**Movie review | "Eye in the Sky" is a suspenseful look at the moral questions involved in drone warfare**

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“Eye in the Sky,” blessed by fine performances from the dependable Helen Mirren and Alan Rickman, is the nail-biter suspense film you’ve been wondering if they’d ever make again. It’s the kind of movie that actually makes sense as it twists our guts over the rules and morals of [modern warfare](http://pilotonline.com/content/tncms/live/).

This movie leaves you talking back to the screen for many moments as you rant at the stupidity of politicians while, on the other side of the ledger, you pull for those who resist the killing of innocents. You will change sides as the film goes along and end up, maybe, still indecisive.

This film entertains as it challenges us to deal with the contradictions of drone warfare, the latest of mankind’s endless inventions of ways to kill each other. It comes just after the Virginia Stage Company’s run of the [play](http://pilotonline.com/content/tncms/live/) “Grounded,” which dealt with a female officer and her turmoil over pushing a button that would result in military gains but moral trauma.

Helen Mirren plays a tough colonel who, from headquarters near Las Vegas, is gung-ho to wipe out four of the world’s most-wanted terrorists when they are discovered in a safe-house hideout in Nairobi, Kenya. She is a warrior, not a diplomat. While Mirren is one of our best actresses, this is not one of her most demanding roles, because she is single-minded throughout. She is the hawk. Her desire for action is thwarted by the “rules of [engagement](http://pilotonline.com/content/tncms/live/).”

As we watch, we wonder. If we have equipment this awesome in visual identification, why is it that we lose so many wars? (This question is answered by the movie in a way that will please some viewers and infuriate others.)

The film poses other questions. Do we, as a nation, care about civilian victims? Are we, in fact, at war? Is government is more concerned about political correctness than about winning? And is this wrong? It’s difficult to sit through this movie without thinking of Benghazi and an apparent lack of decision, or overabundance of cover-up, that clouded a similar possible strike. Any movie that stimulates and informs this debate is more than worth the ticket price .

That aside, “Eye in the Sky” is a whopping good suspense yarn that can survive in the mall as well as in the art theaters.

The audience is as frustrated as Mirren’s character is when decisions are constantly “referred up” while politicians ponder what is best for their next election instead of pondering the death or life of the little girl who is too close to the target.

The ante is upped when we [learn](http://pilotonline.com/content/tncms/live/) that the criminals in the house are readying suicide vests to go out in attacks that will kill hundreds of innocents. This fires up Mirren to call for a “hell” mission to wipe out all of them. They will escape within moments. The clock ticks. We tense up.

But that little girl is selling bread near the house. Early in the film she’s seen playing with a hula hoop. It is obvious that the filmmakers are placing her in danger , but the ploy works . Still, the movie overplays its hand a bit when it uses the little girl for more than one suspenseful showdown. It is questionable, too, that decisions could be made so quickly from all around the world about what should be done with this single house. But, not having security clearance, we can’t really question the accuracy.

The amazing technology looks like something we would have laughed at in a James Bond movie not long ago, and yet we live in a new age.

Wouldn’t it be nice if Alan Rickman, with his usual stunning presence, could get a posthumous Oscar nomination, his first?

Aaron Paul has the required role of the “sensitive” pilot who is against pulling that trigger, even when the formidable Col. Powell (Mirren) gives him the order and asks, “Am I clear?” His performance amounts to little more than a long tear-filled look into the camera.

[A surprise](http://pilotonline.com/content/tncms/live/) is the presence of Barkhad Abdi, the supporting Oscar nominee from Tom Hanks’ “Captain Phillips,” which was partially filmed locally. He has found work, as an underground fighter. No one can forget the pirate he played in challenging Hanks’ Capt. Phillips.

The movie, when all is unreeled, comes down decidedly on the hawkish side – although that can easily be debated. The suspense is there. So is the soul-searching.

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