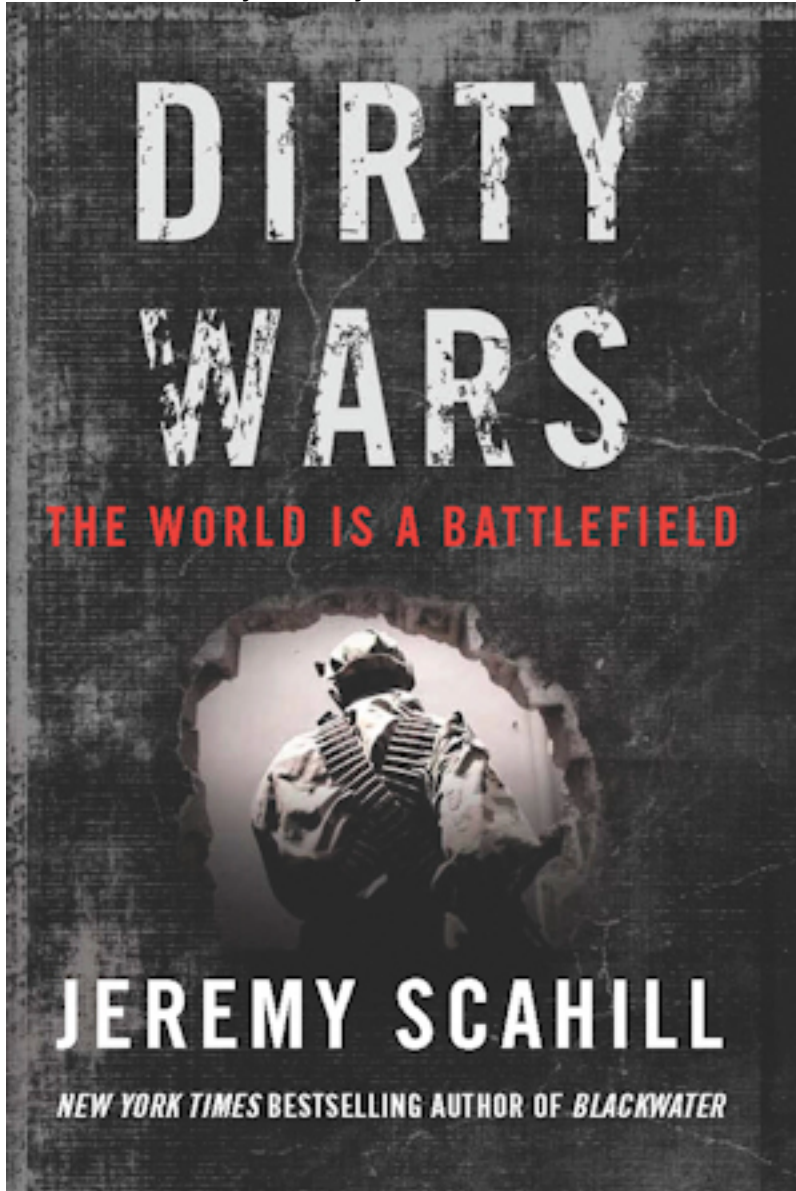


Dirty Wars: the Book  
By Jay Kvale

"We have killed an amazing number of people. . . none has proven to have been a real threat."

— General Stanley McChrystal



Dirty Wars by Jeremy Scahill.  
Available through MayDay Bookstore, Minneapolis.

The killing of vast numbers of civilian noncombatants is just one of the regrettable developments of the Global War on Terror conducted by the U.S. government in response to the 9-11 attacks. The new book *Dirty Wars: The World is a Battlefield* by national-security correspondent Jeremy Scahill of *The Nation* magazine gives the

most incisive account yet of what has resulted from a worldwide conflict that is far from over.

The goal of reorganizing the Middle East—beginning with the removal of Saddam Hussein—was concocted by Dick Cheney, Don Rumsfeld, and their neocon cohorts years before the 9-11 attacks, which provided a rationale for the U.S. to invade Afghanistan and then Iraq. The failure of conventional forces to fulfill their mission of pacifying Iraq led to reliance on the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), elite units of Army Rangers, Navy SEALs, and Delta Force warriors, who operated outside the normal command structure, and answered only to Rumsfeld and his inner circle in the executive branch without oversight by the State Department or Congress.

When Iraq descended into chaos and civil war in 2005-2006, JSOC units became the tip of the spear as their missions eliminated thousands of insurgents. Public perception is that an eventual stalemate had been drawn out of a loss in Iraq, for which General David Petraeus and his counterinsurgency strategy have been given most of the credit. Scahill fills in the picture by his accounts of the secretive raids organized by McChrystal and Admiral William McRaven.

However, the world had now been turned into a battlefield; al Qaeda set up bases in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia. “Draining the swamp” now required additional JSOC missions in these and several other countries. Scahill provides a wealth of information on operations in Yemen and Somalia, including the failed proxy war by an invasion from Ethiopia in 2006, which resulted in the rise of al Shahab, an al Qaeda affiliate.

An additional weapon was brought to the war on terror by the use of weaponized drones. When Barack Obama became president in 2008, he repudiated the Iraq War but escalated troop levels in Afghanistan, even though most al Qaeda operatives had left the country. Drone attacks into Pakistan steadily increased as the Obama administration built the infrastructure for a U.S. assassination program.

The ultimate assassination came on May 2, 2011, when a team of elite Navy SEALs secretly choppered into the compound of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan, and killed him. Scahill's account of this famous raid is riveting and also clarifies some details that have been misreported.

As a narrative thread, every few chapters Scahill describes how Anwar al-Awlaki, an American citizen who was radicalized by 9-11 and subsequent U.S. attacks on Muslims, became a target for assassination by drone, especially after he went to Yemen and preached jihad against America. Awlaki's father, Nasser, who had come to the U.S. on a Fulbright scholarship in 1966 to study agricultural economics at New Mexico State University, wrote a personal letter to Obama protesting the targeting of his son, citing protections of the U.S. Constitution. But Obama and JSOC were determined to get Awlaki. After several misses, a drone killed Awlaki and two others

on September 30, 2011. Two weeks later, Awlaki's 16-year-old son, Abdulrahman, was killed by a drone along with several members of his family at a picnic, even though the boy was also a U.S. citizen and wasn't involved in terrorist activity.

These killings, along with hundreds of civilian fatalities from drone strikes in Pakistan, have caused a storm of protest around the world, but the administration held fast to its position that the world is the battlefield.

It employed what it referred to as "signature strikes." Any male age 18 and older who was in a place deemed a battlefield area and was exhibiting certain kinds of behavior was considered a terrorist and an imminent threat to the U.S. unless proven innocent; there was no opportunity to prove innocence to a drone operator calling a strike from thousands of miles away, so that would mean the only opportunity to prove innocence would be after the targeted person was dead.

Now a whole slew of suspected terrorists have been eliminated by JSOC operations. Drones and JSOC teams, under the direction of McRaven, are operating in more than a hundred countries around the world. But are we winning and are we any safer? Scahill points out that the potential for blowback from all the civilian casualties is enormous and asks the question, "How does a war like this ever end?"

Dirty Wars is extensively researched (80 pages of notes) and written in straightforward prose. Scahill's book is essential reading for understanding our recent history and the dilemma we face now that the world is a battlefield.

Jay Kvale is a member of the WAMM End War Committee and Twin Cities Peace Campaign.