



# The Assassination Complex: Inside the Government's Secret Drone Warfare Program

*Jeremy Scahill, The Staff of The Intercept*

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“A searing, facts-driven indictment of America’s drone wars and their implications for US democracy and foreign policy. A must-read for concerned citizens” (*Library Journal*, starred review) from bestselling author Jeremy Scahill and his colleagues at the investigative website *The Intercept*.

Drones are a tool, not a policy. The policy is assassination. But drone strikes often kill people other than the intended target. These deaths, which have included women and children, dwarf the number of actual combatants who have been assassinated by drones. They have generated anger toward the United States among foreign populations and have even become a recruiting tool for jihadists.

The first drone strike outside a declared war zone was conducted more than twelve years ago, but it was not until May 2013 that the White House released a set of standards and procedures for conducting such strikes. However, there was no explanation of the internal process used to determine whether a suspect should be killed without being indicted or tried, even if that suspect is an American citizen. The implicit message of the Obama administration has been: *Trust, but don't verify*.

*The Assassination Complex* reveals stunning details of the government’s secretive drone warfare program based on documents supplied by a confidential source in the intelligence community. These documents make it possible to begin the long-overdue debate about the policy of drone warfare and how it is conducted. *The Assassination Complex* allows us to understand at last the circumstances under which the US government grants itself the right to sentence individuals to death without the established checks and balances of arrest, trial, and appeal—“readers will be left in no doubt that drone warfare affronts morality and the Constitution” (*Kirkus Reviews*).

## **The Assassination Complex: Inside the Government's Secret Drone Warfare Program Details**

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# From Reader Review The Assassination Complex: Inside the Government's Secret Drone Warfare Program for online ebook

## Soham Chakraborty says

This book is a very important read, specially in the context of ongoing election fever in US. It is all but natural to romanticize about Barack Obama's presidency, when one is presented with an option between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. After all, Obama called for change, a change for law and order, a change for ensuring justice is done for all. In his own words when he was a senator: "But what is avoidable is refusing to ever allow our legal system to correct these mistakes. ..For people who are guilty, we have the procedures in place to lock them up. That is who we are as a people. We do things right, and we do things fair....".

However as Jeremy Scahill and the outstanding reporters and contributors of The Intercept - the digital investigative agency founded by Scahill, Glenn Greenwald and Laura Poitras - show that Obama's call for change turned into status-quo as soon as he moved from candidate to president. On hindsight, Obama's tenure did the same unjust attacks as his predecessor with increased lethality and impunity. The key in this pursuit of deadly accuracy is pervasive and unaccounted use of drones.

This book is a compilation of the drone paper investigation done by the team at Intercept, who poured over a cache of secret information leaked by a whistle-blower within intelligence community. The entire investigation can be read at <https://theintercept.com/drone-papers/>. The chapters are meticulously arranged, starting with basic concepts which develop and intensify later in the book.

It all starts with a kill list, which goes from Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) to President of the United States (POTUS), via a chain of commands. What is unknown is how someone gets placed in the kill list, how information is collected about the individuals in the kill list and how/why the person meets his end by a drone strike, rather than capture and interrogation. As it turns out, Africa is not a 'declared war zone' and is far away from mainland USA. Therefore, instead of having troops on ground, human informants and sources operating in the region, the drone strategy was adopted and perfected. US Government has never explained why someone gets placed in the kill list, thus denying the right to justice that candidate and Senator Obama had craved for. This extrajudicial assassination is not limited to terrorists and this is where the balance of pendulum is disrupted. Often, civilians are killed in the process of eliminating terrorists and those civilians, in military jargon, are euphemism as 'EKEA' or 'Enemy Killed in Action'. What nobody knows though is whether the killed is indeed an enemy. It is important to remember that after any targeted killing, persons on ground search and seize and identify the target. This doesn't happen in Yemen, Somalia where drones attack the target. Consequently even after killing, gathering of evidence and intelligence is not possible.

What follows after this overview is even more chilling. When there are no on the ground source, how are the targets identified and tracked? Drones can be equipped with a device, that can subterfuge as a fake cellphone base tower, thus capturing all phones - and thus SIM cards - in a specific geographical region. The movement of the SIM cards are then tracked along with visuals obtained by the drone. This combination creates a unique, non-human identification and when POTUS signs elimination of a target, the person carrying the particular SIM card being tracked, is killed. Scahill explains that this particular method of obtaining intelligence is called 'SIGINT' (Signal intelligence), as opposed to 'HUMINT' (Human intelligence). And the remarkable downside of this approach is the complete reliance on signals. Terrorists have used this and turned to their advantage. Using random SIMs on disposable phones, mixing SIM cards in a bag and then picking up one, deliberately giving the SIM card to someone else; examples abound where

SIGINT is just not full-proof.

Personally the two chapters that I loved the most are 'Death by metadata' and 'The life and death of objective Peckham'. In 'Death by metadata', Greenwald and Scahill explain the technicalities and fallibility that the powerful electronic surveillance devices used by NSA, CIA, FBI, Pentagon create. The unconstitutionality of collecting indiscriminate surveillance data has already been discussed umpteen number of times in all forms of media. 'The life and death of objective Peckham' is the case study of how Bilal el-Berjawi was tracked, revoked of his UK citizenship and then killed by US drone strike.

All in all, this book opens the dark underbelly of US drone strike and lays it bare for common people to see. A remarkable piece of investigative journalism, this is a book that should be read by all, irrespective of political affiliation and ideology. Because while affiliations and ideologies operate on a mental ground, drone strikes and intelligence gathering happen in a definite practical realm and it is paramount that we are aware of the realities that we are being subjected into without our knowledge and consent.

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### **Samar Dahmash Jarrah says**

Obama simply continued Bush's war on terror and became the drone war president. Just imagine the number of Muslim families who lost loved ones because of an endless war where thousands were killed by mistake.

Billions are spent on endless war that will not lead to more security, just more bloodshed. More revenge too. No one wants to reevaluate the US messed up foreign policies and the blow backs. It is so sickening. This is what you get out of reading this book. Oh one more thing, kiss your privacy goodbye.

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### **Regina says**

I'm not an Obama hater, in fact, I think that history will show him to be one of the best presidents we've ever had. His administration has a dark side, however. Drones and, let's call it what it is, targeted assassinations, fall on that dark side. This book is a must read for every American that still believes in Democracy and the U.S. Constitution and the idea of human rights.

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### **Diogenes says**

I'm not sure what needs to be said here. If you've been living in a cave (one not hit by a drone strike) or are too easily distracted by mindless pop-pap like Pokemon Go, you have no excuse not being aware of the current assassination program entrenched in D.C., the complete erosion of *habeas corpus* and the right to a trial (let alone a fair trial), the abject violation of human rights and international laws, the farcical term "collateral damage," and the utter immorality of such cowardly ways of killing. Sadly, it can be said that at least a suicide bomber has big balls and sets himself/herself directly at the front lines of such "terror," being the actual agent of carnage. That, on some mythological level, is at least honorable in the classic sense to me. Sure, civilian targets are soft underbellies, but you grab what you can with primitive means. Using machines to dispense death from afar is an utter act of cowardice, and every citizen in the U.S. is complicit by proxy, whether you vote or don't vote, advocate or ignore. How government agencies declare its inhuman "unpeople" becomes, sociologically, a human condition that must originate in the clan-of-the-cave-bear days.

It's despicable and a deep scar marking the hypocrisy of "democracy" in the twenty-first century.

Here's the original reporting on this book, done by the intrepid journalists at *The Intercept*, a paragon of investigative reporting: <https://theintercept.com/drone-papers/>

Read, be appalled, and *act* to change the way things currently are, because the U.S. is-- and has historically been since WWII--the chief agent of Terror in large swaths of the world. Nobody becomes "radicalized" out of thin blue sky. They just get horrifically terminated from it, by folks with a dog-eared Bible in one hand and a crumpled up Constitution in the other. What's more, these techniques are being used over U.S. soil for surveillance. I fear for the future, because these post-9/11 trends will only get worse without a societal upheaval.

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### **John Lamb says**

I'd like to see This America Life or Radiolab tackle this topic to add a narrative quality to this book.

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### **Christopher says**

"Over a period of four and a half months in 2012, US forces used drones and other aircraft to kill 155 people in northeastern Afghanistan. Nineteen were jackpots. The remaining 136 people were classified as EKIA (Enemies Killed in Action). The number of jackpots divided by the number of operations gives a 70 percent success rate, but it ignores well over a hundred other people killed along the way. This means that almost 9 out of 10 people killed in these strikes were not the intended targets."

I'm going to do my best to summarize this as efficiently as possible. I'm not strictly, in theory, a pacifist. If there is anyone who deserves to be killed in a military operation, it is the extremist with the aspiration to kill those with a different ideology than themselves. However, The U.S. drone program is a completely unacceptable, inhumane—dare I say *evil*—method for the disposal of terrorists.

The idea of drones is attractive. One can conduct missions from afar with no risk to the operator's life. In theory, targeted drone strikes could prevent a war altogether by ending it before troops ever get involved. So why haven't thirteen years of the U.S. drone program done anything to quell the rising tide of terrorism? Why does it seem to have made the situation worse instead of better?

Almost nine out of ten people killed in drone strikes are not the intended targets. Those nine out of ten are labeled EKIA (Enemies Killed In Action) whether they were innocent bystanders or family of the target or a child unlucky enough to be walking by the target's house at the time of the attack.

Imagine if a hostage negotiator was called into mediate a crisis where a dangerous man has kidnapped nine other people, some of them children, and has barricaded himself into a room with his hostages. Now imagine the negotiator throws a grenade into the room; everyone inside is killed. "But I killed the bad guy", the hostage negotiator argues when he receives criticism. "There's no telling what he'd do if he was still alive." The U.S. drone program wears this kind of disregard for human life on its sleeves.

But why do so many innocent people die? Surely they'd avoid killing civilians if at all possible, right?

"Precision drone strikes" is how they are often described in the media, but precision is hardly a virtue of the drone program. Instead of targeting people, the program targets metadata—the GPS location of a SIM card. It's easy to see how this could lead to indefinite targeting. The location of a phone does not equate to the location of the person who is supposed to own the phone, and it does not display the innocent people who may also be near the phone.

In the age of the aspiring despot Trump, people are already nostalgic and dreamy-eyed at the memory of Barack Obama's presidency. But I'm awakening now to the inhumanity of his foreign policy. In what kind of war is it acceptable to kill nine innocent people just kill one enemy? The world has its share of evil: ISIS, Assad, Putin, Boko Haram, Mugabe, etc. The answer to that evil cannot be a drone strike system that is itself evil; that kills the innocent more often than the guilty; that kills children or leaves children as orphans. The only acceptable number of children labelled Enemy Killed in Action is ZERO. Otherwise, we must begin to look at ourselves as just another source of evil in this world.

... and we wonder why people become radicalized against the U.S. in this endless war on terror.

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### **Andrew says**

The reliance on the use of drones has not only been presented as an effective alternative to "boots on the ground" but has become a major part of US counter-terrorism policy. Yet its indiscriminate use leading to many innocent bystanders being killed, its implementation which appears to be based on questionable intelligence as well as its application as a means of assassination should be raising many questions!

"The Assassination Complex" looks at how drone warfare and related technologies, used by the US Government in the 21st Century is rather than being an effective tool, is causing more problems than it solves.

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### **Laura says**

Horrifying and heartbreaking. I want to believe we're better than the evidence. And yet . . .

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### **Paquita Maria Sanchez says**

You know that horrible feeling you get when you realize that the cynical person you thought you were suddenly reveals itself to not be enough? That things you thought were bad are actually far more terrible than you can begin to wrap your head around? Yeah. Kinda feels like someone is crushing your rib cage in, but in sloooow motion. As an added insult, you just feel stupid.

Drones are the means by which we are convinced that we are not at war. And you know what? Technically, that's correct. If I see a spider in my house, I don't declare war on it. I just go "splat" and crush it. (I know, I should be more gracious, but they terrify me.) Drones are like that, but if the spider was on top of a giant, fluffy pile of kittens, and I just started stomping indiscriminately to get at the spider. No, let me revise that. It's like if another spider I was about to crush told me they think they maybe saw a bigger spider in the pile of kittens several weeks ago, so without checking (because I can't, because time-travel), I just poured

gasoline over the pile of kittens and lit it up. And then told everyone that the kittens were all spiders. And they believed me. Nope, not a war. Just a bunch of dead spiders. Yaaay, we're winning the war against spiders! Not that we're at war with spiders, but if we were, huh-hoh! You better believe we, uh, would be (are) killin' it.

The older I get, the more I sound like a crazy person. While I've managed to maintain a healthy degree of skepticism on most counts, this last year in particular has just dropped the bottom out on my reservations over whether "the leaders" could really be as nefarious as some people say. They could. And can. And are. I mean, it's not like I was prancing around in an American flag bikini this time last year, but I did think most conspiracy theories were just that. I am far less dismissive now, after being proven wrong time and again.

ISIS is the worst, and that's noooo joke. ISIS is like if you took a list of the things I hate most (e.g. chauvinism, sexual assault, zealotry, insultingly blatant hypocrisy, homophobia, religious cherry-picking, imperialistic violence, the excessive use of SUV's) and just started spastically checking things off in order to cobble together the ultimate Frankenstein's monster of terrible. However, let's get real right now: most of the time, these drones hit civilians. This is not a theory, this is now substantiated fact, thanks to the much-needed blowing of whistles. The U.S. government overtly assassinates its own citizens and the citizens of foreign countries alike now (or, well, attempts to) despite their own prohibitions against doing so, and it barely makes the news...and is *certainly* not framed that way when it does. Isn't that troubling?

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### **Joseph Rizzo says**

This, along with Glenn Greenwald's "No Place to Hide" is one of the 2 most important books I've read this year. This is a detailed description of the covert US drone war being operated in the middle east and North Africa in particular. Rather than slowing down the military and intelligence policies of the Bush / Chaney era, the drone war has accelerated exponentially under the Obama administration. The book details some of the targets, history, technology, and kill chain, showing the authorization for strikes going all the way to the president. What should American's think about their governments assassination program? The truth is that the government is dropping bombs from unmanned planes, and there are casualties of this action that include innocent men, women, and children. American citizens have been assassinated by their government without trial. The government carries this out because they have the technology to do so, and in places where they have no fear of reprisal, acting without accountability because it is done in far places like Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. Citizens of the US should know about this war.

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### **Nick Dazzi says**

The book repeats itself many times, there are plenty of redundant information, i have really struggled to get to the end of it.

Many sources are "Anonymous" and i am normally very skeptical because you can say that a source said something, but in fact you can say whatever you want. Other sources have names, but no actual any results will show up if you google their names.

There are many criticism towards the Obama administration, but none against the previous ones where the program actually started, which in my opinion shows that the book and authors are likely to be biased.

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## Ray says

While the term "War on Terror" has fallen out of use during the Obama Administration, the fact remains that we have found ourselves fighting a war against terrorists for well over ten years. And any war is a dirty business, and people die in wars from ancient times to the present. The Bible is filled with verses which direct the righteous to "kill every man and woman, child and infant, cattle and sheep, camel and donkey, and all that belongs to them". Untold thousands of non-combatants died in the indiscriminate fire-bombing of Dresden and Tokyo in WW II, and at Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Today, with a war on terror (ists) not in nation-states, but in individual groups and cells, the style of war has changed, and the weapon of choice has become the armed drone.

And while the drone is superbly precise in most respects, no weapon of war is capable of protecting the innocent while targeting the evil. And as might be expected, the government likes to emphasize the precision and effectiveness of drones in targeting those who are dedicated to destroying us, they rarely discuss the negative impacts of drones.

That's the gap which Jeremy Scahill addresses in his book, *"The Assassination Complex"*. In it, he provides a detailed analysis of the ongoing U.S. drone program combating terrorists in Countries such as Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Pakistan - areas in which the local government is either unwilling or incapable of combating terrorists within its own borders. Scahill is clear in his beliefs that the efficiency and effectiveness of the drone program is lower than our government leads us to believe, and the number of innocent or unintended victims is much higher than government figures show. Also, the unintended deaths or injuries to women, children, or other non-combatants caused by a drone strike likely creates more terrorists than it kills.

Scahill is particularly critical of the drone strikes which killed Anwar al-Awlaki, the American turned terrorist-recruiter, killed by a drone strike in Yemen. Shortly after Awlaki was killed, his teenage son Abdulrahman was also killed by a separate drone strike. In these cases, the victims were both U.S. citizens, and under our Constitution, all citizens are entitled to "due process" if they've committed a crime. Scahill favors the position that as a citizen, Awlaki should have been captured vs. assassinated, and then given a fair trial. Scahill is critical of Obama in his approval of the drone strikes, believing that Obama abused his executive powers and violated the rights of these U.S. citizens.

I have no access to government documents, and therefore I'll trust that Scahill's sources are informed and legitimate, and that Scahill's unease with the Bush and Obama Administration's drone warfare programs is valid. However, Scahill seems to see things as black or white, and fails to address possible gray areas regarding drone strikes. He does not address the possibility that there may be a counter argument about having to decide between two bad choices.

For readers interested in examining these gray areas further, I recommend Scott Shane's book, *"Objective Troy"*. This book also deals with drone warfare, and specifically the targeting of Anwar al-Awlaki. Sometimes, as Scott Shane points out, an act like authorizing a drone strike could simultaneously be both morally required AND morally forbidden. When there's a person, an enemy, who has killed before and promises to kill again, and you have a chance to stop him, police or military personnel will want to do just that. If that person is here, on U.S. soil, the individual can (hopefully) be tracked and captured before he can kill again. But in lawless territories, where capture or extradition is basically impossible without a military assault and placing many more lives at risk, a dilemma arises. The moral imperative is to stop the individual,

the terrorist, before he can carry out his acts to kill many innocent civilians. There may be times when a targeted killing may be the only available way to stop the terrorist from striking again. And it's making the least evil choice in circumstances such as this which becomes a heavy burden for the person making the choice.

Scahill is correct that U.S. citizens are guaranteed "due process of law" under our Fifth Amendment. Scahill's analysis stops there, and makes it seem as if the constitutional protection guaranteed to Awlaki was simply disregarded for convenience sake. But as Scott Shane details in "*Objective Troy*", the Department of Justice Office of Legal Council had been tasked with preparing a legal decision on the legalities of a drone attack before the presidential targeting of Awlaki was approved. After lengthy analysis, the DoJ lawyers determined that a criminal trial was not required, citing a 2004 Supreme Court decision involving Yaser Hamdi. The lawyer's group at the National Security Council also reviewed that decision to target Awlaki. They recognized the unprecedented nature of this case and debated it at length, also discussing whether capture of Awlaki would be possible. Ultimately, all agreed that Awlaki could be targeted. Attorney General Holder said that the constitutional "due process" provision does not necessarily mean court involvement or involve a judicial process. But a legal analysis was performed, so in his legal opinion for this specific case, the Fifth Amendment's requirement was met. And it was only after completion of this legal analysis that Obama and his security advisers authorized placing Awlaki, judged to be a continued and imminent danger to the U.S., on the kill list. So in that light, the targeting of Awlaki was far from a cavalier decision by the military or the President. Scahill and others certainly may argue with that legal analysis, and many have, but to omit the fact that these decisions were vetted and reviewed seems to show that Scahill is only telling part of the story.

Some have also argued that the Awlaki killing, in addition to being a possible violation of the Fifth Amendment, may also violate the foreign-murder statute, 18 USC 1119. However, according to sources which Scahill does not include, Department of Justice lawyers also considered this statute, and concluded that the foreign-murder statute did not apply. The legal opinion concluded that U.S. forces would be justified in killing Awlaki, a terrorist posing an imminent threat to the U.S., since it was "infeasible" to capture him alive. This is similar to the belief that a policeman on the city streets would be justified in using lethal force against an armed person threatening others when the likelihood of imminent danger to hostages exists.

Scahill also writes of the killing of Awlaki's son, Abdulrahman, but does not make it clear that he was not an intended target, and may have become involved with an al Qaeda group. He's presented as a sweet, innocent 16 year-old kid, only interested in finding his father. However, others have suggested that in the weeks Abdulrahman spent in Yemen searching for his father, he inevitably established contact with Al Qaeda members. One Yemeni journalist, Abdul Razzaq al-Jamal, had reported that following his father's death, Abdulrahman had decided to cast his lot with Al Qaeda. According to al Jamal, Abdulrahman had reportedly told an al-Qaeda leader, "I hope to attain martyrdom as my father attained it." So it is entirely possible that Abdulrahman was no longer a sweet young man, looking for his father, but may have already been radicalized by the drone strike which killed his father, and was in fact with willingly with a group of Al Qaeda members when killed.

Other shortcomings of the U.S. drone program which Scahill point out are harder to argue with. Often, intelligence on terrorists is obtained from their phones, and tracking phones when targeting terrorists can easily lead to mistakes. Phones are borrowed and passed along to others, and the phone used by a terrorist yesterday could be a phone used by an innocent relative the next. So targeting a terrorist's phone without additional assurance of who's using it can lead to errors and deaths of civilians.

And then there's the question of accepting the "collateral damage" which comes with a targeted attack. For

example, Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Mansour was recently killed in a drone strike in Pakistan while travelling in a taxi to the tribal regions. Was the taxi driver also a terrorist, or simply an innocent civilian trying to make a living? I certainly can't answer that, but I think the point that Scahill makes is that those in charge of targeting may not be able to know that answer either. In this specific case, the family of the taxi driver has lodged a criminal case against the US government. Relatives of the driver stated that the attack on the family "that hardly earns enough for two meals a day" was unjustified, and asks who will feed the family now. Certainly if the driver was simply an innocent taxi driver, and was killed by our action, this will hardly endear our country to the people in the region.

And lastly, the precedent set by our drone use can be dangerous. In asserting that targeted attacks on anti-U.S. militants anywhere in the world can be lawful, we undermine the international rules we helped craft in the past. Following our example, abusive regimes around the globe may begin to conduct drone attacks or target anyone they label as a terrorist or a militant. What if a Turkish drone targeting Kurdish rebels accidentally kills a U.S. serviceman working with Kurdish troops in Syria? What if an Iranian drone kills an Israeli spy in Iraq? Will we have the ability to condemn the Chinese if they target a Uighur separatist in the Philippines, or the Russians if they poison an enemy of their state while in London? What legal recourse or international support would we have if they target someone living in U.S. territory? Scahill's book leaves us with the rational that the U.S. should not carry out lethal strikes that we would object to if another country conducted such a strike under analogous circumstances with a similar rationale.

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### **Brian Hickey says**

How much do you really know about drones and drone warfare? Are you comfortable with drones targeting and killing suspects (often outside a war zone) who haven't been given any form of a trial? Are you okay with the plethora of civilian casualties that occur in the name of fighting terrorism via drone warfare? If any of this intrigues or concerns you, *The Assassination Complex* tackles all of these issues (and much, much more) in a bold examination of a world that has been systematically swept under the rug. It also demonstrates that the endless war on terror (without any due process), is alive and well, and in many cases stronger than ever.

Right out of the gate, this book deserves five big fat gold stars for its unforgiving, transparent bravery. Like his other books, Scahill digs deep with exhaustive research introducing his readers to yet another issue that has been carefully cloaked under the guise of terrorism. This compelling book is somewhat of an addendum to Edward Snowden's whistleblowing related to the US government's campaign of mass surveillance, however this time around you'll be examining the world of drones. Scahill and the fearless team over at *The Intercept* (Glenn Greenwald, Laura Poitras..) knock this out of the park in an exposé of what is certainly one of the biggest issues of our time.. Drone 'warfare', the implications that come with selective killings outside of a designated war zone, how people make 'kill lists', and more so, the covert surveillance that accompanies the US government's gathering of meta data (often on its own citizens).

The book explodes with a foreword by Ed Snowden setting the tone as it bombards you with its exhaustive research related to mass surveillance, how people make it onto the watch list, the no fly list and eventually the kill list, (okay'ed by the commander in chief). The title of the book implies that because drone killings have become so efficient to the military, it is now the default methodology when it comes to fighting

terrorism, so much that the various government branches are somewhat addicted to its prowess. The book also reveals how little suspects are actually captured or questioned (as drones have become the preferred military strategy) and demystifies the world of drone warfare using 'the drone papers', (a whistleblower's account and evidence) to completely break down how people are selected and how targeted drone killings/assassinations are carried out. More so, it reveals a stark contrast when it comes to civilian casualties when we compare manned operations vs drone strikes. When it comes to the latter: "we assume that they're surgical, but they're not.. Drone strikes in Afghanistan were ten times more likely to kill civilians than conventional aircraft." This alone has become fuel for worldwide debates on the morality and efficacy of this elusive method of warfare.

Though it's not exactly a happy read, I had a really hard time putting this book down because of how many questions it raises and how well it is presented. Scahill's writing style captivates once again making this an absolutely riveting read (whether you're for or against whistleblowing and/or drone warfare). Because this isn't a conspiracy theory, it also serves as a completely transparent and unbiased account of this formerly muggy world of warfare and power..

"These disclosures Obama administration's killing program reveal that there's a part of the American character that is deeply concerned with the unrestrained, unchecked exercise of power. And there is no greater or clearer manifestation of unchecked power than assuming for oneself the authority to execute an individual outside of a battlefield context." - Edward Snowden

I am immensely grateful that writers like Scahill continue to write books like this for they take huge personal risks in the work they do to make us a more informed, transparent and ultimately, a more free population. What hit home the hardest (during this read), was Scahill's demonstration as to how we view and treat people who we suspect as being affiliated with terrorism, especially when it comes to carrying out drone strikes..

"It is inherently unjust for the US government to treat individuals as terrorists - and, worse, to punish them as terrorists - without first providing them due process in the form of judicial review." (Keeping in mind that this was one of president Obama's concrete positions during his 2007/2008 campaign for election.) "Obama's aggressive, expansive use of drones over the course of seven years, in multiple, predominantly Muslim countries, embodies the worst of what made the Bush-Cheney 'war on terror' approach so destructive." For a president that has implemented a plethora of brave and positive policies, drone killings will ultimately be the ugliest aspect of his legacy. That being said, as this is simply my opinion as a Canadian who actually quite likes Obama, please don't take my word for it as I urge you to do your own research to formulate your own conclusions - starting with this brilliant piece of work by Scahill.

If any of this subject matter appeals to you, you owe it to yourself to read this book as it will most certainly make you better as a result of. In the very least it'll provide some good water cooler banter to flex your inner intellect.

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**Teo 2050 says**

[Scahill J, The Staff of The Intercept, Snowden S (foreword), & Greenwald G (afterword) (2016) (05:13)  
Assassination Complex, The - Inside the Government's Secret Drone Warfare Program

Preface (Betsy Reed)

Foreword: Elected by Circumstance (Edward Snowden)

01. The Drone Legacy (Jeremy Scahill)

- How the President Authorizes Targets for Assassination.
- Assassinations Depend on Unreliable Intelligence and Disrupt Intelligence Gathering.
- Strikes Often Kill Many M

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**Asad Khan says**

An eye opener

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