

BOOK REVIEW

***Sudden Justice: America's Secret Drone Wars.* Chris Woods.
London: Hurst & Company, 2015. Pp. 386.**

In the past few years books on drones have mushroomed. The latest addition to the shelf is Chris Woods's book *Sudden Justice*. Woods is a renowned journalist, and specializes in investigative journalism and national security and conflict issues.

Sudden Justice is a thorough expose of the world of drone warfare, which embodies 300 tightly written pages, and offers an insight into the drone programme from officials, personally involved. Woods, in his book, describes the drone and its success as an "accident of history" and "world's first airborne sniper rifle." Introduced as surveillance machines, drones are now knee-deep in active combat zones, and their effectiveness is considered "beyond the conventional battlefields." The book presents a detailed account of the history of the drone weapon, and of how the first armed drone was brought into the production line. The book provides a detailed account of the "Drone" starting from its origins to the present day use and its possible future.

The author explains how the drone programme has transformed the modern rules of war and introduced technological innovation in the traditional asymmetric warfare. The usage of drones is not just limited to war zones in Afghanistan and Pakistan. With new combat fronts in Somalia and Yemen, drones are becoming a weapon of choice for surveillance and combat.

The second part of the book in great detail traces the drone campaigns since 2001. There has been an increased dependency of the US and international forces on drones, in the aftermath of the 9/11. Woods describes that the "drone's primary impact has actually been on the conventional battlefield." It carries details that have never been published before. It is a thoroughly investigated book with interviews and discussions with the personnel operating the drone system, policy makers, NGOs and United Nations officials.

The author sheds light on how, eventually, two overlapping drone campaigns have evolved since 2001. He adds that the drone programme does not work alone or under a single authority. It is a campaign which involves “personnel from the military, the CIA, the NSA, and other intelligence agencies.” It also covers in detail the emerging concept of the “pattern of life” analysis, which is being increasingly used in the drone programme. A former drone operator reveals in the book, “how they would just follow them (targets) and get hold of their habit patterns.” Another operator recalls spending months observing a religious school in Waziristan.”

Sudden Justice presents an informed perspective on the Unmanned Ariel Vehicle (UAV) and its operating systems and mechanics. Describing the efficacy of the use of drone, Lt. General Dave Deptula, a co-architect of the drone campaign in Afghanistan, says that “the beauty of a UAV is in its capability to Find, Fix and Finish.”

The second part of the book unveils how, by the end of Bush Administration, the drone campaign became a major irritant in Pak-US relations. The drone campaign was initially described as a supplementary exercise along with the joint operations Pakistan and the US would carry out in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border area. However, by the end of Bush Administration, the US started carrying out unilateral drone operations, without any prior knowledge to Pakistan. This shift laid the foundation of growing distrust between the two countries.

The author scrutinizes post-Bush, Obama Administration's “obsession” with the “Afghan war - and Pakistan’s role in it.” The drone campaign under Obama took a fast track, and Pakistan saw record drone attacks in the following year. The book also reveals that drones were “not a strategic bombing – it was either a pre-determined attack or in support of troops under fire.”

The author highlights the video game mentality related to drone operations. If it is a wrong hit, there is actually nothing you can do to make it right. The execution of the drone programme by many operators has been characterized as a traumatic experience in the book, as they have

had to observe the movement for long hours without any prior knowledge of the target. Two drone operators confess that it is not like a video game and that there is no “reset” button. Woods also describes how drone pilots are discriminated against in comparison to pilots flying combat aircraft. The difference in promotions is stark and the prospects are not promising. Today, armed predators and reapers are being upgraded by the US, while making use of new and better technology and softwares in future should help avoid civilian deaths.

The book also discussed the growing division of opinion in the US and international community regarding the increased use of the UAV, its legality, and transparency. The drone campaign in Yemen was handed over to the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), which launched its first airborne strike in Yemen in 2009. The decision was taken by the Obama Administration in the aftermath of a disastrous drone attack at a wedding ceremony. Woods discloses events where, at certain times, drones have ‘deliberately targeted’ rescue teams citing a few incidents of civilian casualties as a result of these attacks. The ability to target the enemies from far without any casualties builds a profound effect on how the US engages itself in its foreign policy. A UN investigator quoted in the book identifies the drone campaign as a state of “huge lethality” and one in which it is “impossible to achieve accountability.”

Sudden Justice offers an unparalleled road to information on the drone campaign which makes it an excellent read for professionals and academics alike. It is an amalgamation of events leading to the usage of drones and analysis of how it worked in favour of or against the US and international forces. The author raises an alarming concern on how the terrorists and other extremists may have acquired drone technology, and are building their own indigenous drone programmes. The book presents a clearer account of the UAV and its growing importance in the war and elaborates the growing reliance of countries on it.

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