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The New Strategist

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Collateral Damage, Covert Operations and American Exceptionalism: An Interview with Chris Woods

RODERICK MCKENZIE

Chris Woods is the author of *Sudden Justice: America's Secret Drone Wars* (Hurst & Co., February 2015), which investigates drone warfare through interviews and insights of the pilots, analysts, Special Forces and intelligence officials who have been involved in recent action. Exploring the use of drones (or RPAs, remotely-piloted aircraft) by the CIA in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya as part of the Global War on Terror, as well as more covert operations in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia, Woods records an up-to-date and thorough history of drone warfare, confronting the often hidden consequences of their use.

RM: What is it about RPAs (Remotely-Piloted Aircraft) that make them so controversial in the eyes of the public? Is it a worry about the manner in which they are used, or is it something about the technology itself that is a cause for concern?

CW: It's both. From the public's perspective — and you can partly blame Hollywood and an overexcited media for this — unmanned or remotely piloted/remotely controlled vehicles of all sorts are novel and they're going to become increasingly dominant. We just had data through from the Royal Air Force saying that 4 out of 5 British air strikes in Afghanistan now are by RPA. That is a phenomenal shift in warfare and I think the public picks up on that and I think they are nervous around some issues. The problem with RPAs is that all sorts of other issues that get dragged in. Whether it's the assassination programme run by the CIA or concerns around automation and autonomy, which are often confused in the public's mind. They are kind of a lightning rod for lots of concerns around modern warfare, but in and of their own right they warrant significant interest, I think. They're a revolutionary approach to warfare and I think they need to be thought of as that, at least for the time being.

RM: A key aspect is accountability. How much transparency is there around who is directing the US's armed drone usage? What kind of accountability and oversight is there beyond trusting these organisations to self-regulate?

CW: The Americans have three separate but interlinked and intermeshed drone

campaigns: the conventional air force, special forces' drone use, and the CIA's programme. That gets complicated with the Americans when it comes to transparency and accountability. Because it's so tightly bundled up with elements that the United States doesn't want to publicly discuss, their approach has been to classify everything. Interestingly, we have seen a significant gulf open up now between the British and the Americans in the way that they view transparency. For example, the British now regularly release data on the number of missiles released, from which platform, whether British crews were using their own Reapers or were borrowing American ones, and they give tallies of civilian casualties. The Americans presently classify that data as top secret on grounds of national security. So it's a problem for the Americans – less so for the British at the moment.

The Americans, for example, measure RPAs in terms of combat air patrols (CAPs) — that's the ability to field continuous operations by RPAs over a 24-hour period. They can do that 63 times, so they have 63 CAPs, into which everything is bundled. So you've got your CIA strikes, your Air Force Special Operations Command strikes and your conventional air force strikes. They just can't unbundle it — it's like those kids' games where you pull out the straw and the whole thing falls down. So they don't pull out the straw. Of course, the problem in terms of public perception is it makes them look terrible. They refuse to discuss even the most basic facts about the armed drone programme with journalists, generally, although I did get some levels of cooperation for my book. And when it comes to assessing data, we know from the British that they're being open about it. If we want to understand how warfare is changing we're going to need that kind of data and that kind of information and there's a public discussion we'll need to have around that. Do we want that? Are we ready to go there? Does it have implications for foreign policy or defence policy? There are a hundred questions that the public has a valid point of view on. If you lock the public out of those discussions you're doing yourself a disservice, and that's the problem the Americans have at the moment.

RM: Is it something the US recognises as a problem?

CW: Yes, there are a number of congressmen and congresswomen who are very keen to see transparency and openness. Their focus, though, tends to be on the CIA's programme, or JSOC's [Joint Special Operations Command] programme in Yemen and Somalia. Interestingly there's much less heat about conventional use of armed drones in places like Libya or Iraq or Afghanistan, and I think actually we need to be looking at both. The media's focus has too often been on the CIA's use of drones — it's the big story. We knew virtually nothing about the use of armed drones on the conventional battlefield in Iraq or Afghanistan. One of the things I've tried to do with the book is speak at great length with the Americans, the Brits and the Israelis about that conventional use of armed drones, because we're so busy watching the targeted killing stuff that we're not actually measuring the effect on the regular battlefield. Most of it is probably good. I don't think it's necessarily a problem, but it is something that we need to understand.

RM: How much collaboration is there between the governments running drone operations and the governments of the countries in which the op-

erations are carried out? And how much responsibility do the latter bear for the actions that are taken?

CW: It depends entirely on which country you're talking about. In Afghanistan, for instance, there was intense intelligence co-operation over the years, but in the last year or two there has been real opposition from [Afghan President Hamid] Karzai because of the civilian casualties that armed drones were causing in Afghanistan. Let's be blunt: the United States is so extraordinarily well-endowed when it comes to intel, particularly on the tech side, that host governments are never going to be able to bring that to play. What they can bring is HUMINT (human intelligence). And that comes and goes in all of the theatres where armed drones are being used, depending on any tensions between the US or UK and the host government at any particular time, and that can have implications. If you lose your HUMINT, that can lead to higher civilian casualties, to greater collateral damage overall. There are implications for not having cooperation, but of course the counter to that is it can be hugely damaging to those host countries, particularly off the conventional battlefield. We've seen both the governments of Yemen and Pakistan significantly damaged in the eyes of parts of their population, I wouldn't say all of their population, but certainly vociferous and influential parts of their population.

So the act of cooperating can also have damaging blowback. And, military personnel in both Pakistan and Yemen have been directly targeted by insurgents and terrorists because they can't target the Americans themselves. Because it's remote warfare, there is this issue of displaced violence, that we don't fully understand and we're not building into our equations when we talk about remote warfare at the moment. So if you carry out a drone strike and AQ in Yemen sends a suicide bomber and kills a hundred soldiers at a passing out parade in Sana'a, do we count those numbers? And if we do count those numbers, does that influence what we think about remote warfare? Are the consequences more complex than we possibly give credence for? I think they are, actually. We oversimplify the idea of remoteness and of troops not being at risk.

Some attacks are driven by a sense of impotence, and this is the moral dimension to this warfare. If your troops are never in the field, where are the enemy going to direct their fire? Is that fire going to be directed at your civilian population, dispersed throughout the world? Or is it going to be directed at the host nation's? It's going to go somewhere. They're simply not going to suck up the violence. Nothing we've ever seen in warfare says they will.

RM: To what extent are journalists, NGOs etc able to provide a degree of oversight themselves for RPA programmes?

CW: It's without doubt a challenge, but it's not insurmountable. For example, my own research into civilian non-combatant casualties in Sararogha (former headquarters of the Pakistan Taliban) in 2009 tallied with the media's reporting at the time, with some degree of accuracy. We also know, for example, from the CIA's estimates in August 2011 of the number of militants and civilians they killed up to that point in Pakistan, which was around 2000. I've done some number-crunching on monitoring organisations and overall the numbers tally within 3-5% - certainly acceptable margin. So, I think the media's reasonable at getting the overall numbers - where

things get complicated is the status of those that are being killed, and that's the point of conflict in contention. Not how many (we're probably in the region of 2,500 killed in Pakistan, minimum), the question is how many of those were civilians. The CIA says 50; every other monitoring organisation and the government of Pakistan says 400. That's a huge gulf. And that gulf is pretty much the source of pretty much all the tension and public brawling over the CIA's use of drones in Pakistan. Why is the public's understanding of civilian casualties 8 times higher than the CIA's? That's the great contention.

RM: That's around the definitional issue, such as whether to include all males of fighting age as being combatants by default?

CW: The whole military age male issue, which is not confined, by the way, to the CIA in Pakistan; it's an issue in Afghanistan with the Americans as well. I go into that a lot in the book about how too often the Americans' language is too imprecise in war, to give them the freedom, if you like, to kill where perhaps they shouldn't be killing and where other nations would not kill. It is different, for example, from that of the British or the Germans and that is one of the conclusions I reach in the book: that America tends to fight its wars on behalf of civilians killed, and lose them because of the civilians it kills.

It was 2009 in Afghanistan before Sam McCrystal banged the table and said "if we don't stop killing civilians we're going to lose this fucking war". Why did it take 8 years for the Commander-In-Chief in Afghanistan to say that? There is something very wrong there. Once the hot war is over, you're into COIN (counterinsurgency), you're into post-conflict. You stop killing civilians. They didn't, so the drones get drawn into these bigger strategic questions. And the very interesting thing about armed drones is they have the potential to significantly lower civilian casualties in war. Their persistence, their precision, their ability to loiter, their real-time intelligence, their low yield on the present warheads — all of which are contributing factors to the ability to significantly lower civilian casualties, which is what we should all be aiming for in war. And, in fact, it's an obligation under the Geneva Conventions to use the weapon that causes the least civilian casualties.

But none of that matters unless it's coupled with political will, and I would say that has been the great distinction between British and American use of armed drones until recently — the Americans are much better at it now. The political will to restrict civilian casualties was there with the British and it wasn't there with the Americans until late in the day. And that's a fundamental difference in war.

RM: How have the approaches of the countries using armed drones in conflict changed?

CW: Before they were ever weaponised, drones were developed as persistent surveillance platforms. They were there to fill a hole and that hole was medium altitude, real time, loitering, incognito, delivery of intelligence that could then be remote fed, and the CIA was instrumental in that programme, as they often are in American ISR platforms. The weaponising of Predators came very late and was never intended; rather the Predator was weaponised specifically to assassinate Osama Bin Laden in

September 2000. By January 2001, the first successful trial had taken place using a Hellfire off a Predator and that's a problem we now have with RPAs: they are the first aerial sniper rifle. We'd never had that potential before. Aircraft go very fast, they tend to drop very big bombs and they tend to get out very quickly. RPAs, at least in their present iteration, have profoundly changed that. They loiter, they use these small yield weapons but they *are* sniper rifles in the air and they've been used aggressively in that role, not just by the CIA in, say, Pakistan, but on the conventional battlefield as well. So we know that the British have used their Reapers to carry out targeted killings; they publish the information themselves; it was cited in a recent defence select committee report. Now, if you've got a sniper rifle, it's always going to be a sniper rifle. You might pretend it's a regular rifle, you might pretend it can do a hundred other things, but it's still going to be a sniper rifle.

I think my concern for Reaper and Predator and the Israeli RPAs is: are we seeing a change in warfare that reflects the tools that we have? For example, I'm sure the British Military has, on occasion, had special forces carry out targeted killings on the battlefield, but in very limited circumstances. What we've seen with Reaper in Afghanistan is the rare become commonplace and the targeted killing of suspects in problematic circumstances happening quite frequently. And by problematic, I mean a bloke in province X which is nominally under Afghan/ISAF control riding a motorbike between town A and town B is targeted and killed. Why don't we pick him up? That seems to be pretty straightforward assassination really. I think the answer will be we don't want to put our troops at risk, and that's a valid point, but the point I would put in response is: are we changing warfare because we have the tools to change warfare? Are we thinking through the implications of the shift towards assassination/targeted killing as simply another *regular* aspect of conventional war and how will the enemy respond to that in time? I think we need to think about that.

RM: In what ways has the US failed and succeeded in its responsibility to identify targets and what have been the key difficulties?

CW: For the Americans, it got really complicated because of AfPak [US foreign policy approach of treating parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan as a single theatre of operations]. Between 2004–2008, the Americans predominantly targeted AQ in Pakistan with the active support of the Pakistan government. From 2008 onwards, the insurgency in Afghanistan was getting out of control and the Americans' targeting shifted aggressively from counter-terrorism [CT] to counter-insurgency [COIN]. So it was basically an extension of the COIN campaign across the border in Afghanistan smuggled in under the guise of the CIA's CT programme against AQ. And that's where things get really messy, because the insurgent groups that were being bombed – some of them were at peace with Pakistan, some of them were proxies of Pakistan. Pakistan then starts to get agitated with the Americans and the Americans started to introduce the signature strike [targeted killing on the basis of an intelligence 'signature' or pattern of behaviour], which on a conventional battlefield we call a target of opportunity. But as one CT specialist said to me, the problem here is that it's not a conventional battlefield; it's a civilian space in which we're looking to target. If you go looking for patterns of behaviour among a civilian population, you're going

to kill civilians. And that's exactly what they did.

I think the correlation between signature strikes and higher civilian casualties in Pakistan cannot be ignored. It should never have been permitted to carry out signature strike operations in a civilian environment. It's often implied Waziristan was this deserted area. When Pakistan began its military operations in North Waziristan, the estimated population was 350,000. 450,000 civilian came out; there's another 100,000 still there that we know of in this tiny bit of the world that's borne the brunt of American drone operations. These are strikes taking place in a civilian environment, and we've seen it recently in Gaza: if you bomb civilian environments with a reasonably dense population, you're going to kill civilians, and by that I mean civilian non-combatants.

I think the Americans got there in the end, as a response to public opinion. And I also think Obama also did eventually come in and bang the table and say "stop". So we have a comparable civilian casualty rate on both sides of the [Pakistan–Afghanistan] border now. We didn't have that before; far more civilians were being killed by drones in Pakistan than Afghanistan, but it was the same bloody war. You can't try and win a war with COIN values on one side of the border where you say we're going to avoid killing civilians, when the CIA is killing civilians in the same tribes as part of the same conflict. Who thought that that would ever bring anything but disaster?

RM: The Christof Heyns report raises concerns about drones lowering social barriers to conflict overseas. How true do you think that is?

CW: I think the slippery slope argument has some legs to it. When Obama ordered American engagement in Libya back in 2011, it was the first conflict America had been involved in since 9/11 that was not covered by AUMF (Authorisation for Use of Military Force, which was a congressional authority giving Bush and Obama the power to basically wage war wherever they wanted). So Congress said to Obama "you need Congressional authorisation for this, because it's a war" and Obama said "no I don't, because it's not a war, because there are no troops on the ground". I'm hearing similar noises coming out of the British Government at the moment, related to a possible deployment of our Reapers to the Horn of Africa. "If we go there it's not troops on the ground".

I have a particular concern with that – with the Brits in Afghanistan it was a UN mandate, it was a clearly defined conflict, very clear rules of engagement, we knew who the enemy were. The Brits are looking for a war for their armed drones; they want to stay in bed with the Americans; they're worried about that link being severed after more than a decade and we know that the British are considering sending their Reapers to the Horn of Africa – that means CT ops (counter-terrorism ops, not counter-insurgency ops) in wars that we're not involved in. That's pure slippery slope stuff and I think it is an indication of this lowered threshold for conflict. "We're not gonna have troops on the ground; we're just gonna send a dozen drones". Well, a dozen drones is a war. If you think what 5 British drones have achieved in Afghanistan since 2008. A tiny number of aircraft, kept basically in the air 24/7 carrying out this staggering number of strikes. So, a few drones is, these days, a war.

RM: What are your thoughts on the future of RPA technology?

CW: The more interesting thing about armed drones at the moment is that the present iteration of armed drones may not be with us for that much longer — they're slow, they're clumsy, but they bring pretty significant benefits to post-battlefield conflict. The next generation of armed drones that are being developed, most of them are jet-powered, they're fast, they plan to use much bigger munitions, and they're all about stealth because they're being used in a contested environment. Interestingly, the next generation of armed drones may lose us the battlefield benefits we have with this iteration, for example in terms of lower civilian casualties. If you're going in and out fast — one of the reasons we have bigger bombs on fast aircraft is because we want to be sure of the job. Because you have less time for the mission, you use a big munition to make sure the job is done, and therefore lose that advantage of lowering civilian casualties. So everything from Taranis to Avenger, which is the new General Atomics drone, they're all about speed and will be delivering big munitions quickly. It's just something to think about. We tend to think of armed drones as a continuum but I think we're actually about to see a technological leap which may not be to the benefit of civilians in the battle-space.

I think the Predators and Reapers work spectacularly against countries without air forces. It's the contested airspace that's the challenge and that's where all the Pentagon planning is. That means speed, that means stealth, that means throwing away a lot of the stuff we've gotten used to with armed drones. That said you could probably mothball the entire Predator or Reaper fleet today and unwrap it in 50 years time and it would still be as good, because it's about the technology you put on these things. They're perfectly solid platforms in an uncontested environment. And they'll do the job just as well 20/30/50 years down the line with whatever technology is needed at the time.

RM: In what sense is the US a trendsetter with a window of opportunity to establish an 'acceptable' pattern of use for drones, or has a damaging precedent already been set?

CW: Let's be absolutely clear, there are only two nations on Earth, as far as we know, that presently think that targeted killings beyond the hot battlefield are lawful (except in extreme circumstances) — that's Israel and the United States. The view of practically every nation is that such strikes are unlawful. So that's the legal thing and we too often swallow the American line that these are lawful and actually there's a very clear non-US position here that the British, for example, share, which is generally that these strikes are unlawful. The Brits have not been carrying out targeting killings by drone in Pakistan. Why? We're in the same war against the same people but we're not doing it. Why? That's a question we need to ask more often.

Within the highest levels of the American military and intelligence communities there is a profound debate at the moment about the efficacy of targeted killing, particularly off the hot battlefield. Very senior people are uncomfortable; others are very happy. There's a raging debate going on. So, is America by default laying down the ground rules? It could be argued "yes", but it's not a debate that's by any means over. You're seeing very curious shifts in American public opinion at the

moment. You're also seeing the Libertarian Right coming out very aggressively now against targeted killings which is interesting. Bizarrely, provoked by the Anwar al-Alaki killing, because of the constitutional implications that that had. It's certainly the view of the UN rapporteurs, Heyns and Emerson, that the Americans have been trying to lay down a precedent for targeted killings, but it's by no means clear that the rest of the world will follow. If the rest of the world did follow, my own view is that it would be anarchy. What would we think if Iran had a targeted killing programme beyond the hot battlefield? Or South Korea? Or even the Netherlands?

One of the things I looked at is that in the early days of the War on Terror the focus was not on assassination, the focus was on policing. It was rounding these guys up, aggressively, often involving extraordinary rendition, sometimes involving torture, Guantanamo. It was a messy business, but they were wound up predominantly without killing them. At what point did the United States become comfortable with targeted killing/assassination becoming another plank of foreign policy or military strategy? That's a fairly profound shift that I think is one I'm not sure the American public is as comfortable with as they would think. But maybe that's just my own spin.

We don't see China or Russia carrying out targeted killings so far, but we may. Of course it was Russia and China, both permanent members of the Security Council, who pushed for the UN investigation into armed drones. At the moment, there's more strategic benefit for them making trouble for the Americans over the use of armed drones – particularly the targeted killing stuff which is almost as unpopular as the torture programme – than there are to China or Russia going that way themselves. For them, the rule of law matters and targeted killing outside the hot battlefield is too problematic.

RM: Are we more likely to see countries that are more similar (politically) to the US that might pursue that route, such as the UK or France?

CW: The current coalition government certainly hasn't gone there with the military, but there is evidence that the British intelligence community has been complicit to some degree in the US targeted killing programme. That's worrying. If our public position is that our military doesn't do targeted killing but in essence we use the Americans like the neighbourhood hitman then I don't see that as a particularly healthy move for us as the UK. A case I've looked at myself was the killing of two ex-Brits who had their citizenship stripped by Theresa May, and within 18 months they'd been assassinated by the CIA in Somalia. I don't think that's a coincidence — I can't prove it and they won't tell me to what extent they shared intelligence on that, but I think that it's a challenge around intelligence sharing that could lead to lethal consequences. We've seen this with Germany, Australia, New Zealand and Britain now — it's a problem.

RM: Is the development of lethal autonomous RPAs (drones which identify a target and make a kill decision without the direct involvement of a

human actor) inevitable?

CW: My personal view is that we need to be in international treaty territory here and have them banned outright. The level of public disquiet is one thing, but also it's basic input/output. We're not very good sometimes at targeting the bad guys — we get it wrong. If we put those parameters into a machine it's going to get it wrong on an epic scale. I just don't think there's any interest from any of the Western militaries I've spoken with for autonomy. If you speak to people like Jim Cartwright, former Deputy Chief of Staff [for the JCOS in the US] they'll articulate a view that there always needs to be a human in the loop, and I think that that's the position. I think what gets confused is automation gets confused with autonomy. And there will be a lot of automation, a lot of processes will be automated. The head of the ISIR agency — the US Air Force's overall intelligence wing for drones and U2s etc. — walked me through a scenario where in the very near future raw intelligence coming in from a drone might be sifted for specific languages, phrases etc. Maybe only 1 or 2% of raw data ever makes it to the analysts — that's automation, and that's an inevitability. I think people will be less troubled by that, though it brings its own issues.

You're never going to carry the public on autonomy. Imagine up there now an autonomous lethal device policing, say. People would shoot it down! The fear and revulsion that brings in people. I'm not aware of any military planners who think this is remotely feasible or desirable. If they're out there, they're keeping their mouths shut.

RM: What sort of outcomes might we have seen in Pakistan/Yemen/Afghanistan etc if the United States had not used drones to carry out targeted killings?

CW: It's a really good question and I think the jury is still out. Let's take Pakistan — there's absolutely no doubt that armed drones have significantly denuded AQ and the Taliban and the insurgent factions, have profoundly changed their operational habits, their behaviours; have limited their ability to wage war. All of that's a given — that's tactical. What we don't yet understand is the strategic effect. I've spoken to a lot of US policy-makers on this: former ambassadors, intelligence officials, military officials. And there is really no clear view. We may have won a tactical war but lost the strategic one, is the risk. We don't know. With Yemen, Gregory Johnson has published his work showing that when the Americans began bombing AQ in Yemen in 2009 (not just with drones but with other...). There were about 900 of them, but within 5 years there were 3000 of them. Can you pin that to drones? If so, is it self-defeating. There are, I suspect, some very senior Americans who acknowledge and were always aware that in Pakistan there was only ever going to be a limited window to achieve what they wanted before blowback kicked in. And in the view of some of those former officials it already has. Some of them view it as kicking in a long time ago. So short-term, definitely; tactically, potentially a game-changer. Strategically, we don't understand. Is what's being done by us now going to have implications 10, 20 years down the line? We don't know.

RM: Are the US/Israel likely to change their approach to RPA usage due to legal/political/popular pressure and which will be the strongest factor?

CW: As I said, the United States — absolutely clear from all the data that's publicly available — from 2010 onwards a significant effort on both the conventional and the unconventional battlefield to reduce civilian casualties from RPAs. And it succeeded. The United Nations Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) — it monitors drone use there — around 5% of drones strikes they think in Afghanistan cause civilian casualties. That's not bad for a weapons system. If you go back 50 years to indiscriminate bombing to a situation where civilians are at risk from 1 in 20 strikes and in fairly small numbers where they are killed. Very unfortunate and sad but not huge casualties. All the indicators say that the US has made significant efforts to reduce civilian casualties and have introduced the reduction of civilian deaths as a political imperative. But I go back to what I say: the benefits of RPAs are for nothing if we don't have the political will to reduce civilian casualties, and I think we're seeing that right now in Israel with Gaza unfortunately. The level of civilian casualties from those air strikes is staggering. Partly that's the munitions they're using and partly it's their attitudes towards the people they're killing. That's the problem. I read a number to day and it actually shocked me. In the first intifada (1987 to 1993), the six-years-long intifada, no more than 500 Gazans died in six years of fighting between the Palestinians and the Israelis. We've seen 1200 killed in just a couple of weeks. It gives you an indication of the stunning intensity of the war in this tiny plot of land in which 1.5 million people are crammed in. Unless you have the political will — it doesn't matter how precise your drones are; it doesn't matter how effective your munitions are; it doesn't matter how well-trained your personnel are — then you're going to see problematic civilian casualties unless you tell them not to.

RM: You mentioned that by and large in terms of international humanitarian law and human rights law that by and large the framework is already there to deal with this — do you think there will be pressures to introduce something specifically to curb US/Israeli actions?

The Americans and Israelis are trying to change international law by example. The whole non-international armed conflict model that the Americans use — they're creating a hybrid law that straddles IHRL and IHL that is very vague in areas that really shouldn't be vague, in my view. The Israelis are in similar territory. Will they carry the rest of the world with them? There was a very interesting speech that John Brennan made back in 2012 where he stressed that there needs to be a rulebook for other nations to follow. The problem is that America has already written that rulebook, predominantly, and it's a rulebook that America will not want to be on the receiving end of. But you know, American exceptionalism — discuss!

RM: Future use of drone technology appears inevitable at this stage — what do you imagine is a realistic, ideal approach to their use in future, and how likely are we to see that become a reality?

CW: As early as 2010 the Americans were training more RPA operators and pilots than they were conventional aircrew. We passed that long ago. They're here to stay. What we're seeing in Afghanistan from the data the British are giving us is a profound shift in warfare. Some of the implications of that we don't really get yet in terms of shifts in personnel here. Really interesting stuff going on within MoD analysis and really theoretical discussions going on around longer term implications and, yeah, they're here to stay. They're going to continue to radicalise warfare. We haven't even begun to see the start of the rollout of operated land or sea vehicles and that again is going to have a huge effect. But that's a whole other tale.

RM: If you had the opportunity to write the rules for how they would be used in future, how would you go about it?

CW: My personal view is to keep them on the conventional battlefield. I'm a European and my book shows the perspective of a European. We don't execute people in this country. We put them on trial and we find them guilty and we put them away. In fact, our criminal justice system has been very, very good at dealing with terrorists, and our military has been very good at dealing with insurgencies. If you bolt onto that assassination beyond the battlefield, for me that's a problem area. Use RPAs on the conventional battlefield; they have a lot of benefits over other weapons systems and I don't see them as being particularly controversial, except where we see this leakage where targeted killing becomes a regular affair on the conventional battlefield. That's a big grown-up discussion that the public need to be part of. Is this how we want to be conducting our wars? And what are the implications back home. There are implications, by the way. Military lawyers are absolutely clear that remote personnel based in the UK and America are lawful targets. Does that mean their families, their homes, their vehicles, their towns are too? You can see the potential for collateral damage. These are discussions we need to have about how if we're going to have war-fighters living among us, what does that mean in terms of the risk to them and to the broader communities they live in? There are other issues there as well.