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Death from the Sky: Drones, Terror, and the New Normal in US Foreign Policy
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More than a decade after the attacks of September 11, US foreign policy has taken on a quietly lethal cast. The troops have come home from Iraq and are departing Afghanistan; the angry threats that "you are with us or with the terrorists," the loud declarations of American primacy - these echo only in the memory. And in the gathering quiet, the work of daily killing has fallen to the elite operators of the Special Forces and the CIA and the quiet robotic efficiency of the unmanned drones. Sporadic news of these attacks are among the few flickering signs that the "state of exception" declared by President Bush persists. Indeed, under President Obama, the exception has been normalized. Americans have come to accept - or largely to ignore - a state of constant low-level warfare that carries on beneath the radar, in which people in far-off lands are attacked and killed remotely - and, when captured, imprisoned indefinitely. This state of quiet war persists even as the broader shape of US foreign policy is subtly altered to take account of a world in which global power is moving steadily but undeniably toward the rising nations of the East. In this seminar, we will examine this "new normal" - its genesis and evolution, the contours of its functioning, its implications for international humanitarian law - and study its place in the evolving foreign policy of a superpower struggling to adapt itself to an increasingly multi-polar world.