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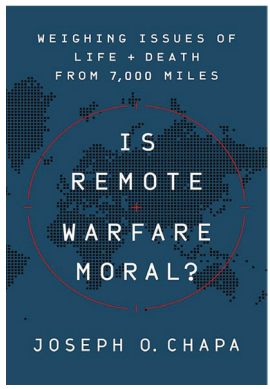
Review



Chapa, J. O. (2022). *Is Remote Warfare Moral? Weighing Issues of Life + Death from 7,000 Miles.* New York: PublicAffairs, Hachette Book Group, 288 pp. (hbk). ISBN: 9781541774452.

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With advances in military technology, humanity has some serious questions to address. In what ways is the remote warfare of drones consistent with just war principles? To what extent is this new military capability continuing the enduring nature of war and/or reflecting the changing character of war?

I considered these questions and turned to Joseph Chapa's *Is Remote Warfare Moral?* Lieutenant Colonel Chapa is a Predator pilot and instructor in the US Air Force with a PhD in moral philosophy from the University of Oxford. His current appointment is as a military faculty member at the Marine Command and Staff College, Quantico, and he was previously the Department of the Air Force's first Chief Responsible AI Ethics Officer. He brings the unique combined perspective of being both a military ethicist and remote warfare operator, enhanced by interviews with operators, commanders, psychologists and a military chaplain, to issues of life and death for those involved in remote warfare.

The MQ-1 Predator and MQ-9 Reaper have been used for intelligence gathering, persistent reconnaissance, surveillance, close combat support and (especially since 9/11) targeted killing. They bring a new paradigm to combat

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as a new operational category, being remotely piloted and utilizing multi-spectral targeting and Hellfire missiles. They do not have the "romance" of a pilot flying acrobatics and facing an enemy in an aerial duel, but they do (potentially) exercise just war in defending one's political community.

Some have suggested that drone pilots develop a "PlayStation mentality" without realizing the human cost of their actions, while others claim that many drone pilots suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and likely also a moral injury. At a strategic level, some argue that drone warfare is "riskless", meaning that countries are more likely to use lethal force, including against people of countries with whom they are not at war. America mainly, but also the United Kingdom and Israel and a few other countries have used them, but China, Russia and others are also investing in their development. Their use is only likely to proliferate further in years to come, thus underlining the importance of asking what ethical principles have guided their use, and what is the morality of remote warfare now and in the future?

Morality from the Pilot's and Sensor Operators' Seats

The major contribution of the text *Is Remote Warfare Moral?* begins with the investigation of issues from the perspective of a drone's crew – the pilot and sensor operators. Chapa discusses principles to evaluate the morality of remote warfare and the use of drones in the context of US foreign policy and the future of warfare. His focus, however, is more on the operators and how they apply their judgment in morally complex combat situations. This is unique for drone crews, as they operate at much greater geographical distances than most military combatants, and yet often with a much closer birds-eye view of adversaries before, during and after contact.

Chapa critiques the narratives that remote warfare crews have a PlayStation mentality and PTSD. He offers a more complex and nuanced perspective on the emotional impact and potential moral injury of seeing visual evidence of violence and its after-effects. He underlines the persistent need for just war principles, arguing that high-value targeting operations are only morally justified if they are discriminate, proportionate and necessary to defeat an unjust threat and defend the innocent elsewhere. He celebrates the role of the crew in responding to battlespace dynamics and applying judgment to limit collateral damage, and the role of command in encouraging such judgment. Drone crews may not face the physical risks of traditional warriors, but they still navigate the moral risks, as Chapa comments: "Predator pilot and Greek soldier … must cultivate the ability to take life without giving up

humanity; to kill but to remain whole; to be willing, if required, to leave their limbs, or even their lives, on the battlefield, but not their respect for human dignity." (p. 83).

Different Virtues for Different Soldiers and Aviators?

My favourite chapter was "It's 'Hard Work to be Excellent': Remote Warrior Virtue". Character virtues in war are called the *martial virtues*; they help soldiers maintain their humanity in the context of war's brutality. Chapa asks how Reaper pilots and sensor operators cultivate the martial virtues of courage, loyalty and honour with no physical risk to themselves. I resonate with Chapa's elevation of virtue ethics as especially relevant for military members to aid in navigating unpredictable and ambiguous situations – not uncommon for drone crews. They may not need the same physical courage in the face of a threat to their own life, but they certainly need moral courage to do what is required despite the consequences – loyalty to the best interests of those they support on the other side of the world, and respect for human dignity for those in the targeting area. This was a thought-provoking chapter, arguing that all military members need virtues, but some roles need particular character virtues in extra doses, such as a drone crew needing practical wisdom and prudence.

Broader Relevance

Remote warfare brings ethical issues into sharper focus and reminds readers that new technology often requires fresh thinking regarding how morality is applied with moral justification, virtue and human judgment. Chapa's discussion of remotely piloted aircraft is relevant also for other remote systems we are likely to see more of – vehicles, submarines, interspace weaponry and new generation long-range missiles. The issues and dilemmas are also relevant to cvber warfare operators and other signallers operating remotely from an area of operations. There are also lessons for AI-enabled weapon systems, which will make distributed warfare more the norm, but that is another and different category that requires its own fresh thinking.

Chapa does not assume there will be war with a peer adversary in the near future, but he predicts it would mean less freedom of movement, less air superiority, inhibited use of the electromagnetic spectrum and higher combat attrition. This would mean more remote warfare, faster-paced speed of operations and a heightened need for moral courage, practical wisdom

and rapid response ethical decision-making. Chapa argues that we cannot let our ethical guard down:

> In the looming age of AI and war, decision makers from the army private in the field to the combatant command leadership, and even to the elected and appointed civilians who lead and oversee the military will need more training and preparation in ethics, not less. (p. 196)

Is Remote Warfare Moral? is highly recommended reading for crews and commanders conducting remote warfare in the air or other domains, as well as ethicists, chaplains and mental health providers seeking to understand and support them.