

# **The Politics and Ethics of Drone Bombing in its Historical Context**

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To Marianna,  
for her love, support and patience

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis intervenes in current debates concerning the violence of armed drones, developing a historical perspective on what is predominantly understood to be a novel form of warfare. It argues that debates on drones overlook the important linkages between drone warfare and earlier regimes of violence from the air. On the basis of a historical analysis of drone warfare, it offers a critique of drone bombing that goes beyond the narrative of “targeted killings”.

The first part of this dissertation, comprising Chapter 1, introduces the central problematic of the thesis by revealing the crucial differences between, on the one hand, a description of drones strikes drawn from testimonies of people living under drones and, on the other, an account of these strikes based on the targeting methodology the U.S. military follows. This part demonstrates that the frame of “targeted killings” fails to offer an adequate lens through which the multifaceted violent effects of drone bombing can be explained, understood and criticised.

The two chapters that constitute the second part of this thesis employ a genealogical historical method, demonstrating that the broader violent effects wrought by drone strikes – which testimonies reveal, but current military doctrine effaces – are intrinsically bound up with the development of the air weapon. More specifically, Chapter 2 offers a detailed account of the emergence of air power theory and discusses the doctrine of “strategic bombing”. Chapter 3 examines how the British colonial territories functioned as a testing ground for assessing, adjusting and consolidating this doctrine.

The third part brings this historical perspective to bear on discussions about drone warfare. Chapter 4 offers a critical review of the literature on drones, arguing that the tendency to frame drone warfare as a radically new form of armed violence forces critical thinking into the discursive straightjacket of the “targeted killings” narrative. Chapter 5 offers a critique of the “targeted killings” framework by inquiring into the manhunting doctrine, developed in recent years by U.S. military theorists. In the afterword to the thesis, it is argued that a critical account of the

violence of armed drones must be able to identify and defy discursive framings that work towards making the horror and destruction wrought by drones unobservable.

**Keywords:** Drone Bombing, Air Power, Colonial Bombing, Targeted Killings, Manhunting

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## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Afxentis Afxentiou

17<sup>th</sup> October 2018

## INTRODUCTION

For the last decade airborne drones have been the United States' weapon of choice in its ongoing "War on Terror", a global structure of violence in which civilians account for the largest share of victims.<sup>1</sup> The proliferation of drones in the skies of "high-risk" areas such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Iraq, Yemen and, more recently, Syria has been met with a corresponding increase in commentaries that seek to comprehend, explain and, in some cases, criticise current drone wars. As such, armed drones and the violence they inflict have become as a central object of analysis in a number of academic disciplines. The fact that drone warfare keeps attracting the attention of a large and diverse body of literature suggests that it poses a profound problem in contemporary studies of state violence.

Seeking to develop a better understanding of this form of armed violence and, particularly, of its relationship with previous practices of state violence from the air, this thesis offers a historical and theoretical critique of drone bombing and the dominant modes of its representation that are commonly shared in both its justification and critique.

### The Scope

The scope of this thesis is both narrow and wide. It is narrow because it does not address one of the central and most persisting themes in contemporary debates about armed drones, namely, the fact that they are "unmanned" aerial weapons. Much of the scholarly response to the emergence of armed drones as a means of warfare has been overly preoccupied with this unmanned feature, which is often taken to be the most controversial aspect of current deployment of drones in "targeted killings" missions. In this context, the fact that drones take their human

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<sup>1</sup> Julian Borger, "US Air War under Trump: Increasingly Indiscriminate, Increasingly Opaque," *The Guardian*, January 23, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jan/23/us-air-wars-trump>.

operatives completely out of physical harm's way has also been a crucial reason as to why drone warfare is viewed as a fundamentally new form of armed conflict that breaks with previous traditions of military violence. While I think that the "unmanned" or "remote control" aspect of drones is problematic, primarily because it extends and sustains (already existing) conditions of asymmetrical violence, this thesis does not partake in the broader tendency that takes this aspect to be a cornerstone for an analysis of the drone as an instrument of violence.<sup>2</sup> As such, the scope of this thesis is limited insofar as it does not seek to develop an account that focuses on the technical object – the drone – itself.

However, as a result of these limits, the scope of my account is also broadened. In not invoking the theme of technological novelty, my approach to drone violence does not begin with the assumption that the drone must be treated as an unidentified violent object without a historical presence; an object that breaks radically with previous forms or practices of bombing. Rather than approaching the armed drone by giving priority to the "unmanned" aspect of it, this thesis opts instead to investigate critically the "aerial weapon" part of its description. This shift of analytic priorities is crucial in bringing to the surface the critical continuities that exist between drone warfare and earlier regimes of violence from the air. It is a shift that engenders an understanding of drone warfare that extends beyond the contours of contemporary uses of drones by the U.S. as an instrument of counterterrorism. This broader understanding offers a way out of the dominant framing of drone violence as "targeted killings". As I show, a historical point of view means moving on from the question of "how do we understand drone warfare as a new kind of war?" to ask also "what conditions of violence remain the same with a weapon like the drone?"

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<sup>2</sup> This thesis does, however, investigate in detail the implications of this tendency for how the violence of drones is understood and criticised.

## **The Argument**

In this thesis I present a twofold argument. First, I challenge approaches to drone bombing which rely exclusively on the narrative of “targeted killings” in order to understand, explain and criticise the violence of drones. Specifically, I argue that this narrative has engendered a discursive environment where non-lethal violent effects such as the injuries, destruction, terror and impoverishment suffered by people who live under drones are marginalised and effaced because they appear to be outside the intended use of drones as weapons used to pursue and kill individual targets. Second, I argue that the tendency amongst a wide variety of scholars, pundits and commentators to treat drone warfare as a radically new form of armed violence is premised on – and, in turn, reinforces – a narrow conception of what both drone violence and previous traditions of military violence entail.

This thesis seeks to give a more comprehensive account of drone violence by situating it in relation to the history of twentieth century aerial bombing. Specifically, I engage with, on the one hand, early air power theory and, on the other, colonial practices of air control in order to identify the critical continuities between these early theorisations and practices of violence from the air and current ones of armed drones. On the basis of this historical analysis I contend that what distinguishes drone bombing from previous regimes of aerial violence is not that it finally eliminates reciprocal relations of hostility or that technological advancement has made highly accurate and “surgical” targeting possible. Indeed, from its very inception, aerial bombing was predicated on a conceptualisation of air power as a radically asymmetrical form of military action. This asymmetry, for early air power theorists, constituted the very source of bombing campaigns’ strategic value. As particularly the case of colonial air policing shows, the idea that aerial bombing takes the form of a non-reciprocal infliction of violence is tightly woven together with historical practices of aerial bombing. Similarly, the historical account of aerial bombing offered in this thesis helps to make sense of the widespread violence, destruction and terror experienced by the communities targeted by, and living under, drones. The fact that aerial bombing has always been understood by its military theorists and practitioners as necessarily entailing wider effects on

targeted populations, such as terror and demoralisation, should, I argue, prompt critical thought to account for these effects when they become manifest in the case of drone bombing. Therefore, even if the intended strategic purpose of drone strikes is purportedly the targeting of *individual* suspected terrorists, this should not limit the understanding of its violence to one that reduces it to lethal action against individuals.

My main contention is that while drone bombing is discursively framed as a practice of individualised killings – which is discontinuous with previous conceptions of air power – it is nonetheless the case that its actual practice materially reproduces effects that are no different from earlier regimes of bombing. In other words, whilst I agree with many of its critics that drone violence is predicated upon a process of individualisation – that is, a process through which individuals rather than the population have increasingly become the central object of aerial bombing – I locate that process in a different register. Whereas dominant critiques argue that with the advent of drone technology, warfare has been reduced to manhunting, assassination or murder, thus individualising the violent effects of military action, I hold out that this individualisation is primarily *discursive* in nature. Indeed, individual targets exist only in military enframings and in the procedures through which the drone programme methodologically identifies, locates and kills people. These procedures of targeting are premised on the erasure of the complex web of effects – effects such as injury, the destruction of homes, impoverishment, the degradation of social life, and widespread terror – created by drone violence and suffered by entire communities. A critical understanding of the individualisation processes that drone violence enacts should thus, I argue, focus upon the multiple forms of erasure that these mechanisms entail. If we understand the material effects of drone violence to be individual in nature, then we have effectively silenced the voices of those who suffer the violence of drones.

My thesis, in sum, aims to lay the foundations for a critical understanding of drone warfare that takes as its starting point the real violent content of drone bombing, as framed by people who experience this violence on a daily basis. Such an approach seeks to destabilise the dominant mode of representation of drone violence as

individualised killings instead of taking it as the point of departure for an analysis of drone warfare.

## **The Method**

My thesis does not apply a singular analytical framework in its approach to the subject of drone bombing. It does not offer, for instance, a critique of drone bombing which is exclusively predicated on a historical or philosophical and normative approach. I felt that, given the complexity of my object of analysis, following a single-discipline approach would have been unnecessarily restrictive and more likely to predetermine the outcome of my investigation than to inform it. This is not to say that I have worked anarchically. Rather, I have let my research be informed by what might be termed methodological precepts; that is, guiding threads that helped me identify which problems to analyse, which traditions of violence to interrogate and which forms of discursive erasure to understand and contest. Each of these precepts was generated by what I thought were blind spots in the existing literature – both scholarly and military – on drone violence. What is more, whilst I proceed to identify each precept with the work of particular historians or theorists, I do not mean to suggest either that the chosen works exhaust their respective approaches or that their authors are prominent interlocutors in this thesis. The lessons that each of them has taught me function not as analytical strictures but as beacons for critical inquiry.

The first precept that guides my approach to drone violence is expressed by Simone Weil in her essay on “War and Peace” in which she advises that ‘the most defective method possible’ would be to try and understand the violence of war ‘in terms of the ends pursued and not by the nature of the means employed’.<sup>3</sup> In

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<sup>3</sup> Simone Weil, *Formative Writings 1929-1941*, eds and trans. Dorothy Tuck McFarland and Wilhelmina Van Ness, (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 241. It should be noted that I was guided to Weil’s work by my reading of the work of French philosopher Grégoire Chamayou, who, in his analysis of drone warfare, adopts Weil’s materialist position. However, as I point out later in this introduction and in far more detail in Chapter 4 of this thesis, my understanding of a materialist approach to drone warfare is markedly different from Chamayou’s. Whereas Chamayou perceives the materialist method

rejecting approaches that focus on abstract ends, Weil suggests that the essence of the materialist method is instead to try to think of war in terms of the mechanism of violence that makes it possible and ‘the consequences necessarily implied by the working out of the means employed’.<sup>4</sup> In accordance with this methodological precept, my understanding of armed drones attaches less importance to the military ends they are thought to serve than to the conditions of violence their use creates for the people living on the ground. As I have already suggested, much of the literature investigates the violence of armed drones from the perspective of their purported ends, namely, as individual targeted killings. Following Weil, I take this perspective to be insufficient for a critique of these weapons and their violence. The dissonance between the strategic rationale that underlies drone violence and the material consequences which the use of armed drones necessarily implies is a key component of this thesis – it constitutes both the starting point of my critical analysis of drone violence and a central problematic which I scrutinise throughout my thesis.

The second precept is taken from Michel Foucault’s writings on historical method. One of the overarching aims of this thesis is to destabilise and demystify currently dominant modes of representation of drone bombing, according to which drones are capable of highly accurate targeted strikes. My contention is that this representation erases the lived experience of the victims of drone violence. In seeking to contest this erasure, I draw up a historical account of aerial bombing which seeks to identify the traces of past modalities of aerial violence that still exist in the present. This departs from what Foucault would term ‘subjugated knowledges’, that is, ‘historical contents that have been buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systematizations’.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, I seek to write what he elsewhere calls ‘a history of the present’.<sup>6</sup> Such a historical approach is part of the genealogical method, which studies history not for its own sake but in order

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to require an examination of the violence of armed drones through an analysis of the technical aspects of these weapons, I engage in an analysis of the material effects of drone warfare and what those effects can tell us about the history of this form of armed violence.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, *“Society Must Be Defended”: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, eds Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1991), 31.

to identify the historical and contingent emergence of ‘those things that continue to exist and have value for us’ so as to render them problematic.<sup>7</sup> The upshot of such a strategy of destabilisation is that it may trouble the very givenness of our received modes of understanding the present and our experience of it. Indeed, genealogy, in Foucault’s words, does ‘not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know’; rather, it ‘separate[s] out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think’.<sup>8</sup> Genealogy, in Foucault’s understanding of the term, is not just about challenging the present mode of representation; it is about identifying that this mode is itself situated in a historical tradition and as such carries the sediments of that tradition. When interrogating frameworks of armed violence that emerge out of military discourse – and, in turn, become dominant modes of understanding military practices – such a genealogical approach is especially urgent, because, as I show in this thesis, such discourse tends to understand itself as a neutral, objective and progressively rational field of knowledge.

Finally, the third precept is inspired by Tarak Barkawi’s argument that the concept of war needs to be decolonised, by which he means engaging in a critique of ‘the ways in which Eurocentric ideas and historiographies have informed the basic categories of social and political thought’ about war and warfare.<sup>9</sup> Decolonising the armed drone and its violence is a vital component of this thesis. My contention is that the prevalent tendency to think, and think critically, of drone bombing as a radically new form of warfare relies on a limited, Eurocentric understanding of what “warfare” is and has been. It is not the case that drone warfare lacks a previous tradition of practice, as this tendency maintains; rather this lack of historical insight arises because ‘European histories of war provide the (provincial) basis for the putatively universal concepts and definitions with which we study war’.<sup>10</sup> The message this decolonial argument imparts has been crucial in my decision to engage

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<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow, trans. D. F. Bouchard and S. Simon (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 81.

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow, trans. D. F. Bouchard and S. Simon (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 46.

<sup>9</sup> Tarak Barkawi, “Decolonising War,” *European Journal of International Security* 1, no. 2 (2016): 199.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

with drone violence by, on the one hand, placing the voice of those who are affected by it at the forefront of my analysis and, on the other, writing a history of drone violence not by looking at Eurocentric grand narratives about warfare but by proceeding from alternative historiographical premises. As such, I formulate my historical account of drone bombing by reflecting on the application of air power as a means of imperial domination and policing during the 1920s and 1930s. In focusing on the previous use of air violence in areas that are often placed at the margins of international politics and history – and, importantly, in areas where at present drone strikes take place most frequently – I demonstrate that a decolonial analysis of drone warfare is crucial for our current understanding of the latter; it is crucial because such analysis questions and disrupts the targeted killings mode of representation, offering instead an alternative approach to drone violence and its history.

### **The Contribution**

In the years during which armed drones have become established as the centrepiece of U.S. counterterrorism policy, there has been a sharp increase in the production of scholarly studies which take drone bombing as their principal object of analysis. My thesis makes a contribution to knowledge by offering a richer historical contextualisation of drone violence. This approach enables me to highlight continuities of drone bombing – so often conceptualised as a radically new innovation – with colonial histories of aerial bombing. It also enables me to depart from an understanding of drone bombing, shared in both critical literature and military discourses, as a technology of targeted killing. To elaborate further on these contributions, it is important to recognise that the topic of drone warfare cuts across disciplinary boundaries. Different studies emphasise different aspects of military drones, draw from various theoretical backgrounds and employ diverging methodological approaches. Some of these studies aim to promote and justify the use of armed drones – as is the case in the work of U.S. military theorists and practitioners that I examine in this thesis. Conversely, other studies offer a critical

approach to drone violence by stressing the various problems that arise with the use of armed drones: the legal issues surrounding the U.S. administration's killing policies, the deployment of armed drones outside official warzones by agencies such as the C.I.A. and the absence of political transparency in the decision-making that leads to the targeting of individuals are some prominent themes that feature in the literature. Because of this diversity in the body of literature that examines drone warfare – and also because of my own multi-disciplinary approach to it – I do not locate this thesis' contribution in a particular academic discipline nor do I seek to add to the work of a particular scholar or group of scholars. Rather, I identify my contribution as a critical intervention into the existing body of literature in a number of different registers. In the remainder of this section I divide the body of literature I engage with in three groups in order to show the precise contours of this thesis' contribution. I should emphasise that, whilst I present them separately, I do not take these three groups to be clearly distinct. Quite the contrary, as I point out, there are significant links between them in the way they approach drone warfare. In addition, what follows should be seen as a brief mapping of my contribution, and not as a substantial literature review. These areas of literature will be outlined more fully as the thesis develops.

### *Drone Warfare in Military Discourse – Theories and Doctrine*

The first group consists of studies of drone warfare developed by military authors. These take the form of official institutional publications, graduate theses in military universities, or articles and commentaries in semi-official professional journals. These studies do not often appear at the forefront of academic work on drones. However, even though they operate on the fringes of the mainstream literature, they develop concepts that are central to ways in which current drone wars are theorised and explained. One example of such a study is George A. Crawford's *Manhunting: Reversing the Polarity of War*. In this book, published in 2008, Crawford asserts that the events of 9/11 have engendered a new global strategic environment in which the United States military must assume a radically new role in conducting wars. Advocating 'the transition of warfare from a conflict between nation-states, toward making warfare personal', he develops a theory of manhunting as a way to describe

– and, also, to prescribe – how the U.S. drone policy takes form.<sup>11</sup> Military writers such as William Shoemate and Stephen Hoshmer develop similar positions in claiming that the current U.S. national security strategy signifies ‘a paradigm change’ that requires the U.S. military to shift its approach to ‘targeting enemy leadership’ in ‘a complex environment’.<sup>12</sup> Others, such as Graham Turbiville, link recent counterterrorism operations to previous counterinsurgency practices instead of distinguishing between the two.<sup>13</sup> Finally, the ideas of these military writers often find their way into military doctrines and manuals; in this context, the 2015 *ATP 3-60 [Army Techniques Publication] Targeting* manual constitutes the institutional articulation of these military writers’ conception of drone warfare.<sup>14</sup> This group of studies signify, in this sense, what I term in my thesis as the discursive practice of drone warfare. The aim of these studies is not purely academic in nature. They are intended as analyses that help enact practices of drone bombing either by giving instructions as to how, where and against whom these weapons should be used or by rationalising and effacing the violent effects of their deployment.

The role of military studies in my thesis is twofold. First, by interrogating the assertions as well as the prose of these military writers, I seek to demonstrate the ways in which they – and by extension the U.S. military apparatus – discursively erase the actual violence inflicted by the practice of drone bombing. Second, I engage with this body of studies in order to suggest that the notions upheld by these military theorists do not pose a niche position in the broader literature on drones. Rather, their frameworks are situated centrally in contemporary debates on drone bombing, informing the basic concepts and terminologies of scholarly research on the subject. In challenging the core assumptions of these military accounts, I propose that critical thought must take the lived experienced of drone bombing as a crucial

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<sup>11</sup> George A. Crawford, *Manhunting: Reversing the Polarity of Warfare* (Baltimore: Publish America, 2008), 29.

<sup>12</sup> William H. Shoemate, “Paradigm Change: Targeting Enemy Leadership in a Complex Environment,” (Master’s Thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2011), 47-49; Stephen T. Hosmer, *Operations Against Enemy Leaders* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2001), 32-34.

<sup>13</sup> Graham H. Turbiville Jr., *Hunting Leadership Targets in Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorist Operations: Selected Perspectives and Experience*, Joint Special Operations University Report 07-6 (Hulburt Field: JSOU Press, 2007), 14.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Army, *ATP 3-60 (FM 3-60) Targeting* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 2015), available at <https://fas.org/irp/doddir/army/atp3-60.pdf>.

source for an inquiry into drone violence. My contention is that the voices of these military theorists and practitioners must be marginalised and silenced in order for alternative ways of thinking and contesting the violence of drones to emerge. In so doing, I contribute to critiques of drone warfare by interrogating critically and in depth military discourses and concepts that are often – without careful engagement – employed in academic literature.

### *Theorisations of Drone Warfare as a New Form of Warfare*

As mentioned above, there is a marked diversity of scholarly analyses on drone warfare which encompass a wide range of academic disciplines. I identify the second group of studies that my thesis engages with as those accounts that understand, theorise and explain drone warfare primarily in terms of a radical discontinuity from previous modalities of military violence. A prominent theoretical work that typifies this broader tendency that approaches drone bombing as a fundamentally novel form of armed violence is Grégoire Chamayou's *Drone Theory* [*Théorie du drone*]. In *Drone Theory*, Chamayou asserts that the need for a philosophical investigation of drone warfare arises 'because [the drone] is an "unidentified violent object"'.<sup>15</sup> He observes that, since it is a weapon that radically effaces reciprocal relations of hostility, the drone cannot be understood through existing categories of warfare – as traditional warfare presupposes a reciprocity of military action.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the advent of a weapon like the drone puts the very notion of "war" into crisis.<sup>17</sup> This preliminary evaluation prompts Chamayou to ask a question that, as I demonstrate later in this thesis, appears as a central problematic in contemporary debates about drones: 'if the "war of drones" is no longer quite warfare, what kind of "state of violence" does it amount to?'<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Grégoire Chamayou, *Drone Theory*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 2015), 14.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

Accordingly, there are many scholars who theorise drone warfare as a new paradigm of warfare.<sup>19</sup> Chamayou, for instance, uses the notion of manhunting as a key concept to explain and criticise the predatory nature of drone violence. Alternatively, in her book *We Kill Because We Can: From Soldiering to Assassination in the Drone Age*, Laurie Calhoun comments that whereas ‘war has always involved the intentional premediated killing of groups of people’, drone warfare is different ‘in that it involves the premediated killings of *specific* people, one by one’.<sup>20</sup> In this context, Calhoun’s argument exemplifies critical approaches on drone bombing that see the latter primarily as a form of violence that ‘looks indistinguishable from ... *assassination or extra-judicial execution*’.<sup>21</sup> According to scholars that parallel this line of argument, the discontinuity of drone warfare lies in the transformation of warfare into a different kind of violence, which is captured by concepts and labels such as “manhunting”, “assassinations”, “remote/targeted killings”, “putting to death” and so on.

Whilst this tendency to frame the violence of armed drones within a new paradigm of state violence characterises the work of both exponents and critics of drone warfare, I focus more on the critical part of the literature. The reason why I do this – and this is also the reason why I introduced this group of studies with the examples of Chamayou and Calhoun – is because I intend my thesis to be a critical intervention and *also* a contribution to prominent critiques of drone violence. My contention is that although these critiques expose and condemn the murderous logic that underlies current uses of armed drones, they nonetheless rely on that logic as the basis for their investigation of drone bombing and its violent effects. In other words, these critics’ point of departure in analysing drone bombing is similar to that of the military theorists cited above. This can be seen, for instance, in the way in

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<sup>19</sup> Chapter 4 offers a critical review of the current literature on drones and there I cite a number of these scholars. Indicatively, Christian Enemark and Paul Kahn are writers whose approach to drone warfare involves understanding the latter principally in terms of a new paradigm. See Christian Enemark, “Drones, Risk, and Perpetual Force,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 28, no. 3 (2014): 365-381 and Paul W. Kahn, “The Paradox of Riskless Warfare,” *Philosophy and Public Policy Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (2002): 2-8.

<sup>20</sup> Laurie Calhoun, *We Kill Because We Can: From Soldiering to Assassination in the Drone Age* (London: Zed Books, 2015), 33. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 33. See also Andrew Cockburn, *Kill Chain: Drones and the Rise of the High-Tech Assassins* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2015).

which these critics often identify drones through the latter's perceived function as precise killing machines, labelling them as "assassin-drones" and "hunter-drones". Consequently, their critiques approach drone warfare mainly in terms of the strategic ends that underpin the deployment of armed drones rather than its actual violent effects. I take this to be a significant problem because regardless of the critical outlook of this second group of studies, it does not fundamentally challenge the dominant mode of representation of drone violence as consisting merely of "targeted killings". One of the key contributions of this thesis is that it brings this problem to the foreground, not in order to challenge the value of existing critical thought on drone violence but to point to its limits and to suggest that a more extensive and thorough critique of drone violence is urgently needed.

In focusing on the material consequences of the deployment of armed drones, namely, the fact that they take the form of aerial bombing, my thesis thus contributes to current debates on, and critiques of, drones in two ways: first, it expands the scope of critical thought beyond the end-oriented narrative of "targeted killings" to include the broader violent effects of armed drones; second, it situates drone violence in a longer, colonial tradition of armed violence and thus fills the historiographical gap in the literature.

### *Historical Analyses of Drone Warfare*

Finally, the third group are studies that frame drone bombing in terms of its historicity. Historical approaches to drone bombing take various forms; studying different elements of drone bombing and displaying varying degrees of analytical rigour. It is possible, however, to subdivide these approaches into three distinct subcategories. First, there are approaches that offer an account of the technological background of armed drones, specifically, of the "unmanned" aspect of drones.<sup>22</sup> Second, some approaches take the "targeted killings" strategy of current drone wars

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<sup>22</sup> This kind of approach is commonly found in most scholarly analyses of armed drones and it often takes the form of a cursory outlining of the brief history of robotic technology, thus historicising a particular technological feature of armed drones. In most cases these historical approaches end up reinforcing the position that drone weaponry is in fact quite novel. For a detailed historical account of this kind see Peter Warren Singer, *Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (London: Penguin Books, 2009).

as their object of historical inquiry and relate it to previous regimes of state violence, such as manhunting and extra-judicial killings, that adhered to this rationale.<sup>23</sup> Third, there is a small body of historical work that identifies and engages with the continuities between drone bombing and earlier uses of air power, in particular colonial regimes of air policing.

Out of the three, my thesis resonates strongly with the last approach. Of special note, in this respect, is the historical work done by Mark Neocleous and also by Priya Satia. Both these scholars highlight the manner in which drone warfare reflects historic aerial practices of controlling colonial populations. Neocleous does so by using “police power” as a critical lens to frame the armed drone as the most recent instrument in enforcing imperial order over people in the periphery of the international political system.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, Satia emphasises and describes the way current practices of drone bombing structurally resemble the British air control system implemented in Iraq in 1921, her argument being that the strategic failings of that initial experiment imply that its drone analogue is similarly doomed to fail.<sup>25</sup>

My historical account of drone bombing deals with the themes invoked by these theorists, but is also distinct from them in significant ways. For instance, whilst, like Neocleous, I examine the various deployments of air power in constructing imperial order, my account focuses more on how these “constructive” effects were always predicated on the *destructive* effects of aerial bombing and the infliction of exemplary violence. Likewise, whilst I share Satia’s focus on how the Royal Air Force (RAF) defined and structured its air control scheme, my aim in doing so is not to offer a strategic evaluation of its success or failure but to demonstrate how its framing by the RAF actively concealed the real violent effects and brutal nature of

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<sup>23</sup> I understand my contribution to this historiographical strand to be of a similar kind to my contribution to accounts that understand drones only through the lens of contemporary strategic projects; namely, my thesis aims to point at the urgency for critical thought also to investigate other routes (other than that of strategic ends) of thinking and historicising drone violence.

<sup>24</sup> Mark Neocleous, *War Power, Police Power* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> Priya Satia, “Drones: A History from the British Middle East,” *Humanity* 5, no. 1 (2014): 1-31.

British air policing tactics. Finally, unlike both Neocleous and Satia,<sup>26</sup> I do not offer a comparative analysis of drone bombing and this earlier framework of air power but instead treat the latter in its historical specificity. In so doing, I focus on the historical and material conditions that surrounded the emergence of air power theory and its colonial application, indicating the ways in which military frameworks are not objective and rational, but historically contingent discursive constructs. In taking this approach, I am then able to deploy this historical insight in my critique of the contemporary “targeted killings” military framework.

As noted, I do not think that these three groups of studies on drones (military discursive frameworks, critical theorisations and historical approaches) can be readily separated out. Indeed, to challenge and destabilise dominant military enframings of drone warfare, the dominant critical understanding of drones as marking an entirely novel moment in the history of warfare must be problematised by way of developing a genealogical account of *aerial bombing*. Yet, in writing this genealogy, one must not fall into the trap of once more effacing the violent, destructive effects of drone bombing. In other words, the gaps that I have identified in each of these literatures reinforce and refer to one another, such that a comprehensive critique of drone bombing necessarily intervenes in or addresses a multiplicity of debates.

## **The Structure**

The remainder of this thesis is divided into three parts.

The first part consists of Chapter 1, which introduces the topic of drone bombing through two contrasting accounts of drone bombing. Initially, I offer a description of drone bombing according to testimonies provided by people who have suffered the violence of drones, either directly by having been injured by a drone strike or indirectly by living in areas in which such strikes occur. This is followed by an

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<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that Satia has also published material that engages with the RAF air control scheme in Iraq but does not relate it to contemporary warfare. Satia’s exclusively historical arguments in that material also feature in this thesis.

account of drone bombing according to the U.S. military's targeting manual. In my discussion of this second account, I demonstrate how drone strikes are methodologically organised, showing how surveillance techniques and intelligence methods are intrinsically bound up with the use of armed force. In presenting drone bombing in this twofold way, I also introduce the central problematic of this thesis, namely, that there is a substantial discrepancy between a description of drone bombing based on its violent effects as experienced by people on the ground and one based on the targeting logic that underlies the use of this weapons. This problematic is one which permeates the entirety of the thesis. I conclude this chapter by discussing the crucial differences between these two accounts and commenting on how in military doctrine the cumulative suffering and violence of the lived experienced of drone bombing is reduced to singular episodes of lethal violence.

In the second part, consisting of Chapters 2 and 3, I develop a historical account of drone bombing by looking at the emergence of air power theory and practice. Even though I rarely refer to drones in this part of the thesis, the history I investigate is the history of the violence of drones. The most fundamental connection between the history of air power I present and current drone wars is the fact that the former describes a regime of armed violence that still takes place in the present. In Chapter 2, I offer an account of the emergence of air power theory in the military discourse of the early twentieth century. I demonstrate that the arguments of air power theorists about the role and military value of aviation were developed within a complex discursive network that included, among other things, cultural representations of air power and the institutional politics of air power theorists themselves. Specifically, air power theorists sought to advance their claim for an autonomous air service, which had a formative impact on the subsequent development of strategic bombing. I follow this analysis of the politics of air power with a discussion of how air power theorists envisioned air power as a radically new paradigm of war, giving an account of the three shifts signified by air power: that air action takes the form of a ruthless, non-reciprocal offensive; that air power renders the notion of the battlefield obsolete and instead targets civilian centres; and that the aim of aerial attacks is to produce sufficient psychological effects so that civilians would force their government to sue for peace. This analysis of air power theory and

the concept of strategic bombing allows me to claim that non-reciprocal frameworks of warfare pre-existed drone warfare.

Chapter 3 looks closely at the application of air power as a means for the control of imperial territories during the 1920s and 1930s. While I specify that the practice of bombing for the “pacification” of colonial people was a common practice amongst European powers, I focus on the British air control system because it was structured, much like current drone wars, as a comprehensive policing apparatus. I give a brief account of the political rhetoric underpinning the claim for substituting ground troops with air forces. I also demonstrate the critical continuities between air policing and pre-existing conceptions and practices of “small wars”. In revealing the continuities between these two paradigms, I indicate the racist underpinnings of both and engage more specifically with how the categorisation of colonial populations in civilisational and racist terms was used to explain and justify the brutality of air policing and the use of aircraft as instruments of destruction and terror. The last part of this chapter takes a closer look at the violent effects of the air tactics used by the RAF; effects that are unambiguously similar to those of drone strikes.

The third part of this thesis, comprising Chapters 4 and 5, brings the historical account developed in the second part to bear on contemporary framings of the violence of drones. In other words, my objective in this part is to use the early air power theories and practices as a historic counter-point to prevalent theorisations of drone violence in terms of targeted killings. Chapter 4 initiates this contestation of the targeted killings narrative by offering a critical review of the literature on drones. I investigate the claim that drone bombing poses a novelty that breaks with past traditions of war and indicate its links with the tendency to view drone warfare through the lens of paradigms of violence that focus on individual killings such as assassination and manhunting. The conclusion of this chapter suggests that the colonial history of drone bombing can furnish a powerful critical position by re-interpreting the use of armed drones as a practice of state terrorism.

Chapter 5 transitions from the broader academic literature to a critique of contemporary military discursive practices that seek to explain and rationalise the use of armed drones by developing a framework of individualised targeted killings.

More specifically, I focus on the recent emergence of the doctrine of manhunting and interrogate the claims of the military theorists that have been closely involved in formulating this doctrine. My argument in this chapter is that the individualisation of drone violence is predicated on three related discursive erasures that these military theorists engage in when theorising contemporary manhunts. In claiming that contemporary counterterror manhunts are situated in a radically new paradigm of war, these theorists, first, erase the history of drone bombing and its links to earlier regimes of violence from the air. Second, these theorists conceptualise manhunts as potentially non-violent military actions. I argue that this conception is premised on an erasure of the real violent content of contemporary manhunts; an erasure effected by occluding any reflection on the violent means – namely, drone bombing – that the U.S. uses in conducting its manhunts. Finally, I indicate that by removing the concept of the population from their doctrine, these theorists erase the people living under drones from being considered as possible victims of drone violence.

In the afterword of the thesis, I briefly reflect on the dangers of continuing to understand and challenge the violence of drones primarily in terms of “targeted killings”. I emphasise the urgency of shifting the scope through which drone bombing is understood, explained and contested in order to make possible a discursive environment where the destruction of the livelihoods of people living under drones is not systematically marginalised and effaced.

# CHAPTER 1: TWO ACCOUNTS OF DRONE BOMBING: LIFE UNDER DRONES AND TARGETING METHODOLOGY

## Introduction

On 24 October 2012 Mamana Bibi, a 68 year-old midwife, was gathering vegetables in the village Ghundi Kala in northwest Pakistan when she was hit by a drone strike.<sup>1</sup> The explosion led to the immediate death of Mamana as well as the injury of her two grandchildren, nine year-old Nabeela and twelve year-old Zubair, who were working in the field alongside their grandmother.<sup>2</sup> Even though the U.S. administration did not officially acknowledge the attack as part of their ongoing drone programme in the area, Mustafa Qadri, an Amnesty International researcher investigating the case, deduced that evidence on the ground strongly suggested a drone attack to be the most likely explanation. One reason for this conclusion was the accounts of villagers who had consistently witnessed drones hovering above the area before the time of the attack. ‘The drone planes were flying over our village all day and night, flying in pairs sometimes three together’, Zubair Rehman recounted, later adding that this was a normal aspect of their daily lives.<sup>3</sup> Another piece of evidence was that the attack involved two missiles fired concurrently; indicative of a “double tap”, a commonly used drone tactic in which two missiles are fired at the same target reportedly to ensure maximum efficiency for the killing.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the missile fragments discovered in the area were examined and found very likely to have been from an AGM-114 Hellfire missile that typically arms U.S. drone

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, ‘*Will I be next?*’ *US Drone Strikes in Pakistan* (London: Amnesty International Publications, International Secretariat, 2013), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ryan Devereaux, “Family of Grandmother Killed in US Drone Strike Arrive for Congress Visit,” *The Guardian*, October 27, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/27/drones-attack-pakistan-family-rehman-congress>.

<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International, *Will I be next?*, 19.

<sup>4</sup> James Cavallaro, Stephan Sonnenberg and Sarah Knuckey, “Living under Drones: Death, Injury, and Trauma to Civilians from US Drone Practices in Pakistan,” *International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic, Stanford Law School and Global Justice Clinic, NYU School of Law* (2012): 74.

aircraft.<sup>5</sup> Finally, for Qadri, the most convincing evidence was the “phenomenal accuracy” of the attack, with the first missile hitting Mamana and literally obliterating her, spreading remains of her throughout the field.<sup>6</sup> Later on that day, Nabeela, with the help of other villagers, collected as many pieces of her grandmother as she could find and wrapped them in a cloth to be buried.<sup>7</sup>

The year before the killing of Mamana, a group of U.S. Air Force officials had visited the sport network ESPN in order to find a solution to a pressing problem they were facing concerning the immense amount of surveillance data transmitted by drones to the centres of operation.<sup>8</sup> The main challenge faced by defence and intelligence analysts was to achieve ‘efficient acquisition, storage, management and dissemination of situational awareness information – particularly full-motion video’.<sup>9</sup> The experience of sport networks in collecting, analysing and rapidly reproducing live video-feeds from sport events proved instructive to military and intelligence agencies as they ended up using a similar data-cataloguing system called Full-motion Video Asset Management Engine (FAME). According to the Harris Corporation that developed it, the key objective of FAME is to add value to and enhance the discoverability of data in order to improve its later examination and retrieval.<sup>10</sup> For military officials, the issue FAME needed to resolve was not simply to find a way of collecting and storing the unprecedented volume of data received from drone transmissions, but in addition to provide the software that could order and organise such data. This was primarily done through the use of metadata coding; that is, an additional set of data significations that would define, categorise and organise the raw data received by drones. Metadata markers – such as the time and geographical location of a video-feed and the type of event it signifies – would

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<sup>5</sup> Devereaux, “Family of Grandmother.”

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Amnesty International, *Will I be next?*, 19.

<sup>8</sup> Sharon Weinberger, “How ESPN Taught the Pentagon to Handle a Deluge of Drone Data,” *Popular Mechanics*, June 11, 2012, <http://www.popularmechanics.com/military/a7967/how-the-pentagon-will-handle-its-deluge-of-drone-data-9600910/>.

<sup>9</sup> Harris Corporation, “Harris Corporation Full-Motion Video Asset Management Engine Meets All Pilot Program Objectives During Empire Challenge 2008,” *Harris Corporation Press Releases*, October 27, 2008, accessed May 3, 2015, <https://www.harris.com/press-releases/2008/10/harris-corporation-full-motion-video-asset-management-engine-meets-all-pilot>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

be tagged onto the received transmissions, allowing analysts to create a unified database which would record a situation on the ground and, in accordance with previously recorded information, spatially and temporally register it into a coherent series to enable a “pattern of life” analysis of the population on the ground.<sup>11</sup>

Both stories recounted above are snippets of contemporary drone wars. They represent what military officers describe as the two opposite ends in the spectrum of activities that make up drone strikes: data collection and management, and the use of armed force to kill targeted individuals.<sup>12</sup> The key objective of the present chapter is to demonstrate that while these stories are both situated in the context of drone bombing, it is nonetheless the case that they correspond with two radically different modes of representation of drone violence. In order to illustrate how this is the case, this chapter develops two distinct accounts of drone bombing. The first section attempts to offer a description of the violence of drone strikes from the perspective of the people who have experienced these attacks in areas such as Pakistan, Afghanistan and Palestine. This perspective is crucial in revealing that the harm inflicted by means of armed drones is not limited to the killing of individuals but comprises many other violent effects, which affect the entirety of the population living under the field of operation of such weapons. The second section presents an account of drone strikes based on the U.S. Army’s *Targeting* manual, a military document that methodologically defines and structures the current deployment of drones in U.S. counterterrorist operations.<sup>13</sup> As I show, this document presents drone strikes as an end point of a rational and repetitive process of finding, tracking and killing individuals suspected to be terrorists. This military enframing abstracts from the widespread and long-lasting effects experienced by people on the ground and instead reduces the scope of drone-inflicted violence to the “targeted killings”

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<sup>11</sup> Jim Michaels, “Military turns to ESPN to Help Analyze Drone Footage,” *USA Today*, December 19, 2012, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2012/12/19/drone-video/1770337/>.

<sup>12</sup> For example see George A. Crawford, *Manhunting: Counter-Network Organization for Irregular Warfare*, Joint Special Operations University Report 09-7 (Hulburt Field: JSOU Press, 2009), 38. I critically engage with Crawford’s representation of the targeting process in Chapter 5, where I contest the claim that the early stages of a targeted killing process are nonviolent and nonintrusive.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Army, *ATP 3-60 (FM 3-60) Targeting* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 2015), available at <https://fas.org/irp/doddir/army/atp3-60.pdf>.

of individuals. In the concluding section, I suggest that the discrepancies between these two accounts point to a crucial problem with how current uses of armed drones are understood, explained and criticised as a practice of state violence. I identify this problem to be the way in which current debates on drone violence approach the latter principally through the lens of “targeted killings”; in so doing, they end up reinforcing the contours of the abstract account presented in the second section of this chapter. This narrow but prevalent understanding of drone strikes has given rise to a discursive environment where the injuries, destruction and terror suffered by the people living under drones are excluded and silenced because they are located outside the dominant framework within which we think about the violence of drones. In identifying this problem, I finish by detailing how the rest of this thesis plans to offer an account of drone bombing that challenges the “targeted killing” framework.

### **Death and Life under Drones**

This section contains stories of death and injury, of blood, pain and fear. My express aim here is to describe some of the immediate effects of drone bombing – the killing and maiming of the people directly targeted, or of those who find themselves in the blast radius of such targeting. I also describe some of the consequences that ripple out from these instances of physical violence – effects like the pervasive and enduring fear of being targeted or the social degradation experienced by communities that live daily with that fear. Three publications are important in this respect: a 2010 report authored by Christopher Rogers of the Center for Civilians in Conflict, which contains interviews of over 160 civilians living in Northwest Pakistan;<sup>14</sup> a 2012 report published by the Stanford International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic and the Global Justice Clinic at the New York University School of Law, which includes more than 130 interviews with victims, witnesses and

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<sup>14</sup> Christopher Rogers, *Civilian Harm and Conflict in Northwest Pakistan* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2010), available at [https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Pakistan\\_Report\\_2010\\_2013.pdf](https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Pakistan_Report_2010_2013.pdf).

experts in Pakistan;<sup>15</sup> and a 2013 report by Amnesty International, which has carried out over 60 interviews with survivors of drone strikes, relatives of victims eyewitnesses and residents of affected areas in North Waziristan.<sup>16</sup> This section draws heavily on these reports as well as on other sources of testimony in order to show what the narrative of “surgically precise” drone targeting promoted by the U.S. administration has come to mean in practice.<sup>17</sup> If there is anything to be learned from the first-hand testimony provided by these reports, then it is that this narrative is false.<sup>18</sup>

### *Death under Drones: The Physical Violence of Drone Strikes*

I begin with a brief exposition of how medical discourse defines and categorises the physical harm caused by blast explosions in general in order to show that the violence inflicted by drone strikes on the bodies of its victims is no less injurious than other forms of bombing. For physicians the manner in which death and injury are inflicted by explosions is often overdetermined, as it can be caused by a variety of factors acting on a body almost simultaneously.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, in the case of drone bombing, as in most cases of explosion, the seriousness or even lethality of the injuries caused depend on a variety of factors, the more important ones being the proximity of the individual to the point of impact, the magnitude of the blast

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<sup>15</sup> Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey, “Living Under Drones.”

<sup>16</sup> Amnesty International, *Will I be next?*

<sup>17</sup> One can take, as an example of this prevalent governmental narrative, the following excerpt from former CIA Director John Brennan’s May 2012 speech on counterterrorism at the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars: ‘In addition, compared against other options, a pilot operating this aircraft remotely – with the benefit of technology and with the safety of distance – might actually have a clearer picture of the target and its surroundings, including the presence of innocent civilians. It’s this surgical precision – the ability, with laser-like focus, to eliminate the cancerous tumour called an al Qaeda terrorist while limiting damage to the tissue around it, that makes this counterterrorism tool so essential’. John Brennan, “The Efficacy and Ethics of U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy,” *Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars*, transcript and webcast, April 30, 2012, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/the-efficacy-and-ethics-us-counterterrorism-strategy>.

<sup>18</sup> Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey, “Living Under Drones,” v.

<sup>19</sup> Centre for Disease Control and Injury Prevention, “Explosions and Blast Injuries: A Primer for Clinicians,” *CDC* (Atlanta, GA: Department of Health and Human Services, 2003), <http://www.cdc.gov/masstrauma/preparedness/primer.pdf>.

radius and the site in which the explosion occurs – whether it takes place in an enclosed space, or outdoors.<sup>20</sup>

Medically, the type of injuries caused by explosions are divided into four categories. Primary blast injuries come as a direct consequence of the sudden and intense pressurization impulse created by the detonation of the explosive, which often leads to the anatomical and physiological deconstruction of the bodies located within the blast radius of the attack.<sup>21</sup> Gas-filled organs – such as the ears, lungs and abdominal track – are particularly susceptible to internal rupture, lacerations and haemorrhage as an effect of the over-pressurised wave that impacts them.<sup>22</sup> An explosion's blast wave can also cause concussions or mild traumatic brain injury even without a direct blow to the head of the victim.<sup>23</sup> In addition, depending on the site of occurrence of explosion, the duration of the blast impulse, and thus its intensity, might differ; while in outdoor spaces the decay time of the blast overpressure is relatively constant, in enclosed spaces such time tends to vary since the impulse wave can reflect off surrounding surfaces.<sup>24</sup> This particular effect was accounted for in the design and development of the AGM-114N Augmented Charge (MAC) Thermobaric Hellfire missile which, unlike previous models that have a rapid decay time, has an added mechanism to sustain the pressure wave and thus increase the lethality of the warhead explosion.<sup>25</sup>

Following from the primary blast injuries category, secondary blast injuries comprise penetrating wounds and even mutilation from shrapnel ejected either from the missile casing, or from surrounding debris.<sup>26</sup> In this category, any body part may be affected and this includes both penetrating and blunt force traumas.<sup>27</sup> Tertiary blast injuries consist of blunt trauma caused by the blast wave propelling

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<sup>20</sup> Gregory J. Argyros, "Management of Primary Blast Injury," *Toxicology* 121, no. 1 (1997): 106.

<sup>21</sup> Centre for Disease Control, "Explosions and Blast Injuries."

<sup>22</sup> Argyros, "Primary Blast Injury," 106.

<sup>23</sup> Centre for Disease Control, "Explosions and Blast Injuries."

<sup>24</sup> Maria A. Mayorga, "The Pathology of Primary Blast Overpressure Injury," *Toxicology* 121, no. 1 (1997): 17.

<sup>25</sup> "AGM-114N Metal Augmented Charge (MAC) Thermobaric Hellfire," *Global Security Organisation*, accessed April 9, 2015, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/munitions/agm-114n.htm>.

<sup>26</sup> Centre for Disease Control, "Explosions and Blast Injuries."

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

the body on solid surfaces or, when the explosion takes place within an enclosed space, by any subsequent structural (building) collapse on the human body.<sup>28</sup> Lastly, quaternary blast injuries is a category intended to cover every type of trauma which does not directly fit the previous three categories.<sup>29</sup> Being an extensive classification, it comprises many different types of injuries such as blast-induced burns; breathing issues from dust, smoke or toxic fumes; crush injuries; and long-term psychological trauma in case the victims survive their bodily injuries caused by the explosion.<sup>30</sup>

This generic medical schema for blast injuries can be corroborated by the more specific testimonies provided by victims – either survivors or people who were near the site of the explosion – of drone strikes. One such testimony is the one of Faheem Qureshi, a fourteen-year-old boy and the lone survivor of a drone strike on the night of 23 January 2009 in the village of Zeraki in North Waziristan.<sup>31</sup> Faheem had been in the house that was targeted and ‘suffered a fractured skull and received shrapnel wounds and burns all over the left side of his body and face’.<sup>32</sup> Upon experiencing the pressure wave of the blast, he said: ‘I felt my brain stopped working and my heart was on fire ... [m]y entire body was burning like crazy’.<sup>33</sup> Zubair Rehman – Mamana’s grandson mentioned at the start of the chapter – reported that ‘[t]here was a very

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<sup>28</sup> Daniel D. Yeh and William P. Schechter, “Primary Blast Injuries – An Updated Concise Review,” *World Journal of Surgery* 36, no. 5 (2012): 967-969.

<sup>29</sup> This category also includes exacerbation or complications of existing injuries identified in previous categories. See Centre for Disease Control, “Explosions and Blast Injuries.”

<sup>30</sup> Stephen J. Wolf, Vikhyat S. Bebarta, Carl J. Bonnett, Peter T. Pons and Stephen V. Cantrill, “Blast Injuries,” *The Lancet* 374, no. 9687 (2009): 412.

<sup>31</sup> The attack in Zeraki marked the Obama administration’s first drone strike, conducted merely three days after Obama had taken office. It took the lives of ‘at least seven, but as many as 11 civilians’ while ‘information from official and other sources [recognised] the death of three children and at least four civilians’. As I explain later in this section, a crucial issue with giving exact numbers of people killed is because the attack completely destroys human bodies caught near the explosion, which makes a body count extremely difficult. For more, see Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey, “Living Under Drones,” 66-71.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 70. In addition, the “Living Under Drones” report comments on the lifelong suffering that Faheem was subjected to because of the drone strike. Though he managed to survive, Faheem ‘lost his left eye, which has since been replaced by an artificial one; he also lost his hearing in one ear as a result of damage to his eardrum. His vision in his right eye is still blurred, requiring ongoing treatment, and he now has only limited mobility’. *Ibid.*, 70-71; see also Spencer Ackerman, “Interview: Victim of Obama’s First Drone Strike,” *The Guardian*, January 23, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/23/drone-strike-victim-barack-obama>.

bad smell and the area was full of smoke and dust ... I couldn't breathe properly for several minutes'.<sup>34</sup> His sister Nabeela added that they were close to the explosion that killed their grandmother and that the strength of the blast propelled them into the air and pushed them onto the ground.<sup>35</sup> A doctor who attended people injured by drone strikes also vividly described how their skin was 'burned so that you can't tell cattle from human', while another person noted that the site of the attack that killed his father 'looked as if it was burned completely, so that even [the victim's] own clothes had burnt. All the stones in the vicinity had become black'.<sup>36</sup>

Another drone strike that hit the Zowi Sidgi village on 6 July 2012 killed eighteen workers who had gathered under a tent after finishing their day's work. Nabeel, one of the people on the site of the attack, describes a gruesome scene following the strike. 'It was a very bad situation', he recounts, '[s]ome people lost their hands. Others had their heads cut off. Some lost their legs. Human body parts were scattered everywhere on the ground. The bodies were burnt and it was not possible to recognize them'.<sup>37</sup> According to the witnesses interviewed by Amnesty International, the initial attack killed at least eight people. When nearby villagers rushed to the site of the attack to help, the drones 'fired another series of missiles targeting those who had come to the scene' to help.<sup>38</sup> This "double-tap" type of attack meant that '[a]t least six people died instantly, and at least another two died minutes later from wounds sustained in the attack'.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the people who did not die instantly by this series of attacks did not receive any immediate help because, following the second strike, 'no one dared go near the tent until the following morning'.<sup>40</sup> Due to this tactic of repeated attacks, bystanders generally avoid undertaking any attempt to rescue or provide medical assistance to the victims of attacks.<sup>41</sup> When people near an attack try to recover bodies from the

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<sup>34</sup> Amnesty International, *Will I be next?*, 19.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>36</sup> Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey, "Living Under Drones," 95.

<sup>37</sup> Amnesty International, *Will I be next?*, 25.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>41</sup> For more on the "double tap" tactic see also Glenn Greenwald, "US Drone Strikes Target Rescuers in Pakistan – and the West Stays Silent," *The Guardian*, August 20, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/aug/20/us-drones-strikes-target-rescuers-pakistan>.

wreckage, they know that they risk becoming victims as well. In this context, Faheem Qureshi expressed his belief that he would 'likely not have survived if he had not managed to walk out of the smoking rubble of his *hujra* (guest house) on his own, because his neighbors would have waited too long in coming to rescue him'.<sup>42</sup> Another local confirmed Faheem's belief, stating that '[w]e and other people are so scared of drone attacks now that when there is a drone strike, for two or three hours nobody goes close to [the location of the strike]. We don't know who [the victims] are, whether they are young or old, because we try to be safe'.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, people who are injured often do not receive help for a considerable time following an attack, which further diminishes their chances of survival.

When comparing testimonies provided by victims of drone bombing to the medical reports on the physiological damage caused by blast-induced explosions, it becomes obvious that while the latter lacks the lived experience of the former, it is still the case that both descriptions appear very much consistent with each other. Drone strikes pulverize, mutilate and burn human bodies – just like any other type of bombing attack. Even more so, because witnesses' accounts do not have the scientificity of medical reports, their descriptions do not tend to differentiate between traumas. Nor do they categorise their experience into various classifications of injury. Instead, they provide an account that describes the bodily injury caused by drone strikes in all of its cumulative effect.

Perhaps another way to approach this similarity between drone strikes and other forms of explosion is to examine a testimony which actually tries to differentiate between them. In his book *The Drone Eats with Me*, Atef Abu Saif discloses a day-by-day account of his experience of the Israeli offensive against Gaza in the summer of 2014. During the offensive, the Israeli state used various means to attack targets in populated areas. Reviewing the various types of attacks taking place, Saif comments:

In time, you start to distinguish between the different types of attack. By far, the easiest distinction you learn to make is between an air attack, a tank attack, and an attack from the sea. The shells coming in from the sea

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<sup>42</sup> Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey, "Living Under Drones," 75.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

are the largest in size, and the boom they make is much deeper than anything else you hear. It's an all-engulfing, all-encompassing kind of sound; you feel like the ground itself is being swallowed up. Tank rockets, by comparison, give off a much hollower sound. Their explosions leave more of an echo in the air but you don't feel it so much from beneath. In contrast, a rocket dropped from an F16 makes the whole street dance a little for a good 30 seconds. You feel you might have to jump out of the window any minute to escape the building's collapse. Different from all these, though, is the rocket from a drone. This rocket seems to have more personality – it projects a sharp yellow light into the sky. A few seconds before a drone strike, this bright light spreads over the sky as if the rocket is telling us, “It's dinner time, time to feast”.<sup>44</sup>

What is striking about this description is the way in which the differentiation between the various forms of bombing attacks is presented primarily in terms of their soundscape. Saif does not describe any of the attacks as being more or less violent than the others, or more or less threatening. Rather than the degree of destruction or the number of lives lost in bombing attacks, it is the sound they make that he presents as the sole meaningful criterion that may set apart various types of attacks. It is only when an attack is experienced as a sound and not as a lethal force acting on someone's body that a difference between the various types of explosion can be articulated. In any other case, the distinction between the physical violence of drone strikes and any other form of bombing is meaningless.<sup>45</sup>

*Life under Drones: Further Suffering Caused by Drone Bombing*

Apart from showing how the physical violence inflicted by drones is in no significant way different from other types of explosion, the testimonies given by people who survived – or otherwise experienced – drone strikes also reveal the broader and

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<sup>44</sup> Atef Abu Saif, *The Drone Eats with Me: Diaries from a City under Fire* (Manchester: Comma Press, 2015), 85.

<sup>45</sup> Though Saif does not articulate this point himself it is worth noting that throughout his book whenever he describes the immediate violent aftermath of a bombing attack he never differentiates between the types of attacks like he does in the passage above. See *ibid.*

longer-term implications that such bombing attacks have on the lives of targeted communities. For example, Ahmed Jan, who himself was injured in a drone strike that took place on 17 March 2011 in the town of Datta Khel in North Waziristan, noted that because of the severe damage that strikes cause on the bodies targeted, it is very challenging to identify deceased individuals following a drone strike. Drawing from his own experience he recounts that ‘people were trying to find the body parts. We find the body parts of some people, but sometimes we do not find anything’.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Firoz Ali Khan described the missiles fired as ‘very powerful’ and noted how ‘they destroy human beings. There is nobody left and small pieces left behind. Pieces. Whatever is left is just pieces of bodies and cloth’.<sup>47</sup>

The severe bodily damage caused by drone strikes and the challenge faced in identifying the dead has led to difficulties in carrying out burial processions for people killed by drone bombing. Masoof Afwan describes the funeral of several of his relatives who died in a drone strike in Waziristan: ‘they held a funeral for everybody, in the same location, one by one. Their bodies were scattered into tiny pieces. They ... couldn’t be identified’.<sup>48</sup> Also, as Ibrahim Qasim comments, ‘[t]here used to be funeral processions, lots of people used to participate ... But now, [the U.S. has] even targeted funerals, they have targeted mosques, they have targeted people sitting together, so people are scared of everything’.<sup>49</sup> Atef Abu Saif describes a similar situation taking place in Gaza, where the constant patrolling of drones meant that mourners were not prepared to risk attending a funeral, even when the deceased were well known to them.<sup>50</sup> In both cases, people were extremely reluctant to participate in burial processions because of the fear of being targeted themselves. Consequently, adding to the failure of identifying and piecing together bodies, the targeting – and the possibility of further targeting – of funerals challenges their practice.

In a similar vein, more than just funerals or other ceremonial activities involving a large assembly of individuals, the fear of being targeted has reportedly led to a

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<sup>46</sup> Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey, “Living Under Drones,” 94.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>50</sup> Saif, *The Drone Eats with Me*, 112.

general unwillingness of people to participate in any sort of social activity which might result in a drone strike. Since people have no accurate indication of what might trigger an attack, drone violence is perceived to be possible always and everywhere, and even rudimentary activities such as having guests over for dinner comes with the expectation that it might lead to being targeted; thus, they are systematically avoided.<sup>51</sup> The incapacity of people living beneath drones to anticipate where and when a strike might hit has, according to another survivor from Waziristan, resulted in a deep internalisation of the fear of being targeted, so that, ‘no matter what we are doing, we are always thinking the drone will strike us. So we are scared to do anything, no matter what’.<sup>52</sup> In the case of Saif in Gaza, the whirring sound of the drone hovering above his head is translated into a state of continuous dread which not even a night’s sleep can dispel. In his words, ‘the drone keeps us company all night long. Its whirring, whirring, whirring, is incessant – as if it wants to remind us it’s there, it’s not going anywhere’.<sup>53</sup>

This sense of continuous tension and anxiety can reportedly linger for a considerable amount of time following an attack. Rida and Atheer, who live in Gaza, comment on how five years after a drone strike killed their cousin, the sound of a drone circling their area prompts them to look for shelter.<sup>54</sup> These reactions of anticipatory anxiety were reported even by people who did not witness a drone strike, but who nonetheless found themselves living under the operation of drone systems.<sup>55</sup> One example that indicates the different forms such reactions take can be seen in the widespread rumours circulating in tribal areas in Pakistan according to which local informants funded by the C.I.A. were planting small silicon-chips which, acting as homing devices, directed drone missiles to the houses of intended targets.<sup>56</sup> The weight of such rumour resulted in the execution of 19-year old Habibur Rehman by Taliban militia in 2009, allegedly for profusely distributing such

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<sup>51</sup> Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey, “Living Under Drones,” 96.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>53</sup> Saif, *The Drone Eats with Me*, 31.

<sup>54</sup> Therezia Cooper and Tom Anderson, “Gaza: Life beneath the Drones,” *Corporate Watch* (February 2015): 17.

<sup>55</sup> Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey, “Living Under Drones,” 82.

<sup>56</sup> Jane Mayer, “The Predator War: What are the Risks of the C.I.A.’s Covert Drone Program,” *The New Yorker*, October 26, 2009, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/10/26/the-predator-war>.

devices after being promised money by the U.S.<sup>57</sup> Oblivious to the actual technological mechanisms involved in drone targeting and informed by high-profile executions like Habibur's, the local population was convinced of the validity of the existence of such devices – it seemed as good an explanation as anything. Many Waziris spoke of fear and suspicion growing in their communities, 'of being tagged with a chip by a neighbour or someone else who works for either Pakistan or the US, and of the fear of being falsely accused of spying by local Taliban'.<sup>58</sup> This clearly shows how the military operation of drone systems carries with it a baggage of effects for the lives of people on the ground which do not necessarily hinge on a direct experience of drone violence, but are nonetheless its by-product.

In addition to the aforementioned effects of drone bombing, there is a wide array of other effects which can be gleaned from accounts provided by people who experienced its violence or are familiar with people who did. For instance, survivors of drone strikes are confronted with physical and mental difficulties in coping with their extensive and often permanent injuries.<sup>59</sup> Two years after a drone strike that killed his two young cousins and his wheelchair-bound uncle, Saduallah Wazir observes that he does not consider himself lucky because he survived the attack.<sup>60</sup> The cost of the strike was dire for Sadaullah who lost both his legs in the explosion and had an eye torn out by shrapnel.<sup>61</sup> The young man – he was fifteen years old at the time of the strike – mentions that his life was radically changed after the strike. 'I had a dream to be a doctor', he notes, '[b]ut now I can't even walk to school'.<sup>62</sup> Faheem Qureshi, mentioned above, similarly describes how he and his classmates find it difficult to concentrate in school, being terrified of the threat of drones in the skies:

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<sup>57</sup> Carol Grisanti and Mushtaq Yusufzai, "Taliban-style Justice for Alleged U.S. Spies," *NBC News*, April 17, 2009, [http://worldblog.nbcnews.com/\\_news/2009/04/17/4376383-taliban-style-justice-for-alleged-us-spies?lite](http://worldblog.nbcnews.com/_news/2009/04/17/4376383-taliban-style-justice-for-alleged-us-spies?lite).

<sup>58</sup> Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey, "Living Under Drones," 27.

<sup>59</sup> Madiha R. Tahir, "Louder than Bombs," *The New Inquiry Magazine-Game of Drones* 6 (2012): 103.

<sup>60</sup> Murtaza Hussain, "Pakistan's Legal Fight to End the Drone War," *Aljazeera*, December 15, 2011, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/12/20111213112743546541.html>.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

Our minds have been diverted from studying. We cannot learn things because we are always in fear of the drones hovering over us, and it really scares the small kids who go to school ... At the time the drone struck, I had to take exams, but I couldn't take exams after that because it weakened my brain. I couldn't learn things, and it affected me emotionally. My [mind] was so badly affected.<sup>63</sup>

Faheem's view of a deteriorating state of education is also shared by Najeeb Saaqib, a village elder, who also adds that schools under drones are no longer a safe space for children: 'We want our girls and boys to get [a] proper education. [We want] someone to become a doctor, someone to become an air pilot, but just because of drone attack[s] we can't take them to school, can't allow them'.<sup>64</sup>

Descriptions such as those provided by Faheem and Najeeb are crucial reminders that the consequences of drone violence go beyond the moment of the strike and instead drastically change the conditions of life on the ground. As Christopher Rogers observes in his report, the effect of drone attacks in northwest Pakistan is 'often long-lasting and complex, destabilizing families and entire communities'.<sup>65</sup> The killing of a father or an adult caretaker 'can deprive the family of its only source of income'.<sup>66</sup> Living with an injury caused by drone strikes 'can require expensive medical treatment, care by other family members, and prevent survivors from working in the household or finding a job'.<sup>67</sup> The destruction of a house 'can mean homelessness' and 'also the loss of a family's most important financial asset, forcing them into cycles of debt and dependency'.<sup>68</sup> Thus, surviving a strike often means being plunged into a life of pain, homelessness and poverty, in a region where there is already a stark problem of impoverishment, unemployment and inadequate

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<sup>63</sup> Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey, "Living Under Drones," 91.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>65</sup> Rogers, *Civilian Harm*, 3.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 3. Wahid, a fourteen-year-old boy from Bajau who lost his father in an airstrike, explains: 'I have four brothers and one sister. But my elder brother is in a wheelchair and paralyzed and we have many, many problems and need food and shelter. Now the only person who can support the family is me ... but I'm afraid because I am too young'. See *ibid.*, 37.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

healthcare.<sup>69</sup> Bakhatwar Jan describes how paying hospital bills after he was injured in an armed attack has pushed him and his family into financial ruin:

I spent 800,000 – 1,000,000 Rs [approximately 10,000 USD] on treatment and had to rely on other people to loan me money. I have five daughters and one son, who is five. I am the only breadwinner. We really need assistance with our living expenses. I keep having to get loans over and over but we are just falling further into debt.<sup>70</sup>

Victims of U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan's FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) often receive no official recognition of being at the receiving end of state violence. An Open Society Foundations report observes how 'government response in FATA to drone strike victims differs markedly from victims of armed violence elsewhere in Pakistan'.<sup>71</sup> According to the report, while the Pakistani government has policy mechanisms in place providing relief to victims of armed violence inflicted by terrorist and militant attacks (or sometimes by the Pakistani security forces), 'there are no policies of funds dedicated to systematically verify civilian harm from U.S. drone strikes and provide compensation and redress'.<sup>72</sup> Khalil ur Rehman, who lost his brother in a drone attack in North Waziristan in 2009, notes

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<sup>69</sup> Here I refer specifically to the FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) in Pakistan where the majority of U.S. drone strikes have occurred. According to an Amnesty International report titled *'The Hands of Cruelty': Abuses by Armed Forces and Taliban in Pakistan's Tribal Areas*, '[t]he Tribal Areas and particularly FATA have some of the lowest rates of education, life expectancy and other health-indicators in Pakistan. Sixty percent of the population lives below the poverty line, the literacy rate is recorded at 17% compared to 56% nationally, and its per capital income is \$250 – half the national average. Poverty, literacy and income rates are even worse for women'. Amnesty International, *'The Hands of Cruelty': Abuses by Armed Forces and Taliban in Pakistan's Tribal Areas* (London: Amnesty International Publications, International Secretariat, 2012), 69.

<sup>70</sup> Rogers, *Civilian Harm*, 45.

<sup>71</sup> More specifically, this report notes that '[s]ince May 2013 the FATA Disaster Management Authority has had the authority to provide compensation to civilian victims of conflict (300,000 PKR in the case of civilian death, and lower amounts for injuries and property damage). Government officials still retain significant discretion in the provision of compensation. However, according to interviews with government officials, this policy does not extend to civilian victims of drone attacks'. See Open Society Foundations, *After the Dead are Counted: U.S. and Pakistani Responsibilities to Victims of Drone Strikes*, (2014), 22, available at, <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/after-dead-are-counted-20141120.pdf>.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

that the process of trying to get compensation for his brother's widow and nine children led nowhere: 'Several times we have asked the government and made claims for compensation ... But every time these requests fall on deaf ears and we have had no reply. We have submitted our applications so many times ... but we get nothing'.<sup>73</sup>

For people who live under drones, then, the violence of these weapons goes beyond the loss of lives; it also includes lost livelihoods. Their accounts reveal that the harm caused by drone strikes weaves a complex and intertwined web of death, injury, destruction and fear. Viewing the violence of drones through the lens that the testimonies of these people provide has several implications. First, the shared stories of women, children and men who experienced a drone strike offer a concrete depiction of its material effects on human bodies and lives. In so doing, they avoid appealing to – and being conditioned by – generalised and abstract characterisations of such violence, for example drone strikes being “surgical” or “humane”. Indeed, an account of drone bombing based on the testimonies recounted above ought to render the use of these terms entirely farcical.<sup>74</sup> Second, these stories are crucial in linking the lethal violence of drones to a series of other effects that disrupt and destabilise life on the ground. As Madiha Tahir argues, mainstream discussions about drone-inflicted harm are invariably framed by a language that obscures these broader violent effects.<sup>75</sup> ‘We are becoming vulgar empiricists’, Tahir observes, ‘who seem to think that a truth not attached to a number (say, the number of “militants” vs. “civilians” killed), or a legal rule (for example: whether an action does/does not violate international law) is no truth at all’.<sup>76</sup> In this context, these stories invoke a powerful counter-narrative that shifts the frame of discussion away from legalistic categories, such as those criticised by Tahir, and towards a critical inquiry of the pain and suffering that a life lived in conditions shaped by drone bombing entails. Finally, a description of drone bombing that emphasises its lived experience on the ground helps situate such an exercise of state violence historically. Indeed, it is

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>74</sup> John Brennan's speech excerpt in footnote 17 exemplifies what I mean when I use the term “farcical” here.

<sup>75</sup> Madiha R. Tahir, “The Business of Haunting,” *Wounds of Waziristan*, September 2, 2013, <http://woundsofwaziristan.com/business-of-haunting>.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

crucial to remember that what is happening now has happened before: the living conditions of populated areas have been a central target of air power ever since its emergence and a staple feature of colonial regimes of air control during the 1920s and 1930s. This historical dimension of drone bombing reveals that the broader web of violent effects suffered by targeted communities is not an unintended effect in using a weapon such as drones. Rather, as I show in Chapters 2 and 3, the state of violence described by the testimonies above is a necessary consequence of exercising violence from the air.

### **Targeting Methodology: How to Kill a Target**

This section describes how drone strikes are methodologically framed by the U.S. military. It contains stories about data collection, intelligence methods and “finishing” enemy targets, about a procedural blueprint to pursue, track down and kill individuals. As I mentioned above, military officers view the targeting process as a wide spectrum of activities, where at the one end there is the collection of data and at the other the deployment of armed force against the target. The most direct way to investigate how the military makes these two ends meet is by examining the targeting paradigm within which the deployment of U.S. armed drones takes place. There are two caveats I want to make at the outset of this section. First, the purpose of this section is to offer a brief outline of the “targeted killings” framework that dictates contemporary uses of armed drones; I critically engage in more depth with the assumptions and ideological underpinnings of this framework in Chapter 5 of this thesis. Second, in what follows I present an account of drone violence as expressed through the language of military doctrine. This is intentional. I temporarily co-opt this language in order to show the jarring contrast between, on the one hand, the vivid descriptions seen in the previous section and, on the other, the abstract and vague terminology the military employs when rationalising its violent practices; a contrast I discuss in the conclusion of this chapter.

*F3EAD: Find, Fix, Finish, Exploit, Analyze, Disseminate*

In its 2015 ATP 3-60 [Army Techniques Publication], titled *Targeting*, the U.S. military states five targeting guidelines that, when followed, ‘should increase the probability of creating desired effects while diminishing undesired or adverse collateral effects’.<sup>77</sup> Four of these guidelines are generic prescriptions which are regular features of military manuals and have to do with ensuring the completion of operational ends with maximum efficiency: ‘targeting focuses on achieving the commander’s objectives’; ‘the art of targeting seeks to create desired effects with the least risk and expenditure of time and resources’; ‘targeting directs lethal and nonlethal actions to create desired effects’; and ‘targeting is a fundamental task of the fires warfighting function that encompasses many disciplines and requires participation from many staff elements and components’.<sup>78</sup> The fifth guideline, however, discloses something specific about the character of the targeting process itself:

Targeting creates effects systematically. A targeting methodology is a rational and iterative process that methodically analyzes, prioritizes, and assigns assets against targets systematically to create those effects that will contribute to achieving the commander’s objectives. If the desired effects are not created, targets may be considered again in the process or operations may have to be modified.<sup>79</sup>

There is a lot to unravel here. First, targeting is not modelled as a linear process with a beginning (i.e., deciding on the objectives to be achieved) and an end (i.e., the completion of those objectives). Instead, targeting is presented as a methodology which functions at a level different from either individual or a set of operations. It is not tasked with the completion of operational objectives alone, but is configured as a system whereby the completion of such objectives is a *variable* in the equation, rather than its *final product*. Thus, achieving objectives – such as killing a target – does not dictate the end of the targeting process, at least not unequivocally, as these

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<sup>77</sup> U.S. Army, *Targeting*, 1-3.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-3.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-3.

objectives can be reaffirmed, modified or discarded according to the effects of targeting – the effects themselves being part of the system. Second, targeting is presented as a system where assets are methodically assigned against targets. Assets in this instance signifies a very diverse and widely construed category,<sup>80</sup> yet what is important to note is that the military presents the relation between assets and targets as organised and to a great extent defined by this idealised diagram of targeting; a logical process is used to detect the existence of a threat, evaluate its importance, determine the best means to engage with it, anticipate the effects of such engagement *et cetera*.<sup>81</sup> Hence, the relationship between the means chosen and the effect military practitioners seek to achieve is itself something which is thought to be underpinned by the rationality of this system. Finally, and importantly, the targeting system is an *iterative process*. It is fashioned in a way that its application calls for a continuous repetition of the targeting process. This can be linked with the first point made above, in that the targeting process is not designed to adhere to an end-oriented rationale (although operational ends are believed to be achieved as part of its practice), but instead tends towards a constant reproduction of effects and targets. In other words, the targeting paradigm as framed by the U.S. Department of the Army is cyclical, not teleological.<sup>82</sup>

This continuous and cyclic character of the targeting process is methodologically established through means of the F3EAD targeting cycle.<sup>83</sup> F3EAD stands as an acronym for Find, Fix, Finish, Exploit, Analyze and Disseminate, and in itself is a customised version of the more generic Decide, Detect, Deliver, Assess targeting cycle [D3A] which the U.S. military applies to targeting in general. The reason for

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<sup>80</sup> Assets include, but are not limited to, the assemblage of technological equipment available (whether that is weaponry, or surveillance sensors); ‘targeting working groups’ which comprise staff involved in decision-making, consultation and referral on matters technical, legal, methodological or strategic; and a broad range of intelligence methodologies through which the information gathered by surveillance is to be analysed etc. For more information see *ibid.*, 1-20, 2-62, 3-11, and 4-28.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, B-1.

<sup>82</sup> Here, *teleological* is used in the original Greek etymology of the word as something striving towards a certain end, and the achievement of that end is thought to terminate its existence.

<sup>83</sup> The F3EAD targeting process (sometimes shortened to F3EA) emerged and was consolidated as the *de facto* targeting procedure for counterinsurgency units during and following the Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) wars; Mitch Ferry, “F3EA- A Targeting Paradigm for Contemporary Warfare,” *Australian Army Journal X (1)* (2013): 54.

developing a specialised targeting procedure is that the U.S. military considers F3EAD to be better suited for the specific demands of counterterrorist operations, since the added steps in the process allow for greater efficacy in creating ‘surgical finishing effects’ against ‘mobile targets’.<sup>84</sup> For Charles Faint and Michael Harris, who hold senior positions in the Joint Special Operations Command,<sup>85</sup> this added efficacy stems from the F3EAD’s capacity to establish ‘a true symbiotic relationship between the operations and intelligence warfighting functions’.<sup>86</sup> ‘This kind of synchronization is crucial’, they continue, ‘because on the modern battlefield the two functions are becoming fused; indeed, **some may now say** that “intelligence *is* operations”’.<sup>87</sup>

This statement, that intelligence *is* operations, lies at the core of the targeting methodology. The idea here is that intelligence does not appear in just one of the steps of the F3EAD targeting process but is an intrinsic part of every step. For military officers like Faint and Harris, this fusion of knowledge and armed action indicates that a drone strike is not a random or accidental use of violence but rather a rationally executed attack which is continuously informed by intelligence efforts. It is on the basis of this statement that the U.S. military, and also the U.S. administration more generally, can claim that targeting insurgents on the ground creates “surgical effects” on the “modern battlefield”.<sup>88</sup> In the rest of this section, I show how this interrelationship between intelligence and targeting is methodologically established by going through the several steps, or functions, that the F3EAD consists of.

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<sup>84</sup> U.S. Army, *Targeting*, B.

<sup>85</sup> The Joint Special Operations Command is one of the key counterterrorist agencies of the United States security apparatus. For more details see Daniel Byman and Ian A. Merritt, “The New American Way of War: Special Operations Forces in the War on Terrorism,” *The Washington Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2018): 79-93.

<sup>86</sup> Charles Faint and Michael Harris, “F3EAD: Ops/Intel Fusion “Feeds” the SOF Targeting Process,” *Small Wars Journal* (2012): 1, available at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/f3ead-opsintel-fusion-%E2%80%9Cfeeds%E2%80%9D-the-sof-targeting-process>.

<sup>87</sup> Faint and Harris, “F3EAD,” 1. Emphases as in the original.

<sup>88</sup> For an example of how the U.S. administration presents its use of drones as “heavily constrained” and backed by valid intelligence see Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President at the National Defense University,” *White House Archives*, May 23, 2013, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/23/remarks-president-national-defense-university>.

## *Find*

“Find” is premised on the very basic notion that in order to achieve targeted killing, one needs first to know *who* the target is and *where* to find them. In very simple terms, then, the “Find” function of the targeting cycle is of a dual nature: the target needs to be identified and located, or *vice versa*.<sup>89</sup> In the context of counterinsurgency operations, both tasks are considered to be challenging as they involve finding an ‘enemy [who] frequently hides among *civilian clutter*’.<sup>90</sup> Therefore, unlike cases where military targets might be easily found and recognized as such – as would be the case when fighting against a regular army with recognizable infrastructure, insignia *et cetera* – counterterrorism targeting involves a rigorous surveillance and reconnaissance approach to identify and locate targets.

This role of surveillance is stressed by the *Targeting* manual which notes that ‘the insurgent’s ability to hide in plain sight demands persistent collection [of data] in order to detect his presence. Persistent collection requires long dwell times and must be focused using multiple sensors on discrete parts of the [enemy] network in order to achieve the fidelity of information required for targeting’.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, time is of critical value for surveillance to have maximum operational efficiency. As surveillance is running parallel to military operations, it is often the case that the killing of a target must be done as soon as the latter is found. For this to happen, information must be relayed back to decision-makers as soon as possible following its collection.<sup>92</sup>

Consequently, since the target is thought to be hidden amidst a disorderly multitude of non-targets, the object of the “Find” function becomes to disentangle this human multiplicity; to differentiate it in such a way that, ultimately, those who are to be killed are separated from those who are not – or at least not during this

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<sup>89</sup> I explain what I mean by *vice versa* when I examine the intelligence methodologies employed to find a target.

<sup>90</sup> U.S. Army, *FM 3-60 The Targeting Process* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Army, 2010), B-3, available at <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/army/fm/3-60/fm3-60.pdf>. Emphasis mine. I cite the 2010 manual in this instance because in the 2015 version this phrasing has been edited and changed to ‘the enemy frequently hides among the civilian population’. U.S. Army, *Targeting*, B-8.

<sup>91</sup> U.S. Army, *Targeting*, B-9.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, B-9.

particular targeting cycle. To do that, the *Targeting* manual warns, surveillance itself might not be enough, even when it is persistent, pervasive and timely. The reason given is that the target is simply too good at blending with the civilian population, too well-versed in hiding in plain sight.<sup>93</sup> A solution to this conundrum is, however, presented in the face of intelligence analysis: ‘the effectiveness of reconnaissance and surveillance grows exponentially when it is cued to and driven by other sources of intelligence rather than operating alone’.<sup>94</sup> This means that, methodologically, intelligence and surveillance operate in a profoundly reciprocal manner. On the one hand, the surveillance is directed and given focus by the information received from a previously established intelligence network. On the other hand, the massing of data via surveillance is essentially the fuel which keeps the motor running for intelligence’s analytical work. The massive amounts of data collected by surveillance are processed through various techniques only to be returned back in the shape of action-guiding intelligence to direct further collection of data. In fact, insofar as F3EAD targeting goes, one might even correlate the terms “surveillance” and “intelligence” and use them interchangeably, as the application of one implies the presence of the other.<sup>95</sup>

In addition, the form that intelligence efforts take is not always the same. To begin with, the intelligence output varies because it is underpinned by heterogeneous methodologies, each of which might have different foci and analytical priorities.<sup>96</sup> Depending on the type of the data collected, different kinds of intelligence sources might be produced. For example, intercepting communications signals can point to the exact location of targets, but is limited in identifying them as such (targets).<sup>97</sup> Video-feeds from visual surveillance can be very useful in trailing targets, but also are of little help when deducing who they might be.<sup>98</sup> Intelligence derived from informants on the ground can identify individuals, yet be insufficient in pointing to their exact location.<sup>99</sup> Because of these limitations and advantages, the best way of

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., B-9.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., B-10.

<sup>95</sup> See *ibid.*, 2-47, 3-7, A-10, B-10, B-11, B-19.

<sup>96</sup> Chandler P. Atwood, “Activity-based Intelligence: Revolutionizing Military Intelligence Analysis,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (2015): 24-33.

<sup>97</sup> U.S. Army, *Targeting*, B-10.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., B-10.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., B-10.

proceeding is perceived to be the blending of these different types of intelligence sources in the same melting pot, in order to extract the optimal amount of information about the target's position and identity.<sup>100</sup>

Though the *Targeting* manual does not engage with the specifics of intelligence methods and emphasises their role only in identifying and locating targets, it is nonetheless the case that the method used bears a great degree of relevance as to what "identifying" and "locating" means. For example, nodal analysis – also known as link analysis – is an intelligence method that identifies the target through its social interaction with the rest of the population. The underlying principle here is that terrorist networks 'do not exist in a vacuum' but 'interact with supporters in the population and, less directly with their supporters buried in the power structure'.<sup>101</sup> According to this method, the initial challenge in locating targets – the fact that they exist amongst the population – presents instead an advantage. Identifying targets becomes a question of focusing surveillance and intelligence efforts on social interactions on the ground – for instance, public events, private gatherings, phone conversations or economic exchanges.<sup>102</sup> Since the target is a socially dependent person, those interactions are thought to present crucial intelligence leads that can be used to track down the target. Furthermore, the *Targeting* manual emphasises that identifying the social network of a target may offer further advantages: '[n]odal analysis uses the initial start point to generate additional start points that develop even more targeting opportunities within the enemy's network'.<sup>103</sup> Simply put, locating the whereabouts of the social network of a target means establishing a hunting territory wherein more people may be targeted. The personal identity of these people might be unknown, but the fact that they live in proximity to a confirmed target and that they have interacted with that target suffices for

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., B-12, B-13, B-14 and B-15.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., B-12.

<sup>102</sup> For a more technical analysis see Bill Mandrick, "An Ontological Framework for Understanding the Terror-Crime Nexus," in *SOF Role in Combating Transnational Organized Crime*, eds William Mendel and Peter McCabe, 147-162 (MacDill Air Force Base: JSOU Press, 2016), 148-150.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., B-14.

considering them as potential future targets.<sup>104</sup> In this context, the Find does not necessitate identifying a target first and then locating them; the location of a person instead functions as an identifying mechanism which can be used to designate more targets to be killed.

A similar reasoning is at work in the case of activity-based intelligence. According to Letitia Long, the Director of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, activity-based intelligence signifies ‘the most important analytic methodology the Intelligence Community (IC) must master to succeed in the future’.<sup>105</sup> Long uses a maritime metaphor to explain the need for, and the process of, this intelligence method:

Today, intelligence gathering is like looking in a global ocean for an object that might or might not be a fish. It might be anything and it might be important, but at first, *we are not sure it even exists*. And whatever it might be is constantly moving and interacting with a huge number of other objects. They might make up an organized school of fish or they might not be related at all. But *we do know that we need to find it*, identify what it is, and figure out how it relates to all the other objects – whether fish or sea fowl – we either know or think might be important.<sup>106</sup>

This passage shows that at the core of activity-based intelligence lies a principle of categorical suspicion: even if a target might not exist, the intelligence analyst has to suspect that there is a target to be found. In order to determine who the target is, activity based intelligence requires an immense amount of data supplied by persistent and pervasive surveillance that records every interaction on the ground.<sup>107</sup> While this sounds similar to nodal analysis, the scope and aims of activity

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<sup>104</sup> See Gareth Porter, “How McCrystal and Petraeus Built an Indiscriminate Killing Machine,” *Truthout*, September 26, 2011, <https://truthout.org/articles/how-mccrystal-and-petraeus-built-an-indiscriminate-killing-machine/>.

<sup>105</sup> Letitia A. Long, “Activity Based Intelligence: Understanding the Unknown,” *The Intelligence Journal of U.S. Intelligence Studies* 20, no. 2 (2013): 7.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 7. Emphases mine.

<sup>107</sup> Surveillance input can take different forms. For example, the ARGUS-IS sensor platform mounted on MQ-9 Reaper drones is a tool used to establish a detailed visual image of the ground. Comprising of 386 sensors, ARGUS-IS is able to create a composite image of 1.8 gigapixels which can cover an area of up to 100 km<sup>2</sup>, while retaining its capacity to focus on

based intelligence are far more extensive: ‘this methodology will aid in the development and understanding of patterns of life, which in turn will enable analysts to differentiate abnormal from normal activities as well as potentially defining a “new normal”’.<sup>108</sup> Life on the ground is to be observed in its every minute and insignificant detail, with each quotidian activity being recorded, algorithmically tagged and archived. The idea is that ‘[e]veryone, everything, every object has to be somewhere at a point in time’, which means that ‘analysts [can] apply advanced tools and techniques to visualize and comprehend the data to identify patterns of activity and trends over time’.<sup>109</sup> By amassing records of people’s past movements, activity-based intelligence aims to create a spatio-temporal map that can be used to represent life on the ground in the form of patterns. In this respect, finding a target to kill becomes a matter of identifying a pattern of life which deviates from what the processed data has established to be “normal” behaviour.<sup>110</sup>

The intelligence methods of nodal analysis and pattern of life analysis demonstrate that in the *Targeting* manual the identity of a targeted individual is understood as a very fluid category. In these methods, the notion of a personal identity, which is unique to each person, gives way to a representation of identity within a set of socio-military criteria such as geographical location, social connections and a profiling based on the grand sum of someone’s daily activities.<sup>111</sup>

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particular areas or individuals. Alternatively, other sources of surveillance can be electronic signals from various devices like radio or mobile phones. A key reason why drones have become the principal means by which the U.S. carries out its surveillance is because of their capacity to combine various kinds of surveillance sources by having different sensors affixed to them. Thus, drones are thought to be a vital instrument in creating a totalising surveillance regime. For more see Stephen Trimble, “Sierra Nevada Fields ARGUS-IS Upgrade to Gorgon Stare Pod,” *Flight Global*, July 2, 2014, <http://www.flightglobal.com/news/articles/sierra-nevada-fields-argus-is-upgrade-to-gorgon-stare-400978/>; and Julian E. Barnes, “Military Refines a ‘Constant Stare against our Enemy,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 2, 2009, <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/nov/02/nation/na-drone-eyes2>.

<sup>108</sup> Atwood, “Activity-based Intelligence,” 25.

<sup>109</sup> Long, “Activity-Based Intelligence,” 12.

<sup>110</sup> It should be noted that advocates of the pattern of life analysis method do not mention in their work how drone strikes can affect the “normality” of life. Likewise they offer little insight as to whether having armed drones constantly hovering over an area (in order to amass the data needed for pattern of life) might itself be an activity which is very disruptive of everyday life. The underlying assumption in their analysis is that surveillance processes have no impact on how life unfolds on the ground.

<sup>111</sup> I discuss the dehumanising effect of these practices of surveillance and intelligence in Chapter 5.

In this context, what is being targeted is not human beings but, as Neil Curtis puts it, 'the determination of "patterns of life" suggestive of hostile intent'.<sup>112</sup>

### *Fix*

"Fix" is the part of F3EAD where having located a potential target and categorised them as a probable "high value individual" who is to be tracked, the collection of information continues with a refined and intensified focus on that particular person. Intelligence efforts similarly persist, in order to narrow down the probable sites where the target is to be located. Pattern of life analysis is viewed as particularly useful in this respect because it frames the targeted person as a pattern of activities that is repeated over time. Thus, pattern of life can be used to predict the future movements of a target.<sup>113</sup> This is precisely the meaning of Fix: determining (fixing) the target in possible locations where they might be found at the particular time when the decision is made for them to be killed.<sup>114</sup> And once 'the unit is satisfied that Fix is valid, they may cho[o]se to launch the finish force'.<sup>115</sup>

### *Finish*

The "Finish" step is the part of the F3EAD cycle where armed force is deployed. In contrast to the more detailed description of other steps of the cycle, the *Targeting* manual has a particularly terse entry for "Finish". Attention is mostly brought to the issue of timely intervention: 'the [finish] force will normally not have the time to create elaborate plans. Instead the force will be required to adapt a known drill to the existing conditions and rapidly execute the required actions'.<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, "Finish" does not mean that the targeting is finished; as the manual dictates, '[t]he force must also be prepared to conduct follow on operations based on information

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<sup>112</sup> Neal Curtis, "The Explication of the Social: Algorithms, Drones and (Counter-)terror," *Journal of Sociology* 52, no. 3 (2016): 527.

<sup>113</sup> U.S. Army, *Targeting*, B-18.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, B-19.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, B-20.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, B-23.

found during exploitation on the objective'.<sup>117</sup> The next step following the killing of a target may very well be killing new targets nearby. Rather than being a point of conclusion, "Finish" is actually a step that prepares the ground for further targeting. A notable feature of the manual's entry for "Finish" is the statement that a key output of this step is that the '[t]arget [is] *isolated* and engaged'; the implication here being that the armed action is taken exclusively against the individual being targeted.<sup>118</sup>

### *Exploit*

The function of the "Exploit" step is effectively to reset the F3EAD cycle. According to Faint and Harris, "Exploit" marks 'the most critical single step in the process as it leads to the finding, fixing and finishing of the next target and the perpetuation of the cycle'.<sup>119</sup> In terms of the activities involved, "Exploit" is very similar to the subsequent "Analyze" step. Both are vital components in an intelligence effort aimed at supplying new information about the enemy and their network and thus lead to more operations to kill enemy targets.<sup>120</sup> Thus, '[e]xploit-analyze starts the cycle over again by providing leads, or start points, into the network that could be observed and tracked using airborne ISR'.<sup>121</sup> There is, however, a key difference between the two: urgency. Unlike "Analyze" which operates at a slower pace, "Exploit" activates during the immediate aftermath of a strike, involving and necessitating a rapid collection of information from the site of the attack itself. There are two reasons for having two different intelligence processing speeds. First, depending on the findings during exploitation, the following killing action might not require a repetition of all the steps leading to "Finish", but instead proceed by killing targets whose emergence is directly linked to the previous attack.<sup>122</sup> Consequently,

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., B-23.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., B-25. Emphasis mine.

<sup>119</sup> Faint and Harris, "F3EAD," 3.

<sup>120</sup> Michael T. Flynn, Rich Juergens and Thomas L. Cantrell, "Employing ISR: SOF Best Practices," *Joint Force Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (2008), 57.

<sup>121</sup> Flynn, Juergens and Cantrell, "Employing ISR," 57.

<sup>122</sup> The F3EAD does not always take the sequence described in doctrine. Instead, the *Targeting* manual allows for inconsistencies in the order in which the steps in the targeting process are executed: 'At any given time however, a unit may be at the find step for some targets, the exploit step for several other targets, and at the fix, finish, analyze, or disseminate step for still other targets. Similarly, the unit may disseminate information

it is a matter of allowing for a shortcut within the killing cycle. Second, “Exploit” does not simply sustain the relationship between intelligence and operations; it imposes it. The inclusion of “Exploit” as a formal step in the targeting cycle means that in practicing F3EAD, military practitioners are *methodologically obliged* to continue the search for new targets as soon as the previous one has been killed. In this context, one may recall that a key principle that underlies targeting is that effects are created systematically. The role that intelligence efforts play in the “Exploit” step is to make sure that those effects always have the potential of rebooting the targeting cycle. As a consequence, following a drone strike, intelligence staff retrieve information, process it, calculate the “desirability” of effects created by juxtaposing them to operational objectives, and then recycle them back in the form of guiding instructions in order to find the next target. This is what the phrase “intelligence *is* operations” strictly implies.

### *Analyze*

Similar to “Exploit”, the aim of “Analyze” is to examine information, analyse it and convert it into actionable intelligence, but at a slower pace, one that allows for further analysis and validation. The term “actionable intelligence” is another example of the methodological connection between intelligence and armed action. James A. Stewart, a veteran data scientist for Raytheon Cyber Products,<sup>123</sup> discloses an abridged description of what the “Analyze” step consists of:

By collating and visualizing “data,” we create meaningful “information.”

As we add additional meaning in the form of context, this information

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pertaining to the location of a target prior to the finish step or exploit step. Generally, the process will follow the depicted flow, [but] do not let the process restrict what needs to happen next’. What this excerpt reveals is the opportunistic nature of the targeting framework which prescribes that contingency and expediency must be accounted for when killing targets. F3EAD may as well be AEDF3 or F3DAE for different targets at any time, or indeed at the same time. Thus, a targeting team is not methodologically bound to follow every step of the F3EAD cycle, especially not if the opportunity to attack a target or multiple targets may be lost. See U.S. Army, *Targeting*, B-6.

<sup>123</sup> Raytheon, a major U.S. defence contractor, commercially advertises its development of drone software as allowing for ‘real-time access to actionable intelligence’ for drones operating around the globe; quoted in Medea Benjamin, *Drone Warfare: Killing by Remote Control* (London: Verso, 2013), 38.

becomes “knowledge.” Knowledge is more valuable than information because it informs our decisions and strategies, but it’s not “intelligence” until it is presented in a way that drives actions.<sup>124</sup>

Stewart’s explanation is one that stresses the interrelationship between surveillance, intelligence and armed action. Surveillance is important, insofar as it constantly supplies raw data. In turn, that data is valuable only after intelligence methods transform it into information and they add meaning to it through processes of archiving, categorising, analysing and ordering. Information is then situated within the context of military objectives in order to become knowledge which will inform military practitioners about life on the ground – knowledge such as what social interactions are “suspicious” or what patterns of life are “threatening”. Finally, such knowledge is always *preparatory*; in other words it is always presented in a form that enables military officers and political decision-makers to point their finger at the next target to be killed.

### *Disseminate*

The “Disseminate” step has a singular purpose: ‘to make sure everyone else knows what you know’.<sup>125</sup> In other words, the goal of dissemination is to allow intelligence – and by proxy the data gathered through surveillance and reconnaissance – to permeate each part of the military structure and ensure that information can be exploited by every branch. The list of organisations covered by dissemination typically includes other targeting teams, units on a theatre-level of operations or agencies operating on a national level (like the C.I.A. or the U.S. Air Force) which partake in a ‘federated intelligence community effort’.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, depending on which armed conflict F3EAD is applied to, the list of likely recipients might extend even more, taking in coalition partners and host nation forces.<sup>127</sup> Dissemination

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<sup>124</sup> James A. Stewart, “Blinded by Insight: Actionable Intelligence Requires the Right Balance of Human and Automated Data Analysis,” *Raytheon*, September 15, 2015, <http://www.raytheoncyber.com/news/feature/blog-blinded-insight.html>.

<sup>125</sup> U.S. Army, *Targeting*, B-38.

<sup>126</sup> Faint and Harris, “F3EAD,” 4.

<sup>127</sup> In the context of the “War on Terror”, an example of a host nation could be the Pakistani government, in the territory of which the C.I.A. executes drone strikes. For more see BBC,

cannot be all-encompassing at all times, as for security reasons informational “tear lines” are imposed for the release of information across national boundaries.<sup>128</sup>

In addition, relaying data is seen by military officials as a crucial step in transforming traditional military units into flexible semi-autonomous teams that can act quickly upon information. As the former U.S. General Stanley McChrystal observes, dissemination of information is important for reducing time delays in decision-making processes and a necessary condition in ‘creat[ing] a shared consciousness between each level of the counterterrorism teams’.<sup>129</sup> Allowing this circulation of information to take place not only means that the targeting cycle keeps getting repeated but also that it does so with greater intensity and frequency. McChrystal explains that

[t]he intelligence recovered on one target in, say, Mosul, might allow for another target to be found, fixed upon, and finished in Baghdad, or even Afghanistan. Sometimes, finding just one initial target could lead to remarkable results: The network sometimes completed this [targeting] cycle three times in a single night in locations hundreds of miles apart – all from the results of the first operation. As our operations in Iraq and Afghanistan intensified, the number of operations conducted each day increased tenfold, and both our precision and success rate also rose dramatically.<sup>130</sup>

“Dissemination” is therefore a step which makes sure that targeting continues and expands. It is also a step intended to organise U.S. targeting teams into a structure that mirrors terrorist networks. ‘Although we got our message out differently than did our enemies’, McChrystal writes, ‘both organizations increasingly shared basic

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“Secret Memos ‘Show Pakistan Endorsed US Drone Strikes’,” *BBC News*, October 24, 2013, accessed October 28, 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-24649840>.

<sup>128</sup> Jimmy A. Gomez, “The Targeting Process: D3A and F3EAD,” *Small Wars Journal* (2011): 13.

<sup>129</sup> Stanley A. McChrystal, “It Takes a Network: The New Front Line of Modern Warfare,” *Foreign Policy*, February 21, 2011, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/02/21/it-takes-a-network/>.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

attributes that define an effective network'.<sup>131</sup> In agreement with McChrystal, Faint and Harris also note that 'more information sharing is better when it comes to defeating our nation's enemies', the *raison d'être* of the 'intelligence enterprise' being the creation of "a network to defeat a network".<sup>132</sup> For military officials, therefore, the most efficient way to go about destroying terrorists groups is to replicate their organisational structure.

To conclude this section, in the U.S. Army *Targeting* manual one can find a description of drone bombing as viewed through the lens of the targeting framework that underlies the U.S. counterterrorism strategy.<sup>133</sup> By situating drone strikes within this framework, military theorists and practitioners present the violent practice they engage in a specific way: as a rational process in which enemy targets are "neutralised" (killed) systematically on the basis of sound "actionable intelligence".<sup>134</sup> This military enframing reduces the perspective taken on drone violence to one where the only material effect that counts is the "desirable effect" of killing targeted individuals. The world that the *Targeting* manual constructs is one occupied solely by the armed drone (and the people who make use of it) and the targets it perpetually needs to find, fix and finish; the existence of everyone else caught up in drone violence, namely, "the civilian clutter", is either not acknowledged or viewed only as being a potential source for more targeting opportunities.

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Faint and Harris, "F3EAD," 10.

<sup>133</sup> While armed drones have principally been employed in the context of the "War on Terror" for strikes against suspected terrorists, these weapons have also been put to use for other purposes. For example, the Israeli military has been known to practice a drone tactic called "knocking on the roof". This involves a drone aircraft firing a missile on a house as a signal – hence the euphemism "roof knocking" – for a subsequent attack which is intended to level the building to the ground. In this instance, the armed drone is an instrument of a policy which aims to forcibly remove Palestinian people from their homes. For more on this see Adam Withnall, "Israel-Gaza Conflict: Israeli 'Knock on Roof' Missile Warning Revealed in Remarkable Video," *Independent*, July 14, 2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/israel-gaza-conflict-israeli-knock-on-roof-missile-warning-technique-revealed-in-stunning-video-9603179.html>.

<sup>134</sup> U.S. Army, *Targeting*, 1-6.

## Conclusion

I began this chapter with two stories about military drones and I used them as guiding threads to present two accounts of drone violence. The first account was a description of drone violence from the perspective of people whose daily life is profoundly scarred by it. In reading the testimonies provided by these people, one navigates through a descriptive labyrinth in which death, destruction, pain and fear lurk at every turn and twist. The second account was a description of the same violent phenomenon in terms of military discourse. In this instance, one is trapped in a descriptive cul-de-sac where the only violent effect that is tacitly acknowledged is that of the individual kill. There are a number of discrepancies between these two accounts that I will now draw attention to.

First, there is a marked contrast in the language used in each case. People who have experienced the violent effects of drone strikes describe their experience in an extremely affective language that leaves no room to doubt the horror and destruction inflicted by these weapons. Pieced together, the testimonies of these people offer a truly harrowing account of what it means to live under drones. Conversely, military discourse is able to evacuate drone strikes of their material effects by means of a highly abstract and sanitised language. To give an example of the thoroughness of this linguistic erasure, the *Targeting* manual – a 122-page document composed to outline the best method to kill enemy targets – features the word “kill” no more than seven times. To keep in touch with the practical implications of what is being said in that manual requires a constant alertness to the fact that when one reads phrases such as “direct a force package” and “neutralise a node in the enemy network” this translates in reality to bombs blasting apart the bodies of people suspected to be terrorists. One can see in the use of these vague terms a discursive strategy that disallows any attempt to think about the violent contents of what is being described.

Second, there is a substantial gap between these two perspectives regarding the extent of the violent effects of drone bombing. As mentioned above, the *Targeting* manual approaches drone violence in terms of the objectives pursued. As such,

drone bombing is described as nothing more than lethal violence directed against a particular target. In contrast, a description of how armed violence is experienced on the ground expands the scope of its effects considerably. Effects such as the destruction of a home, having to live while being maimed or the haunting presence of drones in the sky are central components of life on the ground. Understanding the violence of drones exclusively in terms of the military objectives it serves means ruling out an analysis of these wider harmful effects.

Finally, there is a discrepancy in how these two accounts understand the duration of the violent effects of drone bombing. In military discourse, armed violence appears as a momentary event. This moment, according to the *Targeting* manual, occurs during the “Finish” step of the F3EAD cycle. The violence of drones, however, goes beyond the sum of individual strikes. One of the crucial insights offered by testimonies is that the intervals that separate one attack from the next one are not devoid of violence. Because they describe the lived experience of having to deal with previous strikes while fearing future ones, testimonies demonstrate the violent continuity of these attacks rather than compartmentalising them as separate events. Thus, a consideration of the continuity between different strikes draws a significantly different picture, for it includes effects that arise precisely because drone bombing is a *protracted* practice of state violence.

My contention is that the differences between these two accounts exemplify a central problem in the discourse on drone violence, one that this thesis seeks to address. The problem is that the “targeted killings” interpretation of drone violence has become a dominant narrative in contemporary debates on drones. This does not mean that approaches that see drones bombing as a practice of targeted killings are necessarily supportive of – or that they are complicit in sanitising – drone violence. There are many critics who, in following this narrative, have been highly critical of the policies served by drones. But, despite the critical position they occupy, these critics still rely on a discursive framework that presents the violence of drones principally as a practice of targeted killings, as I shall demonstrate in Chapter 4. Thus, their approach remains focused on the strategic ends that underpin the current deployment of drones rather than the consequences necessarily implied by the use of such weaponry. In reducing the scope of drone violence to targeted

killings, this critical approach inadvertently marginalises the material, lived, embodied reality of life under drones, and ultimately fails to create space for the voices of those who suffer drone violence on a daily basis.

My objective in the remainder of this thesis is to challenge this narrow and distorting conception of drone violence. To do so, I will, in the following two chapters, develop a historical account of violence from the air and demonstrate how drone warfare is part of a broader history which goes back to early twentieth-century regimes of aerial bombing. A historical point of view reveals that drone bombing's devastating and terrorising effects have been a central component in military theories and practices of air power ever since its emergence. As I show in the following chapter, early air power theorists conceived strategic bombing primarily in terms of how violence from the air disrupted everyday life on the ground and enforced a widespread state of fear on targeted populations. In situating drone warfare within this historical context, I seek to develop an account that marginalises and silences the contemporary targeted killings narrative and instead emphasises the critical continuities between the violence of drones – as described by people living under the field of operation of these weapons – and this earlier military representation of strategic bombing. Finally, a crucial theme in the remainder of this thesis is that military frameworks are neither neutral nor objective representations of armed violence. Rather, I argue that military reasoning takes place in a highly politicised and ideological environment. I develop this theme in the following chapter where I show that early air power theorists' conception of aerial bombing was intrinsically bound up with their institutional aim to secure the autonomy of air forces as an independent military service. This theme is crucial for Chapter 5 of this thesis where I show that the military rationalisation of drone bombing as “targeted killings” is predicated on certain erasures which occlude a critical consideration of aerial violence in terms of its history, its destructive and terrorising effects and its victims.

## CHAPTER 2: THE UNBEARABLE “MORALITY” OF THE BOMBER: THE EMERGENCE OF AIR POWER THEORY

### Introduction

*Air Power: “The vital riddle of our times”*

In June 1909, the *Daily Mail* printed an article reminding its readers that its owner, Lord Northcliffe, offered a reward of £1,000 to the first person who would complete a flight across the English Channel. Northcliffe’s challenge was met a month later, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of July, by Louis Blériot, who flew his airplane from Calais to Dover in a journey that lasted approximately 37 minutes. News of this event was received with a considerable degree of discomfort by the British press. Rather than viewing Blériot’s action as merely a feat of scientific and technological innovation, journalists quickly pointed to a rather disturbing fact about it: Blériot, as well as his aircraft, were French. The next day, and to ensure that the gravity of the situation was noted by its readership, the *Daily Mail* declared that Blériot’s flight signalled the end of Britain’s status as an island nation. The article read as follows:

When, less than a year ago, we offered our prize there were many who declared it ridiculous to imagine that man would ever fly across the Channel ...

Now, however, we have to reckon with the fact that a small and inexpensive machine, which can readily be multiplied by the hundred, has bridged the Channel ... *British insularity has vanished*. We would not be understood to say that in a few weeks or months hordes of aeroplanes will follow where M. Blériot has led, but his example has shown the way ... Men who can navigate the air know nothing of frontiers and can laugh at the ‘blue streak’ [the British Navy].

... The British people have hitherto dwelt secure in their islands ... But locomotion is now being transferred to an element where Dreadnoughts are useless and sea power no shield against attack ... Such a dramatic moment in human history occurred yesterday.<sup>1</sup>

The *Daily Mail*'s conclusion that foreign aircraft posed a serious security issue was shared among other newspapers as well. The *Daily Graphic*, for instance, observed that Blériot's flight showed to the world how the airplane was no longer an 'ingenious toy ... but an instrument of warfare of which soldiers and statesmen must take account'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, *The Morning Post* warned that Britain should not look disinterestedly at other nations' advancements in aviation, because 'the problem of flight' was not 'of scientific interest or even of commercial utility alone'; rather, 'the practical aspect of flight which overshadows all others is the use of flying machines in time of war'.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the *Daily Telegraph* wrote that because 'our insular immunity in the old sense is coming to an end', the British needed to 'compete, and compete in earnest'.<sup>4</sup> Considering this new challenge to British security, the article maintained, 'Air-power will gradually become as vital to us as sea-power has ever been', and for this reason, 'England must wake up in this matter; and of a certainty, she will'.<sup>5</sup>

Feeling the need to add a specialist's voice to its repertoire, the *Daily Mail* asked the well-known science fiction author H. G. Wells to contribute a piece on the matter. Wells, who a year earlier had published his book *The War in the Air*, complied. In his commentary he asserted that Blériot's success posed 'the vital riddle of our time', by which he meant the question of how Britain – which, compared to its neighbours, lagged behind in greatness and technological prowess – would respond to its

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<sup>1</sup> *Daily Mail*, 26 July 1909 as cited in Alfred Gollin, *The Impact of Air Power on the British People and Their Government, 1909-14* (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), 71-72. Emphasis mine.

<sup>2</sup> *Daily Graphic* 26<sup>th</sup> July 1909 as cited in Peter Mead, *The Eye in the Air: History of Air Observation and Reconnaissance for the Army 1785-1945* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1983), 35.

<sup>3</sup> *Morning Post* 26<sup>th</sup> July 1909 as cited in Gollin, *Impact of Air Power*, 73.

<sup>4</sup> *Daily Telegraph* 26<sup>th</sup> July 1909 as cited in Gollin, *Impact of Air Power*, 73.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

condition as a decaying power.<sup>6</sup> For Wells, the crossing of the Channel by a ‘foreign-invented, foreign-built, foreigner-steered thing’ was more than yet another reminder of Britain’s growing impotence. It was also a warning for what the future held in store for the people of Britain:

Within a year we shall have – or rather they will have – aeroplanes capable of starting from Calais ... circling over London, dropping a hundredweight or so of explosive upon the printing machines of *The Times* and returning securely to Calais for another similar parcel.

... I look out upon the windy Channel and think all those millions just over there, who seem to get busier and keener every hour. I could imagine the day of reckoning coming like a swarm of birds.<sup>7</sup>

It is easy to dismiss these remarks – which themselves were a culmination of the rising popular anxiety of that period regarding the prospect of foreign invasion<sup>8</sup> – as merely a case of journalistic scaremongering. But the problem of an imminent war in the air went beyond the scope of popular discourse.

A number of military and state officials espoused Well’s conviction that a successful flight across the Channel (by a foreign aircraft no less) posited a “vital riddle” for British security. For instance, in offering his congratulations to Blériot, Field Marshal Roberts did not fail to note also that ‘M. Blériot might be leading the way to great changes in the conduct of future wars’.<sup>9</sup> In fact, Britain’s unpreparedness for a war in the air was taken seriously enough to become the

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<sup>6</sup> H. G. Wells, *An Englishman Looks at the World: Being a Series of Unrestrained Remarks upon Contemporary Matters* (Project Gutenberg eBook, 2004), The Coming of Bleriot, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/11502/pg11502.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., np.

<sup>8</sup> At the time, Germany was thought to be the main threat for a continental invasion of Britain. The invention of a rigid dirigible airship in Germany by Count Zeppelin caused a number of “air scares” and further fuelled a general sense of uncertainty regarding Britain’s status as an insular nation. For more, see Basil Collier, *The Defence of the United Kingdom* (Uckfield: The Naval & Military Press Ltd, 1957); and Alfred Gollin, “England is No Longer an Island: The Phantom Airship Scare of 1909,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 13, no. 1 (1981): 43-57.

<sup>9</sup> Field-Marshal Roberts as cited in Gollin, *Impact of Air Power*, 74.

object of a major parliamentary debate on 2 August 1909. During the discussion, the Liberal government was represented by R. B. Haldane, the Secretary of State for War. Haldane began his speech by arguing that, no matter how remarkable recent advancements in aeronautics might have been, they did not necessarily imply that aircraft was a reliable means of war. He continued by explaining that the best way to develop a military air power for Britain was through a scientific process, which would slowly, but surely, lead towards the production of aircraft that could potentially be used for the purpose of war. Haldane's suggestions, however, were vehemently challenged by Conservative politicians such as Arthur Lee, Gilbert Parker and Arthur du Cros. Their main argument was that the government's overly academic approach lacked the urgency needed for properly addressing the real security threat of an attack from the air. Du Cros, in particular, remarked that at a time when 'no nation can afford to be without the airship as a permanent weapon', Britain was the only power not investing in 'a definitive constructive programme' of military aviation.<sup>10</sup> In agreement with this, Lee posited that the government's position disregarded the very plausible scenario of aircraft 'appearing over such places as the capital of a country, centres of mobilization, bases of operations ... and dropping explosives and bombs quite at random'; these attacks, he concluded, 'must have a very demoralizing effect' on the civilian population.<sup>11</sup> While he was unaware of it at the time, Lee was essentially spelling out the strategic formula which underpinned subsequent military theorisations of air power.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Arthur du Cros as cited in *ibid.*, 81-82. Du Cros's counter-proposal to the government's intention to divvy up the development of military aviation between the Army and the Navy was the creation of an independent Aerial Department which, according to Du Cros, would be 'the proper and most efficient method of dealing with this matter'. As this chapter shows, the argument for an independent Air Service was central to how the concept of "strategic bombing" emerged and became dominant in the years that followed this Parliamentary debate.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Lee as cited in *ibid.*, 80.

<sup>12</sup> There is no semantic difference between the terms "air power" and "airpower". "Air power" marks the standard pre-1940 term for both specific military applications of aircraft as well as the full potential of a state's air capability. According to David McIsaac, a change in the form of the term, with "airpower" as a single word, ensued following the publication of Major Alford Joseph Williams' *Airpower* (New York, 1940). While "airpower" is the form commonly used by recent military publications, in this thesis I will be using the pre-1940 version. See David McIsaac, "Voices from the Central Blue: The Air Power Theorists," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret, 624-647 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

*Air Power: Towards a History of Drone Warfare*

The reason why I recount the events above is not so much because of their impact on later developments in aerial warfare but because they mark, as historian Alfred Gollin writes, ‘the beginnings of airpower politics in Great Britain’.<sup>13</sup> One of the key objectives of this thesis is the development of a historical account of drone warfare; a type of warfare that the majority of scholarly analyses explain in terms of its novelty rather than its historicity. The present chapter begins this account by discussing the emergence of air power theory in the military discourse of the early twentieth century. I continue and conclude in the following chapter, where I show that the terrorising violence of aerial bombing constituted a key coercive mechanism for the exercise of British colonial power during the 1920s and 1930s. The purpose of these two chapters is thus to lay down the historical groundwork for my subsequent critique of drone warfare.<sup>14</sup>

More specifically, the present chapter has two related aims. First, I offer a critical analysis of the central arguments of early air power theorists. In so doing, I draw attention to the way in which these theorists framed military aircraft as a weapon which could deliver a devastating blow to the morale of the enemy population; the essential value of air power, they posited, lay in its ability to win wars decisively by terrorising targeted populations into submission through means of long-range, “strategic” bombing. Second, I seek to demonstrate how this particular

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<sup>13</sup> Gollin, *Impact of Air Power*, 77.

<sup>14</sup> My argument, which I develop in Chapter 4, is that there has been a general tendency in the literature concerning drone warfare to overlook the important continuities that connect the drone bombing with earlier practices of air power. Very importantly, this tendency characterises also the work of prominent critics of drone violence, who, in presenting drones as a radical break with past forms of armed conflict, fail to consider that contemporary uses of drones did not arise out of nothingness – as a sudden moment of techno-military innovation – but rather signify the latest episode of a more protracted process of state violence and domination from the air. The lack of historical scrutiny has meant that the standard way in which the violence of drones has been criticised does not challenge the dominant discursive framing of armed drones as instruments for “targeted killings”. This critical position, I argue, inadvertently reduces the violent effects of armed drones to almost exclusively the killing of individual targets. Conversely, my contention is that when the violence of drones is viewed in relation to the history of air power (and, in particular, the colonial exercise of air control) a significantly different picture emerges. That is, a historical perspective reveals how the non-lethal violent effects of armed drones – effects such as the widespread and long-lasting terror that drone strikes inflict – are consequences that the use of such weapons necessarily implies.

understanding of air power emerged out of, and was shaped by, the historical and material circumstances within which air power theorists at the time were writing. In fact, this is why Blériot's crossing of the Channel features at the start of this chapter: the debates that this event generated reveal that the question concerning the application of aircraft in war was not a topic that military men alone had a say in. On the contrary, as I argue below, air power theory can be situated in a more complex discursive network that also included – among other things – popular beliefs and anxieties, literary fantasies, journalistic rhetoric and politicised interests concerning the military use of aviation.

In view of these aims, the structure of this chapter unfolds as follows. In the first section, I give an account of early air power theorists' representation of military aviation as a revolutionary development in war. I show how, in the eyes of these theorists, the radical character of air power mirrored their own revolutionary nature. By self-identifying as a unique caste of military scholars and officers, air power theorists sought to advance their main institutional objective at the time, namely, ensuring the existence of air forces as an autonomous military service led exclusively by airmen. In the second section, I argue that this institutional objective was crucial in the articulation of a theory which framed aerial warfare as a form of armed violence in which *bombing* was the principal mode of armed action, the enemy *population* the target of attack and *moral effects*<sup>15</sup> the desired violent outcome of air strategy. Finally, I conclude by suggesting that the politics of air power theory in the early twentieth century offers a representation of how military practices of armed violence are discursively constructed. In paying attention to the broader context that surrounds the emergence of air power theory, I seek to challenge accounts – in particular those composed by later air power theorists – which present the development of such a theory as a formal and rational process which unfolded (and still unfolds) strictly within the institution of the military. This kind of historical narrative, I argue, is founded on the assumption that military thought constitutes a field of knowledge that is articulated in an increasingly rational form – with old and flawed principles and practices being replaced

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<sup>15</sup> As I explain below, "moral effect" is the term used by airmen to describe the psychological damage that aerial bombing would inflict on the targeted population's morale.

progressively with new and seemingly more valid ones. In understanding air power doctrine, strategies and policies<sup>16</sup> as constructions which are subject to continuous improvement and refinement, military scholars end up describing the history of aerial warfare in terms of *progress* or *evolution*.

### **Air Power Theory: Revolutionising War**

For early air power theorists, the question that air power posed to the military planners of their age demanded a rupture with traditional ways of thinking about

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<sup>16</sup> For military scholars, doctrine, strategy and policy are closely related terms which are nonetheless distinct from each other. A doctrine comprises a set of fundamental principles that underlie the ideal way in which campaigns and wars should be fought and organised. As such, the doctrine is thought of as the articulation of “pure” military thought which is prescriptive in character. A strategy, unlike doctrine, is viewed as less reliant on pre-determined military principles and more inclusive of political aims, economic constraints and logistical calculation in the pursuit of specific national objectives. As these objectives are often determined by political decision makers, strategy is not shaped by military considerations alone, but also by political expedience. Finally, policy involves a detailed focus on the administrative aspect of military practice. Policy is mostly grounded on existing legal and bureaucratic regulations, or other factors which might be financially, politically or ideologically driven. In addition, policy deliberations may not only be different from doctrine and strategy but sometimes even work directly against them. For example, air power theorist Phillip Meilinger notes how the manufacturing of the outdated Fairey Battle light bomber continued well into 1940 for policy purposes (improving national morale), despite the fact that those aircraft were, at the same time, considered outdated and entirely incapable of realising doctrinal and strategic needs. There are two observations I want to make here. First, this kind of discursive structure shows that military thought, far from being a unified discursive field, is heterogeneous, highly politicised and often contradictory. Second, the stratification of military discourse in this way implies that on a certain level (specifically, that of doctrine) military thought operates without any outside interference from non-military factors. Hence, as heterogeneous as military discourse may be in general, military intellectuals are still able to lay claim to the existence of a world of thought where military knowledge is driven exclusively by an internal rationality. This chapter shows, however, that the emergence of air power theory marks a case in point of how this sort of pristine categorisation does not hold up to the actual way military discourse operates. As I demonstrate, even seemingly pure intellectual concerns, such as what methodological approach is to be used for the development of doctrine, are highly politicised. For more detailed commentaries on the formulation of doctrine, see Phillip S. Meilinger, “Trenchard and ‘Morale Bombing’: The Evolution of Royal Air Force Doctrine before World War II,” *The Journal of Military History* 60, no. 2 (1996): 243-70; James S. Corum, “Air Power and Counter-insurgency: Back to the Basics,” in *Air Power, Insecurity and the “War on Terror”*, ed. Joel Hayward, 216-232 (Cranwell: Royal Air Force Centre for Air Power Studies, 2009); and Geoffrey Sloan, “Military Doctrine, Command Philosophy and the Generation of Fighting Power: Genesis and Theory,” *International Affairs* 88, no. 2 (2012): 243-263.

the waging of war. The key difference, they claimed, lay in the direction that the military mind ought to have looked in when evaluating the potential wartime role of air forces.<sup>17</sup> Traditional military scholarship approached war largely as a phenomenon best explained through the lens of past experience.<sup>18</sup> As naval historian Sir Julian Corbett wrote in 1913, historical precedent was like ‘a mine of experience where *alone* the gold is to be found, from which right doctrine – the soul of warfare – can be built up’.<sup>19</sup> According to this traditionalist position, the study of wars was a field shaped principally by historical precedent. Military scholarship thus mostly engaged in an analysis of past conflicts; likewise, scholars who adhered to this approach viewed themselves as researchers of bygone events – they would sieve the dust heap of history either to validate their ideas or to find where they got something wrong and unearth new principles of warfare.<sup>20</sup>

Air power theorists strongly objected to this methodological outlook.<sup>21</sup> Their central point of contention was that, when it came to the topic of air power,

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<sup>17</sup> Phillip S. Meilinger, “Giulio Douhet and the Origins of Airpower Theory,” In *The Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Airpower Theory*, ed. Phillip S. Meilinger (Alabama: Air University Press, 1997), 1-2.

<sup>18</sup> According to Markus Mäder, the military study of history ‘became particularly customary in the wake of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century’. Behind this historical approach, Mäder explains, ‘lay the intention to distil enduring principles for action from past experience and teach this body of precepts to future officers’. Markus Mäder, *In Pursuit of Conceptual Excellence: The Evolution of British Military Strategic Doctrine in the Post-Cold War Era, 1989-2002*, Studies in Contemporary History and Security Policy Vol. 13 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004), 28-29. See also, Oliver J. Daddow, “Facing the Future: History in the Writing of British Military Doctrine,” *Defence Studies* 2, no. 1 (2002): 157-164.

<sup>19</sup> Julian Stafford Corbett, *Naval and Military Essays: Being Papers Read in the Naval and Military Section at the International Congress of Historical Studies, 1913* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 24. Emphasis mine.

<sup>20</sup> In this context, military scholars did not just view their writings as studies of history, but more so understood their intellectual pedigree to be that of professional historians. According to Eliot A. Cohen, ‘no less important than the study of history by the would-be strategist or student of strategy is the acquisition of *the historical mind* – that is, a way of thinking shaped by one’s reading of history and by using history as a mode of inquiry and a framework for thinking about problems’. Eliot A. Cohen, “The Historical Mind and Military Strategy,” *Orbis* 49, no. 4 (2005), 575. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that not all air power theorists rejected an empirical approach. Some air officers, such as Captain C. T. Burke of the Royal Irish Regiment (Army Air Battalion), in fact spoke against viewing the aeroplane in terms of its future potential. Burke wrote in 1911 that, ‘Pleasant though it may be to wander into the realms of fancy and to picture the aeroplane of the future, it is better to take the existing machine, or in the words of M. Clementel in his report to the Senate “the aeroplane as it is”’. However, as I show, this kind of argument became increasingly less salient among the ranks of airmen, who, following the

empirical knowledge was of little value. They suggested that air power could be best understood by a mode of inquiry which would instead be based on imagining future wars, rather than ruminating on past ones. For example, William “Billy” Mitchell, the leading U.S. air power theorist at the time,<sup>22</sup> argued that the tendency to search for a precedent to guide every possible future action was ill-suited to the study of air power, where ‘one has to look ahead and not backward’ in order to ‘figure out what is going to happen, not too much what has happened’.<sup>23</sup> A point similar to Mitchell’s was also raised by the Italian theorist Giulio Douhet.<sup>24</sup> According to Douhet, the preparation for a war in the air required ‘an exercise of the imagination’ that entailed nothing less than ‘a mental excursion into the future’.<sup>25</sup> In his seminal treatise *Il dominio dell’ aria* [The Command of the Air], published in 1921, Douhet warned that

[w]e must look toward the future with anxious, wide-open eyes to steel ourselves for what may come, so that the reality may not take us by surprise. This is all the more necessary in the revolutionary period we are living through so much so that he who is not ready will have no time to get ready or to correct the errors of the past. So we must not let ourselves be led astray by the magic of the past. *It is always dangerous to*

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end of World War I, fully embraced a future-oriented view of air power. C. T. Burke, “Aeroplanes of To-day and their Use in War,” *Journal of the United Service Institution* 55, no. 1 (1911): 628.

<sup>22</sup> According to P. Meilinger, ‘Mitchell dominated the early years of the American air arm just as Trenchard did the RAF. Like his British counterpart, this influence was due not simply to his administrative position but also to his ability to impart a vision of airpower to an eager group of subordinates. The men who would lead the Army Air Forces in World War II ... considered him their intellectual father’. Phillip S. Meilinger, ed. *Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Airpower Theory* (Alabama: Air University Press, 1997), xv.

<sup>23</sup> William L. Mitchell, *Winged Defense: The Development and Possibilities of Modern Air Power, Economic and Military* (New York: Putnam’s, 1925), 20-21.

<sup>24</sup> Although Douhet’s influence in the emergence of the Anglo-American air power theory can only be tenuously established, he is widely regarded as one of the most prominent contributors to air power theory. For an account of the impact of Douhet’s work on military studies of air power see Jonathan Haslam, “Giulio Douhet and the Politics of Airpower,” *International History Review* 34, no. 4 (2012): 753-773.

<sup>25</sup> Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, trans. Dino Ferrari (Washington: Coward-McCann INC., 1942), 145.

*keep looking backward when marching forward, and still more so now when the path is full of sharp detours.*

Students of war are induced to rely on the experience of the past for their preparation for the future conflict by the fact that theories of war can't be proved except in a real war. This was the reason why the nations who went to war in 1914 entered the conflict with their minds on the War of 1870 ... *But woe to him who tries to fight the war of the future with the theories and systems of 1914!*<sup>26</sup>

For Douhet, past experience was not simply an inadequate foundation for the development of air power; it was also a dangerous one, since it failed to prepare military planners for upcoming wars in the air. In rejecting the epistemic value of previous frameworks, he then proceeded to compare the work of air strategists to that of craftsmen. Very much like someone who reflects carefully on the future use of the object they are about to make, Douhet observed, 'he who intends to build a good instrument of war must first ask himself what the *next* war will be like'.<sup>27</sup> As I show below, in adopting this future-oriented mode of thinking, air power theorists like Douhet and Mitchell were able to dismiss – on grounds of their methodological approach – existing knowledge about military aircraft that went against their vision of what the role and function of such a weapon should be.

It should be noted, moreover, that air power theorists understood their opposition to military tradition to run deeper than method and epistemology. They also viewed their nonconformity as a consequence of their unique temperament as military officers. Douhet, for instance, explained that the reason why the basic principles governing war remained unchanged was 'because the players were always alike and the game always the same'.<sup>28</sup> What separated inferior military leaders from great ones, he emphasised, was that the former cautiously adhered to the rules of the game while the latter were 'essentially players who could cut free of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 205-206. Emphases mine.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 145-146. Emphasis mine.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 149.

tradition' and 'men with the psychology of great gamblers'.<sup>29</sup> In a similar fashion, Hugh Trenchard – the first Chief of Staff of the Royal Air Force and its leading post-World War I figure – complimented his fellow airmen for exhibiting precisely the kind of mental disposition that Douhet found admirable. In praising his colleague David Henderson, Trenchard noted that what made Henderson a splendid officer was that he possessed 'twice the insight and understanding' of Trenchard himself and, more importantly, 'he was prepared to run risks rather than lose a chance which he saw might never come again'.<sup>30</sup> Conversely, air power theorists also regularly pointed to the tendency of the military establishment to oppose any ideas that sought to revolutionise warfare. In this respect, one of Mitchell's core criticisms of the armed services was that they were the most conservative of all the components of a nation and, hence, more likely 'to build on a foundation that they are certain of rather than to take any chances of making a mistake'.<sup>31</sup> Since Mitchell thought that the art of military flight required a capacity for innovative thinking, he argued that the institutional conservatism of the army and the navy could only breed officers who would be psychologically unfit to lead the air forces.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, air power theorists not only valorised imagination, intuition and risk-taking as prime leadership qualities, but also viewed *themselves* as officers who possessed these qualities in abundance.

My argument is that when air power theorists constructed for themselves this image of the progressive intellectual or the daring military officer, they did not operate in a discursive vacuum. Rather than inventing such a subjectivity from scratch, they were in fact drawing from, and contributing to, a broader narrative in which aviators figured as the central heroes of a progressive technological world. Before giving a brief account of this narrative, I want to emphasise from the outset that cultural representations of the aviator in the early twentieth century varied across time; they were multi-faceted and, as I will show, overlapping. It would thus be a mistake to reduce these representations simply to what air power theorists made of them, or to think that they pertained to military men alone. Just as aviation

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>30</sup> Hugh Trenchard as quoted in Andrew Boyle, *Trenchard* (London: Collins, 1962), 233.

<sup>31</sup> Mitchell, *Winged Defense*, 20-21.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

was not an activity practiced only by the military, so too “the aviator” was not a figure constructed solely within military circles. This, in fact, was especially the case during the pioneering phase of flight, when the aviator was associated less with the military than with private entrepreneurs such as the Wright brothers, Louis Blériot and Henry Farman.

Even in its non-martial variant, the heroism of the aviator was thought to comprise a militant dimension – in particular towards the existing state of the world. To begin with, aviation was understood to be a challenging and dangerous venture. Taking off to the skies went against the very nature of humans as terrestrial beings, and it was therefore viewed as ‘a deed that required energy, spirit, faith, sang-froid, daring, calm, perseverance, and a capacity for improvisation’.<sup>33</sup> Depicted in this way, the labour of aviation was thought to demand something more than just technical savvy or knowledge of the workings of the natural world and how they could be challenged. It also required a willingness on the part of the aviator to act on that knowledge and, in the process, to antagonise his own physical limitations that kept him on the ground. This outlook was central in the establishment of a romantic representation of the aviator ‘as a slightly whimsical figure, generally a nice young man in love with the outdoors and violent exercise, a dare-devil, etc’.<sup>34</sup>

A characteristic display of this rhetoric surrounding aviators can be seen in how Charles Fontaine, a French journalist, portrayed Blériot following the latter’s crossing of the Channel. According to Fontaine, Blériot personified ‘one of these modern heroes, soldiers of science and progress, and victors over the hostile forces of nature in whom was combined the double superiority of character and intelligence’.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, the aviator was presented as an individual in whom one could find the virtues of both an inventor (acumen, imagination, knowledge) and a warrior (physical courage, competence, daring). Becoming an aviator involved, in the first instance, taking a stance against the oldest tradition of all: nature itself. It is no coincidence that the newspapers and literary writers of the time popularised the use of *military* terms such as “the conquest of the skies” as pertinent

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Wohl, *A Passion for Wings: Aviation and the Western Imagination 1908-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 64.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>35</sup> Fontaine quoted in *Ibid.*, 63.

metaphors to capture what they thought was the essence of an aviator's mission in life.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, because aviators were acknowledged by their success in flying an aircraft, being one was already proof of the triumph of human ingenuity over the laws of nature. In this respect, cultural representations of civilian aviators glamorised the act of flying by transforming what was essentially a technological development into a militarised enterprise.<sup>37</sup>

This kind of sensationalising rhetoric continued being at play when the figure of the aviator became properly military – that is, when members of the armed forces started identifying with it. In the latter case, however, the rhetoric was also inverted. While before aviation was presented as a glorious undertaking because it closely resembled warfare, now it was war that supposedly took the form of an adventure by incorporating aviation as part of it. At the root of this interchange lay a determinist view of the aircraft as a technological innovation that would inevitably alter the nature of war and, in so doing, usher in a brave new era of fighting wars. In his *Aircraft in War*, published in 1914, James M. Spaight, 'one of the [British] Air Ministry's most successful propagandists',<sup>38</sup> posited that the fighting aircraft was an 'extraordinary development' and also expressed his confidence that 'unless some totally unexpected factors come into operation, the science of war and the science of flight have in our days formed an alliance which will outlast our generation and will in all probability endure as long as war itself'.<sup>39</sup>

In order to further emphasise the heroic aspect of aerial warfare, air power theorists often contrasted it with ground warfare, which they presented as an increasingly wasteful and ignoble activity. Their argument was that the modern army was a means of war that had reached the terminal stage of its development, being no longer able to procure a quick and decisive victory. For them, World War I marked a case in point: a paralytic war between two opposing forces which held each other immobile for years while subjecting their troops to meaningless mass killing. This reproachful view of land-based wars was prevalent in the post-war

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Paris, "The Rise of the Airmen: The Origins of Air Force Elitism, c. 1890-1918," *Journal of Contemporary History* 28, no. 1 (1993): 124.

<sup>37</sup> Wohl, *A Passion for Wings*, 69.

<sup>38</sup> Paris, "The Rise of Airmen," 125-127.

<sup>39</sup> J. M. Spaight, *Aircraft in War* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd, 1914), 1.

writings of theorists like Basil Liddell Hart,<sup>40</sup> J. F. C. Fuller and J. M. Spaight, who disseminated a 'somewhat distorted official history' which presented aviation in war as a success story 'compared to the apparently dismal showing of the army on the Somme and at Passchendaele, the navy at Jutland, the terrifying cost in human life and the alleged incompetence of the generals'.<sup>41</sup> Conversely, the work of these air officers was key in reinforcing the conviction that aircraft – and, in particular, its ability to transfer military action to the sky – presented a technical solution to the physical limits of ground forces. War in the air was, in this way, envisioned as an escape from the cycle of boredom and death suffered by soldiers in the trenches; fighting with aircraft transformed war into a wholly different experience: 'Darting about the heavens in their lightly armed and unarmoured planes and pouncing on one another in individual combat, [fighter pilots] fight tenaciously, win gallantly, or die heroically'.<sup>42</sup> As historian John H. Morrow writes, the use of aircraft in World War I evoked 'romantic images of valiant young aviators clad in long leather coats and helmets', who would 'peer from the open cockpits ... in search of prey or predators'.<sup>43</sup> In the eyes of air power theorists, aviation elevated war – both in a literal and a metaphorical sense – onto a wholly new level of existence.

Paradoxically, the claim that military aviation brought warfare to the next stage of its development was accompanied by the belief that this innovation also returned war back to its supposedly chivalrous past. 'War in the air', proclaimed a recruiting poster for Britain's Royal Flying Corps, 'recalls the olden times, when knights rode forth to battle and won honor and glory by their deeds of personal heroism'.<sup>44</sup> The Royal Flying Corps' poster assured its recruits that, unlike the lot of army soldiers, their life would be full of 'romance, action, adventure, and opportunities for glorious achievement'.<sup>45</sup> Aviation presented, in this way, a technological invention that recuperated war's status as an exciting and honourable venture. The depiction of pilots as "knights of the air" encouraged 'a mythologizing of the air war into a single

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<sup>40</sup> See, in particular, Basil H. Liddell-Hart, *Paris, or the Future of War*. (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1925, Reprint, New York: Garland, 1972).

<sup>41</sup> Paris, "The Rise of the Airmen", 124.

<sup>42</sup> John H. Morrow, *The Great War in the Air: Military Aviation from 1909 to 1921* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2009), xiv.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>44</sup> As quoted in Ezra Bowen, *Knights of the Air* (Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1980), 7.

<sup>45</sup> As quoted in *Ibid.*, 7.

image of individual combat, deadly but chivalrous'.<sup>46</sup> This imagery of a chivalrous duel affirmed the individuality of aerial heroes,<sup>47</sup> which was drawn in contrast to the anonymity of trench soldiers who were 'trudging through the mud with very little heroism to escape the industrialized butchery'.<sup>48</sup> More importantly, such a fantasy popularised a misleading representation of war in the air as a principally symmetrical fight between fighter pilots.<sup>49</sup> In so doing, it distracted from the fact that air power theorists' vision of air power – which, as I show below, was founded on a strategy of bombing civilian populations – was rather one which understood aerial warfare to be a fundamentally asymmetrical relation of hostilities. As Sven Lindqvist writes, the cult of the fighter pilot had so potent a hold upon the public mind that 'even when airplanes were used to kill people on the ground, air war was generally considered "purer" and "nobler" than other forms of warfare'.<sup>50</sup>

To summarise, the aerial subjectivity that air power theorists praised and self-identified with was discursively situated within a broader narrative regarding aviation and aviators. In giving pride of place to qualities such as imagination, intuition and risk-taking, these theorists were in fact reflecting and reinforcing an already existing representation of the aviator as the maverick forerunner of a new age of technological advancement. In the case of Douhet, Mitchell and Trenchard,

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<sup>46</sup> Morrow, *The Great War in the Air*, xv.

<sup>47</sup> A clear example of this affirmation of individuality can be seen in the publication of a book entitled *Above the Trenches*, which, according to its authors' introductory note, was 'the result of 20 years of research ... devoted to over 800 biographies of individual scout pilots'. Christopher Shores, Norman Franks and Russell Guest, *Above the Trenches: A Complete Record of the Fighter Aces and Units of the British Empire Air Forces 1915-1920* (London: Grub Street, 1990).

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Hippler, *Governing from the Skies: A Global History of Aerial Bombing*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2017), 40.

<sup>49</sup> Peter Dye, a retired Air Vice-Marshal of the Royal Air Force, notes that the popular appeal of individual air combats still engenders a misrepresentation of what the Royal Flying Corps were in fact doing during World War I: 'The RFC's [Royal Flying Corps] substantial contribution to operations on the Western front has been both distorted and diminished by an enduring public fascination with air combat and, in particular, the deeds of individual fighter aces. Film, television and popular literature have given this aspect of the first air war an undeserved prominence and an element of glamor – while largely ignoring the genuine achievements of the air service'. Dye notes the lasting effect that this popular narrative has had on subsequent military analyses on the topic, by admitting that '[m]ilitary historians have not been immune from this cultural and professional myopia'. Peter Dye, *The Bridge to Airpower: Logistics Support for Royal Flying Corps Operations on the Western Front, 1914-18* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2015), 15-20.

<sup>50</sup> Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, trans. Linda Haverty Rugg (London: Granta Books, 2012), 67.

this type of subjectivity lent itself into a ‘triumphalist view of technology ... as a frictionless “magic bullet” solution for war’s problems’.<sup>51</sup> It was a perspective that allowed them to respond to a set of ostensibly military questions – How could the conduct of wars be improved? What impact would air power have in future wars? How should aircraft be deployed? – by adopting a language of technological progressivism that glorified both the prospect of aerial warfare as well as *their* role in developing and promoting such warfare. In the final part of this section, I demonstrate how this romantic outlook functioned ideologically in air power theorists’ attempt to build up a case for the existence of air forces as an autonomous arm of the military on par with the older services of the army and the navy.<sup>52</sup>

### *Independent Air Force: The Struggle for Institutional Autonomy*

A central claim in the writings of early air power theorists was that the institutional autonomy of air forces was a necessary precondition for the development of air power. In Douhet’s words, ‘[b]efore any real aerial warfare can take place, its basic elements, such as planes, personnel, and their organisation into an autonomous fighting body, must first be created and forged into an efficient fighting organisation’.<sup>53</sup> Most air power theorists at the time shared this conviction that without the administrative, financial, logistical and operational freedoms that institutional autonomy provided, the growth of air power would be severely stunted.<sup>54</sup> They thought that if the leadership of air forces was left in the hands of the army and the navy, air power would ‘always be subject to land or sea operations’,

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<sup>51</sup> Peter Faber, “Paradigm Lost: Airpower Theory and its Historical Struggles,” in *Airpower: The Strategic Concepts of John Warden and John Boyd*, ed. John Andreas Olsen (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2015), 21.

<sup>52</sup> I do not offer here a historical account of airmen’s struggle for autonomy but rather an exposition of some of their key arguments with respect to their claim for autonomy. The main reason for not doing the former is that it would be inaccurate to frame that struggle as a unified and coherent movement, which it was not. This struggle has a varied historical background since air forces developed differently in each country’s military structure. But, despite this variation, there are important linkages between the arguments airmen made in order to secure institutional autonomy, especially in relation to the concept of “strategic bombing”, which I discuss in the next section.

<sup>53</sup> Douhet, *Command of the Air*, 56.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

something that would reduce the value of air forces from ‘an offensive weapon of formidable power’ to a ‘mere aerial auxiliary’.<sup>55</sup>

For air power theorists, then, the emergence of air power was an event that required a twofold break: first, a methodological shift away from the traditional mode of thinking about war and, second, radical organisational reform that would culminate in the establishment of an independent air service. They, moreover, presented these two breaks as inherently bound up with each other. Mitchell captures this perspective in a crucial passage, where he writes that air power meant that

[a] new set of rules for the conduct of war will have to be devised and a whole new set of ideas of strategy learned by those charged with the conduct of war. No longer is the making of war gauged merely by land and naval forces. Both of these old, well understood factors in conducting war are affected by air power which operates over both of them. Already, we have an entirely new class of people that we may call “the air-going people” as distinguished from the “land-going people” and the “sea-going people.” The air-going people have a spirit, language, and customs of their own. In fact, they are much more so because our sea-going and land-going communities have been with us from the inception of time and everybody knows something about them, whereas the air-going people form such a new class that only those engaged in its actual development and the younger generation appreciate what it means.<sup>56</sup>

Mitchell’s argument here is obvious: if someone is to be in charge of developing aerial warfare, then airmen are the most suitable candidate. But it is important to note *how* he articulates this demand. Indeed, in the space of a few lines, he manages to weave together all the rhetorical tropes concerning aviation discussed above. His argument, for instance, offers a clear example of a technological determinist view of air power, since it is grounded on the *a priori* assumption that aviation will inevitably have a transformative effect on the waging of war. He reasons, also, that

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 55-57.

<sup>56</sup> Mitchell, *Winged Defense*, 6.

this transformation makes necessary an epistemic overhaul of military scholarship – strategists will need to waive their existing knowledge of war and come up with a new one in order to account for the existence of air power. Crucially, for Mitchell, this epistemic rupture goes hand in hand with an analogous break within the ranks of the military: in a similar way that air power is wholly distinct from old systems of war, airmen are altogether different from their army and navy counterparts. In implying a correlation between air power and “air-going people”, Mitchell effectively evokes the discursive construction, mentioned above, of aviators as a group of people whose special personality mirrors the unique nature of aviation itself. In so doing, however, Mitchell does not simply replicate the broader discourse concerning aviators. The institutional question that motivated arguments like Mitchell’s – namely, the question of who should lead the air forces – suggests that air power theorists engaged in something more than a passive or inadvertent reiteration of a popular narrative. Rather, in their case, this narrative performed an overtly ideological role. Airmen relied on it in order to organise themselves politically; the image of a class of “air-going people” allowed them to forge a unified institutional identity and to lay claim to a commonality of viewpoints and interests about air power. And, in addition, it was a narrative that, in their eyes, conferred legitimacy on their cause by demonstrating their intrinsic affinity with air power as well as the new knowledge it gave rise to.

The ideological context within which the development of air power theory took place was also crucial as regards air power theorists’ methodological orientation. In pursuing air force autonomy, these theorists were confronted with two mutually dependent conditions: on the one hand, their justification for autonomy relied on the argument that air power had the potential to revolutionise war; on the other hand, as Douhet pointed out, such a potential could be realised only if and insofar as air forces were granted autonomy. The difficulty faced by air power theorists was that an empirical methodology worked against their argument for autonomy. This had to do, in part, with the fact that there was a significant lack of practical knowledge regarding the potential of aviation, since, prior to World War I, engine-

powered aircraft had seen very little operational use in war.<sup>57</sup> An internal study of the U.S. Army Air Force, for example, observed that the entrance of the United States into the war in April 1917 ‘found the country almost totally unprepared in aeronautical experience, equipment and personnel’, so much so that ‘[n]o airplane in America up to 1917 had even mounted a machine gun, and aviation personnel had practically no knowledge or radiotelegraphy and telephony, photography, bombing equipment, lights for night flying, aviators’ clothing, compasses used in flying, or other aviation instruments’.<sup>58</sup> This scarcity of knowledge did not exist only on the tactical level of aircraft’s application to war, but also on the technical level of the machine itself. Flying technology was at the time still a fledgling and, as such, relatively untested.<sup>59</sup> Mechanical questions – such as the limits of the aircraft motor, the adversity that climate or extreme weather events might have on its performance and the reliability of navigational systems – could not therefore be readily answered or solved by recourse to past experience.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to the general lack of practical knowledge regarding aircraft, air power theorists had to reckon with another problem. They were concerned that what little experience of military uses of aircraft did exist was actually conveying the wrong kind of message concerning the value of air power. During World War I, for instance, the usefulness of aircraft as an instrument of warfare was generally

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<sup>57</sup> It is important to note, however, that European powers used aerial bombing in their colonies, a practice that began as early as 1911. One of the reasons why air power theorists did not draw on the colonial experience of bombing may have been that colonial warfare was categorised as a different type of war. I discuss the colonial exercise of air power in more detail the following chapter.

<sup>58</sup> Chase Mooney and Martha E. Layman, *Organisation of Military Aeronautics 1907-1935*, Army Air Forces Historical Studies No. 25 (Washington, D.C.: Army Air Forces Historical Division, 1944), 26-27.

<sup>59</sup> The first ever successful experiment with an engine-powered aircraft took place in 1903 – with the Wright brothers recording a twelve seconds flight in the hills of North Carolina. They issued their patent for manufacturing aircraft in 1906 – merely six years before World War I broke out. David C. Mowery, “Breakthrough Innovations in Aircraft and the Intellectual Property System, 1900-1975,” *Economic Research Working Paper 25* (2015): 12-13.

<sup>60</sup> As Major Alexander Bannerman argued in 1909, ‘many years of patient labour and research must surely pass before the conquest of the air becomes an accomplished fact; at present man, the moment he leaves the earth, is at the mercy of the elements. The aeronaut has not yet conquered the air; he exists only by its clemency’. Alexander Bannerman, “The Difficulty of Aerial Attack,” *A Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 53, no. 1 (1909): 645.

acknowledged, but largely for reconnaissance and observation missions such as mapping trenches, spotting artillery stations, patrolling and tracking enemy movements.<sup>61</sup> Though the notion of an aerial strategy was scathingly discredited by army strategists, even the most conservative among them did not dispute that an aerial viewpoint furnished a significant advantage in the battlefield. As a result, the utility of air power as an instrument for military intelligence was never seriously questioned, and neither were its other auxiliary uses such as interdiction of enemy forces.<sup>62</sup> This sort of evaluation about the role of air power, however, raised a crucial question for air autonomists: if the value of air forces was predicated entirely on its support to the war efforts of other services, why should it be made independent to begin with? Indeed, British airmen found themselves confronted with this question as soon as the Royal Air Force (RAF) was founded in April 1918, with the leadership of the army criticising the newly founded service precisely on grounds that its establishment directed air power away from its true *raison d'être*, which was to be an ancillary instrument in the offensive work of the army.<sup>63</sup>

Hence, insofar as the military experience of World War I positively accredited aviation, it did so by emphasising the auxiliary role of aircraft more than its ability to decisively win wars through independent action. The success of aircraft in maintaining a supporting role actually presented a setback for air power theorists for it fastened the air forces tighter to the leadership of the army and the navy, rather than cutting it loose. Existing knowledge thus constituted a feeble epistemic

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<sup>61</sup> Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 11.

<sup>62</sup> Spaight, *Aircraft*, 8.

<sup>63</sup> Even Trenchard – whose name and actions were to become synonymous with RAF autonomy – was himself ‘the sceptic *par excellence*’ about this opening gambit. ‘I thought’, Trenchard retrospectively remarked, ‘that if anything were done at that time to weaken the Western Front, the war would be lost and there would be no air service, united or divided’. However, Trenchard’s objections to the formation of the RAF were of a different ilk than those of his army and navy colleagues. In his later career, he accepted without qualm the ‘almost boundless’ potentialities of the aircraft as a future weapon, so he was not a sceptic of air power in that sense. The problem, in Trenchard’s opinion, was that Smuts’ plans were simply out of tune with the situation at hand. For Trenchard, forcing the development of a new service, defensive in character, through a separate Ministry (Air Ministry) at an hour of acute danger for national existence, was a premature move. Although he expressed support for Smuts’ plans later on, Trenchard’s initial plan was to gradually integrate the RNAS into the RFC, since he believed that the Admiralty had little faith in aviation. For more see Boyle, *Trenchard*, 229-32.

foundation for air power theorists to base their theory of air power; the practical experience of using military aircraft was both too sparse and too unappealing to sustain the arguments of theorists like Douhet and Mitchell. As a result, these theorists' commitment to an abstract and future-oriented approach served a very practical purpose; it allowed them to validate their vision of a war fought exclusively from the air by engaging in a systematic disregard of empirical proof that showed otherwise. The resulting doctrine that emerged out of this kind of methodological expediency was, as historian Malcolm Smith describes, 'a monstrous birth', 'a mixture of dogma, opportunism and pragmatism' founded by no 'single, clear and concise rationale'.<sup>64</sup>

### **Moral(e) Bombing: The Emergence of Air Terror Strategy**

The aim of the previous section was to offer an account of the mode of reasoning that drove the development of air power theory in its historical specificity. As I have shown, the emergence of air power was a complex discursive development. I demonstrated how this was the case by indicating not only that the institutional politics of early air power theorists possessed an intrinsic hold upon their methodological approach but also how their understanding of air power, and of themselves, was ideologically constructed against the backdrop of a much broader discourse that glorified aviation and aviators.

In the present section, I focus on what I have so far been referring to, rather vaguely, as the air power theorists' "vision of war in the air". While early theorisations of air power differ, sometimes significantly, it is nonetheless the case that, as Smith observes, an 'intuitive faith in the bomber appears to have been more or less common to all countries interested in the development of air power in the interwar years'.<sup>65</sup> Consequently, if and insofar as these different theoretical

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<sup>64</sup> Smith refers specifically to the RAF doctrine developed during the interwar period. Malcolm Smith, "The Royal Air Force, Air Power and British Foreign Policy, 1932-37," *Journal of Contemporary History* 12, no. 1 (1977): 154.

<sup>65</sup> Malcolm Smith, "'A Matter of Faith': British Strategic Air Doctrine Before 1939," *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, no. 3 (1980): 423.

accounts can be discussed as a homogeneous whole, it is as a theory of bombing. “Strategic bombing” constituted a central concept in early air power theorists’ writing and, in the case of the RAF, marked the cornerstone for the development of its official doctrine. In what follows, I show that strategic bombing entailed three fundamental shifts in the practice of war: first, military action takes the form of a non-reciprocal bombing attack; second, the enemy’s civilian centres and population, and not its armed forces, is the strategic object of attack; and third, the purpose of air strategy is to produce sufficient “moral effects” to terrorise civilians so that they would force their government to capitulate.

### *Unrestrained Offensive*

In recalling his early days in the RAF, Air Marshall John Slessor concisely captured the attitude that he and his fellow air officers had towards bombing: ‘Our belief in the bomber, in fact, was intuitive – a matter of faith’.<sup>66</sup> A key reason why this dogmatic approach to bombing was so prevalent was that, for these airmen, aerial bombing was an aspect of air power that offered the most compelling justification for the existence of the RAF as an independent service. While bombing had an auxiliary dimension, for it could be used in close support to army units conducting the main offensive,<sup>67</sup> at the same time airmen fervently believed that long-range, “strategic” bombing striking deep into enemy territory could be a decisive factor in winning wars.

The potential of the bomber to be a strategic weapon was, in fact, a promise that the Smuts Committee Report of 1917 (on the basis of which the RAF was founded) had clearly expressed.<sup>68</sup> ‘The time’, Smuts wrote in the report, is ‘rapidly

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<sup>66</sup> John Slessor, *The Central Blue: The Autobiography of Sir John Slessor, Marshall of the RAF* (New York, Frederick A. Preager, 1957), 204.

<sup>67</sup> Military interdiction – bombing enemy forces and resources before reaching the battlefield – is such an auxiliary function of the bomber.

<sup>68</sup> It should be noted that the formation of the RAF was as much a political gesture as it was military. Following the German Gotha air raids of London in 1917, Lloyd George’s government felt pressured to show initiative in response to those attacks. The South African general Jan Christian Smuts was called to assess the situation and – with the advice of lieutenant general David Henderson – provide a solution. The Smuts committee had only two members: Prime Minister David Lloyd George and Jan Smuts. Lloyd George took little part in the proceedings of the committee, while Smuts working alone submitted two

approaching when [the] subordination of the air board and the air service could no longer be justified'. He pointed out the error of comparing the air force to the artillery arm: while the latter 'could never be used in war except ... [as] an instrument ancillary to a service', the former 'on the contrary can be used as an independent means of air operations'.<sup>69</sup> Smuts' position on the matter was driven by his belief that 'as far as can at present be foreseen there is absolutely no limit to the scale of [air power's] future independent war use'.<sup>70</sup> In his eyes, the boundless potentiality of the aerial bomber meant that

the day may not be far off when aerial operations, with their devastation of enemy lands and destruction of industrial and populace centres on a vast scale, may become the principal operations of war, to which the older forms of military and naval operations may become secondary and subordinate.<sup>71</sup>

Strategic bombing was held, in this way, as the spearhead of air forces; it was on the wings of the bomber that the hopes of air autonomists would take flight, not on those of fighter and scout planes. Smuts' report was crucial to how the RAF was subsequently organised as a fighting force. As a military historian observes, Smuts' unflinching view of the centrality of strategic bombing 'was to influence the future doctrinal development not only of the RAF, but also of every other air service which aspired to [an] independent status'.<sup>72</sup>

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reports. The first one was a rather uncontested proposal for the re-organisation of the London defence network to shelter from aerial attacks. The second one, however, was a radical plan for the merging of the air units of the army and the navy – the Royal Flying Corps – and the fleet – the Royal Naval Air Service – into a single command. For detailed commentaries on the events surrounding the establishment of the RAF see Sydney Wise, "The Royal Air Force and the Origins of Strategic Bombing," in *Men at War: Politics, Technology and Innovation in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Timothy Travers and Chiston Archers, 149-172 (London: Transaction Publishers, 2011); Andrew G. B. Vallance, *The Air Weapon: Doctrines of Air Power Strategy and Operational Art* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996), 3-8.

<sup>69</sup> Jan C. Smuts, "Smuts Second Report," *Royal Air Force Museum*, accessed August 15, 2018, <https://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/london/whats-going-on/news/read-the-smuts-report/>.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Vallance, *The Air Weapon*, 6.

For British theorists, air strategy involved, in the first instance, a radical rupture with the concept of battle. They argued that in traditional warfare the relationship between the application of force and defeating an enemy became manifest in two interrelated objectives: first, eliminating the enemy's physical ability to wage war (namely, its armed forces), and, second, subduing its will to do so.<sup>73</sup> Trenchard, a strident proponent of strategic bombing, argued that the first objective was not an end in itself; it was merely a means to overcome the enemy's will to continue the fight. The real object of war, he posited, was 'to defeat the enemy nation, not merely its army, navy or air force'.<sup>74</sup> His contention was that armies could not pursue victory without first engaging with the enemy's armed forces – due to their earthbound nature, armies were forced to seek battle. According to Trenchard, air power made that preliminary step decidedly pointless. In a 1929 paper on the future role of the RAF, he wrote:

It is not necessary for an air force, in order to defeat an enemy nation, to defeat its armed forces first. Air power can dispense with that intermediate step, can pass over the enemy navies and armies, penetrate the air defences and attack directly the centres of production, transportation and communication from which the enemy war effort is maintained.<sup>75</sup>

In diminishing the importance of battle as the only path to victory, Trenchard also considered the battlefield to be an obsolete site for air strategy. This conceptual abolition of the battlefield led to the framing of the air forces as an *intrinsically offensive* instrument of war. The RAF's first doctrine, entitled *Operations Manual* and published in 1922, noted that in 'ground warfare the offensive is no homogeneous whole, but is incessantly mixed up with the defensive'.<sup>76</sup> Because the battlefield was a space of contest between opposing forces, the capacity of one force to sustain its

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<sup>73</sup> Meilinger, "Trenchard and 'Morale Bombing'," 243.

<sup>74</sup> Trenchard as quoted in George H. Quester, *Deterrence Before Hiroshima: The Airpower Background of Modern Strategy* (Oxford: Transaction Books, 1986), 52.

<sup>75</sup> Trenchard, as quoted in Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany 1939-1945*, Volume IV (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1961), 73.

<sup>76</sup> Air Ministry, *Royal Air Force Operations Manual* (London: Air Ministry, 1922), 62.

attack was at all times relative to the capacity of the other force to counter it. Depending on the contingencies of the battle they were engaged in, therefore, armies could have been attacking, defending, or sometimes both. But since the enemy forces were seen as posing no resistance to air forces, the latter's offensive ability was understood in absolute, rather than relative terms. For British air power theorists, even the enemy's opposing air force was not considered to be a significant barrier, for '[i]t should be realised that no number of aircraft acting on the defensive will necessarily prevent a determined pilot from reaching his objective'.<sup>77</sup> Douhet, for his part, did not simply espouse this belief in the unrestrained attacking power of air forces but also followed it to its logical conclusion:

Viewed in its true light, aerial warfare admits of no defense, only offense. *We must, therefore, resign ourselves to the offensives the enemy inflicts upon us, while striving to put all our resources to work to inflict even heavier ones upon him.* This is the basic principle which must govern the development of aerial warfare.<sup>78</sup>

Douhet's message is not subtle. Air power, in his eyes, effectively reduces the enemy to an inactive agent whose plans or actions bear no relevance to the violence of the air weapon.<sup>79</sup> In line with Douhet, advocates of strategic bombing emphasised that the almost unlimited freedom of movement of aircraft meant that there was simply no defence against its ability to penetrate and strike against the most sensitive and well-protected areas of the enemy.<sup>80</sup> Mitchell, in particular, argued that the new spatial dimension within which air power operated made aerial attack ubiquitous; just as 'the air covers the whole world', he noted, 'aircraft are able to go anywhere

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>78</sup> Douhet, *Command of the Air*, 55. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>79</sup> Lt Colonel Barry D. Watts, *The Foundations of US Air Doctrine: The Problem of Friction in War* (Alabama: Air University Press, 1984), 7.

<sup>80</sup> British air power theorists also pointed out that that geographical features like mountains, forests and rivers offered no obstacle to the offensive action of aircraft. Moreover, they were keen to point out that the radius of action and the speed of the bomber far surpassed those of ground forces; attaching air forces to armies was, in their eyes, counterproductive since it obliged the bomber to follow the more lethargic pace of the army. For more, see Dimitar Nedialkov, *The Genesis of Air Power* (Sofia: Pensoft, 2004), 17.

on the planet'.<sup>81</sup> Air attacks were seen as, above all, *non-reciprocated* and *all-pervasive*. The RAF's *Operations Manual* captures this viewpoint as follows:

The basis of all [air] strategy is therefore, the offensive or striking instead of parrying. The idea underlying efficient leadership of any force is to pursue a ruthless offensive which, by its very determination, will cause the enemy to conform to the plans of the other.<sup>82</sup>

British airmen thus came to see RAF as an organisation characterised by a singular purpose: 'to seek out and attack the enemy wherever he may be'.<sup>83</sup> Finally, the *Operations Manual* made clear that this principle of "ruthless offensive" was exclusively to be pursued by specific means: 'the weapon of aerial attack on ground objectives ... is the bomb, either high explosive or inflammatory'.<sup>84</sup>

#### *Bombing the "Spirit of Resistance"*

As discussed, aerial campaigns were understood to be a decidedly one-directional infliction of violence. For air power theorists, the ability of air power 'to jump over the army which shields the enemy government, industry, and people' meant that air forces could 'strike directly and immediately at the seat of the opposing will and policy'.<sup>85</sup> This emphasis on the "will" of the enemy is also seen in doctrine, where it was noted that war 'can be prosecuted only by the will of a united people' and, therefore, the aim of offensive action is 'to bring such pressure to bear upon the enemy people as to induce them to force their government to sue for peace'.<sup>86</sup> As British air power theorist Liddell Hart observed, this pressure could be exerted in many ways and at several points, and the function of the best strategy was 'to discover and exploit the Achilles' heel of the enemy nation; to strike not against its

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<sup>81</sup> Mitchell, *Winged Defense*, 4.

<sup>82</sup> Air Ministry, *Operations*, 62.

<sup>83</sup> Air Commodore P. F. M. Fellowes, D.S.O., ed. *Britain's Wonderful Air Force* (London: Odhams Press Limited, 1943), 35.

<sup>84</sup> Air Ministry, *Operations*, 55.

<sup>85</sup> Basil Liddell-Hart, *The Current of War* (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, 1941), 59. Emphases in the original.

<sup>86</sup> Air Ministry, *Operations*, 4.

strongest bulwark, but against its most vulnerable'.<sup>87</sup> Once this is understood, he proceeded to explain, common sense should tell us that the strategic object must shift from attacking the most robust of the enemy pressure points – namely, its armed forces – to moving against those “vital centres” whose destruction would immediately compel the enemy to surrender.<sup>88</sup> While the reasoning that underpinned Liddell Hart’s argument was simple enough, the vagueness of the term “vital centre” led to different ideas concerning what the specific target of strategic bombing would be.

A popular argument among the leadership of the RAF was that factories and railroads constituted the obvious target choices for strategic bombing. In his May 1928 memorandum to the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee, Trenchard argued that ‘the object to be sought by air action will be to paralyse from the very outset the enemy’s productive centres and munitions of war of every sort and to stop all communications and transportation’.<sup>89</sup> In framing industrial units and railways as indispensable parts of the war machine, he asserted that they were legitimate military targets, even though civilian casualties would inevitably occur in the attacks.<sup>90</sup> He thus claimed that while ‘the blind bombing of a town with the only aim of terrorising the civilian population’ was illegitimate, the terrorisation of munition workers by attacking their homes (he did not specify how these homes were to be identified or how the terror of bombing them would be contained such that it would not affect the rest of the population) was not only permissible but a key objective of strategic bombing.<sup>91</sup> Trenchard was well aware that by targeting workers and communications lines the RAF was seeking to apply pressure on something more than merely the enemy’s military infrastructure: ‘It will be harder to affect the will of an army in the field by air attack than to affect the *morale of a Nation* by attacks on its centres of supply and communications as a whole’.<sup>92</sup> As historian Tami Davis Biddle notes, while the official pretence was that civilians were not to be directly

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<sup>87</sup> Liddell Hart, *Current of War*, 55.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-59.

<sup>89</sup> Trenchard as quoted in Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, 94.

<sup>90</sup> Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, 96.

<sup>91</sup> Trenchard as quoted in Beatrice Heuser, *The Bomb: Nuclear Weapons in their Historical, Strategic and Ethical Context* (London: Routledge, 2014), 43.

<sup>92</sup> Trenchard as quoted in Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality* 96. Emphasis added.

targeted, '[c]learly, terms like "vital centres" and "centres of manufacture, communications, and transportation" meant cities would take the brunt of the attacks'.<sup>93</sup>

Given that the industrial zones that Trenchard saw as appropriate military objectives were either in or very close to populated areas, the principle of bombing an enemy's "vital centres" effectively obscured the distinction between what counted as a "military target" what as "civilians".<sup>94</sup> As a matter of fact, Liddel Hart's "Achilles heel" argument for attacking the enemy at its most vulnerable pressure point erased that distinction altogether – it was a strategic dictum that set civilians, a group that theorists presented as the image of the enemy's vulnerability, well within the category of military targets. John Slessor, for example, criticised a definition of the term "vital centre" that was confined to merely the material system of supply or communication for the armed forces; in his eyes, it promoted an overly narrow and mechanical interpretation of war as an activity which revolves exclusively around the operation of the military machine. 'War is a human activity', he counter-proposed, 'and, human nature being what it is, decisions in war are influenced by factors other than those of cold military expediency'.<sup>95</sup> The human dimension of war meant, for Slessor, that political decision-makers and even members of the armed forces had to take into account the 'national point of view' rather than just the military, which brought into play a series of political, social, economic and moral considerations in the waging of war.<sup>96</sup> The bottom line of his argument was thus that 'when we use the term "vital centre" it must cover not only the literally vital centres of communications in the field, or of munition-production

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>94</sup> The fact that attacks on industrial centres were, in the eyes of British air officers, synonymous with bombing cities became exceedingly clear in the actions of the RAF during World War II. As Jürgen Brauer and Hubert van Tuyl write: 'Of the 755,531 tons of bombs the RAF was to drop on ten target categories in Germany in the sixty-six months from December 1939 to May 1945, fully 69 percent – some 523, 615 – fell on cities, a target group euphemistically referred to as industrial areas'. Jürgen Brauer and Hubert van Tuyl, *Castles, Battles & Bombs: How Economics Explains Military History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), 197.

<sup>95</sup> John Slessor, *Air Power and Armies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 17.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 17.

in the industrial areas at home, *but also those centres which for political or social reasons have to be treated in the same way*'.<sup>97</sup>

Slessor's point of view was also shared by Air Commodore Robert Brooke-Popham – the first commandant of the Air Staff College in Andover. In his lectures to RAF staff officers in May 1925, Brooke-Popham explained the growing strategic significance of the population by developing an account of historical evolution. His contention was that, because of processes of industrialisation, the democratisation of governments and the existence of trade unions, in the modern era the population was at once more affected by and more able to affect the waging of war than ever before.<sup>98</sup> General strikes or voting out a government constituted, for Brooke-Popham, as potent a weapon as any found in the military's arsenal. Similarly, Liddell Hart reproduced this kind of reasoning in his influential book *Paris, or the Future of War*, which was published in 1925.<sup>99</sup> Employing a biological metaphor to represent the relationship between civilian population and war, he wrote that '[a] nation's nerve-system, no longer covered by the flesh of its troops, is now laid bare to attack, and like the human nerves, the progress of civilisation has rendered it far more sensitive than in earlier and more primitive times'.<sup>100</sup> He evoked the same metaphor in a later publication, where he argued that '[i]n a great war the whole nation is involved, though not necessarily, or wisely, under arms. The fists and the sinews of war are mutually dependent ... the collapse of its will to resist compels the surrender of the whole'.<sup>101</sup> In Liddell Hart's mind, a state in war was characterised by an organic unity, which meant that the civilian population was as much part of the conflict – and, consequently, a key objective of military attacks – as the armed forces: 'The enemy nation's will to resist is subdued by the fact, *or threat*, of making life so unpleasant and difficult for the people that they will comply with your terms rather

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 17. Emphasis mine.

<sup>98</sup> Brooke-Popham as quoted in Meilinger, "Trenchard and 'Morale Bombing'," 263.

<sup>99</sup> This book was placed on the RAF recommended reading list and was considered a widely popular manuscript on air power. See, Tami Davis Biddle, "British and American Approaches to Strategic Bombing: Their Origins and Implementation in the World War II Combined Bomber Offensive," in *Airpower: Theory and Practice*, ed. John Gooch (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 100.

<sup>100</sup> Liddell Hart, *Paris, or the Future of War*, 36-37.

<sup>101</sup> Liddell Hart, *Current of War*, 57.

than endure this misery [of being bombed]'.<sup>102</sup> Hence, in presenting war as an activity that extends beyond the state's military apparatus and depends to the exertion of socio-political forces, air power theory framed the enemy's civilian population as one of the "vital centres" that strategic bombing should target. In fact, as Brooke-Popham's argument reveals, the population was portrayed as the quintessential vital centre: a nation's "will" inheres in its population precisely because it is a *civil* will to resist.

This view – that defenceless civilians were now intrinsically linked to the war effort and thus a key target for aerial bombing – was meticulously inculcated into subsequent RAF thinking and planning. In 1938 Air Commodore L. E. O. Charlton outlined the reasoning that underpinned strategic bombing in starkly familiar terms:

[H]ammer blows can be dealt by means of bomber aircraft at the heart of a country, on the very citadel itself where *the spirit of resistance lies* ... Air action, thus applied, in certain circumstances may so defeat civilian courage that a *popular* cry for peace at any price arises, and the Government deprived of the support on which it must needs rely in order to prosecute the war, has no option but to ask an armistice and accept what terms are given.<sup>103</sup>

### *Air Power's Moral Objective*

The air power theorists' position concerning the importance of the population in strategic bombing was shaped also by the fact that from the very outset their view of air power was dominated by 'a preoccupation with the "moral" effects versus "material" results of bombing'.<sup>104</sup> In the case of British theorists, George K. Williams notes, 'this preoccupation ... evolved into a widespread obsession'; an obsession that

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>103</sup> L. E. O. Charlton, G. T. Garratt and R. Fletcher, *The Air Defence of Britain* (London: Penguin Books, 1938), 18-19. Emphases mine.

<sup>104</sup> George K. Williams, *Biplanes and Bombsights: British Bombing in World War I* (Maxwell Airforce Base: Air University Press, 1999), xii.

not only affected the RAF's targeting policies but also became its predominant justification for pursuing them.<sup>105</sup>

As it happens, the institutional politics of airmen constituted a crucial factor in the development of this obsession. The independent status of the RAF was, as seen above, founded on Smuts' assertion that air power would prove to be an almost omnipotent instrument of war, which would wreak destruction on an enemy's industrial and populated areas. The problem with this prognostication, however, was that it did not hold up against the experience of employing long-range bombing during World War I. Following the war, quantitative assessments of the direct, material effects of British air raids commonly pointed to the very sobering conclusion that strategic bombing had been 'at best a secondary and very imperfect method of attack'.<sup>106</sup> More specifically, in the "General Material Damage" section of the British field survey, the surveyors wrote that it was 'very noteworthy how surprisingly little serious damage has been done throughout four years of war' and, in the case of factories, 'on no occasion has a works been forced to close down for more than a week as the direct result of bombing'.<sup>107</sup> Left as such, this kind of conclusion placed the newly formed service in a very precarious position. Though British surveys were severely edited before appearing as official reports (so that they would present a more favourable depiction of the destructiveness of air power) Smuts' vision of an independent air strategy was more convincing during the war than after.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>106</sup> As quoted in Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, 60.

<sup>107</sup> As quoted in Ibid., 58.

<sup>108</sup> In their initial format, these field surveys presented some very undesirable conclusions. They directly contradicted official proclamations that the government had made about strategic bombing for quite some time, and rendered the cost paid for it completely indefensible. To account for this discrepancy, the findings of the surveys were severely edited before being published in the Air Ministry's final bombing report. For example, while Major Erskine Childers – who was heading the field report for bombing damage in Belgium – initially conceded in his report that air raids were at best an inefficient strategic offensive, at its end he maintained that 'with the progress in air science that seems likely to continue, it will be possible in a few years ... for a powerful military nation ... to obliterate cities in a night and produce the stunning moral effect necessary to victory'. Even more so, *contra* the core message of most field surveys, the official verdict on British bombing as given by Command 100 – a 1919 Parliamentary paper – was that the 'effect, both morally and materially, of the raids on German territory carried out during the summer of 1918 can hardly be overestimated'. This inconsistency of initial surveys with final reports and

In order for RAF officers to maintain that their foundational claims possessed a measure of validity, they needed a shift in the narrative regarding the strategic impact of bombing. With all-destructive bombing no longer being a sustainable argument, air power theorists posited that even if the material effects of air attacks were limited, nonetheless its “moral effect” – that is, the psychological damage it inflicted on the morale of the enemy – remained devastating.<sup>109</sup> The significance of the “moral” dimension of bombing was also something that the post-war surveys seemingly verified; as Biddle notes, in its final conclusions, ‘the survey team stressed the moral effect (a term encompassing the “indirect effects”) of bombing far more than its material effect’.<sup>110</sup> Accordingly, these surveys reported that bombing had a “considerable” impact on disrupting the targeted cities’ rhythm of life and production and, more specifically, that the targeting of workmen’s houses during the summer of 1918 generated a “general state of nervousness”, in particular among children and women.<sup>111</sup> Under the leadership and pivotal influence of Trenchard, the RAF’s official policy line during the 1920s (and well into the 1930s) prioritised the “moral” over the “material” aspect of bombing; this institutional fixation on moral effects can be best seen in the way that statements such as ‘the moral effect produced by an aeroplane overhead is out of all proportion to the damage, itself considerable, which it can inflict’, appear recurrently in its 1922 *Operations Manual*.<sup>112</sup>

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parliamentary proclamations is suggestive of how bias about the effectiveness of air bombing was not only driven by military dogma alone, but also by the political and economic investment poured into it. For a detailed account on these reports see Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, 58-62; In addition, for an account of the findings of the U.S. field surveys and how they differed from the British surveys see Williams, *Biplanes and Bombsights*, 239-264.

<sup>109</sup> It should be noted that this was not a wholly new narrative. The notion that air attacks would terrorise targeted populations was already a prevalent theme in accounts of aerial bombing and, importantly, was fuelled by literary, journalistic and popular representations of bombing. However, while initially there was a sense that the terrorising effects of air attacks were equivalent to their material results, there was a re-adjustment in airmen’s evaluations such that “moral effect” was claimed to be disproportionately greater than the material damage created by bombing. For more on literary representations of all-destructive bombing, see Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*.

<sup>110</sup> Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, 59-60.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>112</sup> Air Ministry, *Operation Manual*, 62-63. See also pages, 18, 58, 60, 105, 129 and 133.

While the practice of “morale” bombing is a topic that I deal with in more detail in the following chapter, I want to point out three crucial implications that the concept of “moral effect” had on the articulation of air strategy. The first one concerns the way in which the vagueness of this concept allowed the RAF leadership to exaggerate the significance of aerial attacks without much fear of empirical contradiction.<sup>113</sup> A characteristic display of this kind of embellished claim can be seen in Trenchard’s famous proclamation that bombing should aim to inflict ‘the greatest moral effect possible’, because ‘[a]t present the moral effect of bombing stands undoubtedly to the material in proportion of 20 to 1’.<sup>114</sup> As one historian notes, Trenchard’s ratio was completely fictitious and ‘had no scientific or mathematical basis’.<sup>115</sup> However, despite the fact that he translated what was clearly a hunch into a numerical ratio, ‘Trenchard was able to use his “twenty to one” calculation to good effect: after the war, echoing proclamations of the moral effect appeared consistently in official RAF memoranda, policy statements, essays, lectures and examinations’.<sup>116</sup> Because of its intangible nature, moral effect did not lend itself to quantification, which meant that claims such as Trenchard’s could not have been easily disproven. Thus, the difficulty of accurately estimating the psychological impact of bombing was precisely – and paradoxically – what allowed Trenchard and his colleagues to assign to it a numerical value, which, while arbitrary, nonetheless gave the impression that some kind of objective or mathematical reasoning underpinned it.

A further implication is that air power theorists used the concept of “moral effect” to promote the idea that aerial warfare was a progressive development in the waging of war. Their argument was that the psychological impact of bombing proved clearly demonstrated that the bomber was a unique weapon, which could attack directly the main objective in war (the enemy’s will to resist). A ruthless bombing offensive that immediately affected that objective, they argued, was

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<sup>113</sup> Williams, *Biplanes and Bombsights*, 25.

<sup>114</sup> Trenchard as cited in *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>115</sup> Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, 48. Many historians have noted this tendency of Trenchard to use pseudo-scientific statements in order to promote his arguments for air power. It is for this reason that historian Malcolm Smith describes him as ‘a master of the wholly unfounded statistic’. Malcolm Smith, *British Air Strategy Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 61.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

markedly more efficient than previous strategic approaches which did so indirectly. In addition, their emphasis on the moral over the physical effects of bombing led these theorists to frame aerial warfare as not only more efficient, but also more humane and beneficial form of armed conflict.<sup>117</sup> They did so by arguing that aerial strategy was not based on killing and destruction but rather on demoralising and disruption.<sup>118</sup> 'After all', U.S. theorist Alexander de Seversky writes, 'corpses can't revolt [against their government], but millions of living people whose everyday existence is shattered as a result of systematic bombardment contribute to the general chaos, undermining morale and hastening the collapse of resistance'.<sup>119</sup> The notion that air power reduced the loss of life by terrorising rather than killing people was used by airmen as an enduring ethical justification for strategic bombing. In a meeting with his commanders in June 1943, General Henry H. Arnold of the U.S. Army Air Force emphasised that the bomber, 'when used with the proper degree of understanding, becomes, in effect, the most humane of all weapons'.<sup>120</sup> Arnold was not, of course, oblivious to what the "humaneness" of bombing truly comprised; two months earlier he had conveyed an altogether different message to members of his Air Staff:

[T]his is a brutal war and ... the way to stop the killing of civilians is to cause so much damage and destruction and death that the civilians will demand their government cease fighting. This does not mean that we are making civilians or civilian institutions a war objective, but we cannot "pull our punches" because some of them may get killed.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> It is noteworthy that Douhet understood the "humane" quality of aerial warfare to arise from precisely the fact that civilians will bear the brunt of air attacks, which, according to him, will mean that 'future wars ... may in the long run shed less blood'. Douhet, *Command of the Air*, 61.

<sup>118</sup> See, for example, Chapters 3 and 4 in John F. C. Fuller, *The Reformation of War* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1923).

<sup>119</sup> Alexander P. De Seversky, *Air Power: Key to Survival* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1952), 162.

<sup>120</sup> Henry H. Arnold as quoted in Mark Clodfelter, *Beneficial Bombing: The Progressive Foundations of American Air Power, 1917-1945* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 134.

<sup>121</sup> Henry H. Arnold as quoted in Ronald Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment: American Bombing in World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 62.

Hence, the false dichotomy of moral effects versus physical violence that was evoked in theoretical accounts of strategic bombing allowed for the erasure of what air power theorists knew, and openly admitted among themselves, to be the case: that the indiscriminate killing of civilians constitutes an inherent and inalienable aspect of “morale” bombing.

Finally, in prioritising the moral effects of bombing, air power theorists cemented the position of civilians as the main target of air attacks. As seen above, populated areas were thought to a key objective in strategic bombing. An emphasis on moral effects, however, meant that terrorising civilians was no longer taken to be an indirect consequence of strategic bombing, but rather its intended effect and explicit aim. Major General John F. C. Fuller was especially forthright in arguing that if one sought to undermine a nation’s morale, then the best military action to take was to attack its civilian population. In his book *The Reformation of War*, published in 1923, he contended that ‘all acts of war ultimately aim at creating a state of treachery in an enemy’, by which he meant reducing the enemy’s morale ‘to so low a point that he is willing to set aside his national existence or policy, and accept the will of his adversary’.<sup>122</sup> For Fuller, there was no question as to what was the most treacherous component of a nation:

In a besieged town or fortress, what human elements within it have, in the past, proved the most receptive to treachery? Undoubtedly the civil elements. The reason for this is self-apparent; soldiers are controlled by discipline, civilians by fear. Consequently, *the main targets of the moral attack are the civil inhabitants of the country attacked*, for if their will can be corrupted, however well disciplined may their soldiers and sailors be, their organization will become affected by the general rot which has undermined the stability of their government. A nation septic with revolution can no more wage an organised war than can a man, contorted with colic, shoot a snipe.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Fuller, *Reformation*, 105.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 105. Emphasis mine.

Fuller's depiction of civilians as both historically treacherous as well as naturally fearful effectively captures how British theorists, in particular, understood the notion of morale bombing to be inseparable from the practice of directly targeting and terrorising civilians. For them, the alleged psychological frailty of the general public meant that civilians were, *par excellence*, the "moral objective" of strategic bombing.<sup>124</sup>

## Conclusion

In the present chapter, I have offered an account of the emergence of air power theory as an object of military thought in the early twentieth century. I have paid particular attention to the broader context within which this theory was articulated, in order to highlight the ideological momentum that drove the development of strategic bombing and its subsequent institutionalisation in the form of military doctrine. I have presented, moreover, the content of that theory, and highlighted the specific ways in which air power theorists viewed air power as a fundamental rupture with conventional ways of fighting wars. What emerged out of these theorists' dogmatic belief in the bomber was a strategic doctrine of bombing that

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<sup>124</sup> It should be noted that Fuller's overt contempt of civilians exemplifies a more general tendency among air power theorists that considered civilians as a nation's chief weakness and, in the case of a war from the air, the main reason for its defeat. In many cases, this tendency was expressed in terms of racist or class prejudice against particular sections of society. L. E. O. Charlton, for instance, argued that during the German air attacks in World War I, '[t]he foreign folk in the crowded East End district were singularly liable to an unreasonable panic, particularly the preponderating Jewish element'. The moral frailty of foreigners was so great, Charlton claimed, that during air attacks 'bands of young aliens belonging to neutral or allied countries, shedding every vestige of manhood, would behave like animals of the wild, sometimes brutally trampling people to death in a mad, insensate rush for safety'. Similarly, Slessor thought that the stoppages in industrial production were the result of the working class' proclivity to run in fear whenever there were attacks from the air, since 'your toothpick worker will go to ground again, even if he has not already left the area which is more probable'. As Brett Holman notes, the message conveyed by this racist representation of the population was clear: 'no matter how strong British morale might be overall, the poor and the foreign were the nation's weakest link and in the next war could prove its downfall'. See, L. E. O. Charlton, *War Over England* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936), 13; Slessor as quoted in Smith, "Royal Air Force", 157; Brett Holman, *The Next War in the Air: Britain's Fear of the Bomber, 1908-1941* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 67.

reconfigured military force into a non-reciprocated ruthless offensive aimed at an enemy's "vital centres" and, more specifically, the terrorisation of its civilian population.

Why is the history of how air power theory emerged important, in the present? After all, for contemporary military writers such as Peter Faber, '[early] air theorists never succeeded in forcing the paradigm shift they wanted ... because the objectives the air strategists pursued represented, at least initially, "a bridge too far"'.<sup>125</sup> Others, like Robert F. Grattan, note that the 'strategic bombing theories of the interwar period were simply unrealistic', a utopian ideal that 'distorted the preparations for the Second World War'.<sup>126</sup> In the eyes of these writers, strategic bombing has been a work in progress and thus its history is best understood through the lessons of the wars that evolved its use; the usual case studies being the First and Second World Wars, Korea, Vietnam and the Gulf Wars. It is for this reason that, in evaluating the early theories of strategic bombing, John Pimlott cautions his reader:

What needs to be remembered before the validity of these ideas is examined in detail, is that in 1939 the theory of strategic bombing was just that, only a theory. It was based upon incomplete evidence from the First World War which had been taken to extremes by people intent upon achieving or maintaining air force independence, and had never been put into practice, so the problems and shortcomings were simply not known.<sup>127</sup>

Pimlott implies two things here: first, that the reason why pre-1939 theory of strategic bombing failed to work was solely because of airmen's lack of knowledge, and, second, that the experience of World War II dispelled at least some of their confusion and thus advanced the theory to the next level of its development. These historical accounts present air power theory as the product of a military rationality

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<sup>125</sup> Peter Faber, "Paradigm Lost", 22.

<sup>126</sup> Robert F. Grattan, *The Origins of Air War: The Development of Military Air Strategy in World War I* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2009), 212.

<sup>127</sup> John Pimlott, *Strategy & Tactics of Air Warfare* (Secaucus: Chartwell Books: 1979), 13.

which is progressively improving every time its knowledge is found wanting. As Grattan argues, '[m]ilitary thinking usually takes place within a structure in which logic and systematic problem solving are preferred to intuition', something which means that 'the uses of air power had been established and the strategies for its employment were emerging from the trial and error of the war years'.<sup>128</sup>

My contention, and this is a point that the entire chapter was working towards, is that this kind of historical approach leaves much to be desired. It is an approach that, to begin with, obscures the fact that military thinking does not occur in a discursive field solely confined to the institution of the military. As I have shown, air power theory emerged out of a more complex discursive network within which air power theorists were a key node, but not the only one. Just like air power theorists' arguments shaped broader narratives about strategic bombing, they were in turn informed by those narratives (particularly whenever those narratives reinforced the airmen's political agenda). In addition, a key assumption that underlies this evolutionary approach is that military scholarship always strives towards correcting its mistakes and hence improving its epistemic position. This assumption becomes questionable once one recalls Slessor's revealing remark that for air power theorists strategic bombing constituted an article of faith rather than a concept that they would readily abandon if proven wrong.

Another issue with how contemporary military writers seek to present a "progress" of air power is that they discard previous interpretations of strategic bombing because it does not fit their current mode of framing aerial warfare. Consider, for example, Colin S. Gray's attempt 'to tell the truth about contemporary airpower' by equipping himself with 'a fearless commitment to burn such important fallacies [about air power] as can be located and targeted'.<sup>129</sup> Gray's "bonfire of fallacies" incinerates something more than fallacies, however. It also silences ways of interpreting the violence of bombing that do not necessarily fit existing strategic projects that govern the use of air power. For example, if "morale" bombing is not a prevalent principle in contemporary doctrines of air power, this does not mean that

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<sup>128</sup> Grattan, *Origins of Air War*, 201 and 216.

<sup>129</sup> Colin S. Gray, "Understanding Airpower: Bonfire of the Fallacies," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (2008): 44-47.

it also should cease to be a lens through which to understand, evaluate and criticise the terrorism of current regimes of violence from the air. I develop this line of argument in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

Finally, these writers invariably base their narrative about air power on a very selective historical outlook, which contains only what they see as evolutionary moments in the development of bombing. Because of this blinkered view, they can claim quite confidently – as Pimlott does – that up to 1939 air power theory was “only a theory” that “had never been put into practice”. The historiographical eurocentrism that underlies claims such as these effaces how the bomber was a key technology of violence and coercion in the exercise of colonial power during the “interwar” period. In fact, as Hippler notes, the colonial milieu is the birthplace of air power, since ‘bombing from the air did not start in Europe but in the Libyan desert, before striking the Middle East, Waziristan, Africa, the Philippines, and Nicaragua ... before European cities were transformed into fields of ruins, there was the colonial matrix of total war’.<sup>130</sup> Hence, the notion that for twenty years following World War I, strategic bombing existed merely in the plane of ideas is misguided, not least because it is precisely its deployment in colonial contexts that provided the cornerstone for the development of those ideas. Situating air power theory within its colonial history is, therefore, necessary in order to understand critically how air power constitutes an instrument of terror and destruction. It is to this task that I turn in the following chapter.

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<sup>130</sup> Hippler, *Governing from the Skies*, xiii.

## **CHAPTER 3: THE POLICE FORCE OF CIVILISATION: COLONIAL AIR BOMBING**

### **Introduction**

In the present part of the thesis I am developing a historical account of drone warfare. I have started this account in the previous chapter, which presented a critical inquiry of the emergence of air power in military discourse of the early twentieth century. More specifically, I demonstrated that the shared conviction among air power theorists that air power posed a radically new paradigm of war was intrinsically bound up with their institutional and ideologically driven objectives at the time. Seeking to establish – or, in the case of the RAF, preserve – an autonomous air service, early air power theorists argued that air power signified a rupture with traditional conceptions and practices of war in three fundamental ways. First, air power was an application of armed forces that adhered to a principle of a continuous attack which took the form of a ruthless bombing offensive. Second, air power effectively erased the battlefield as the principal site of military intervention and instead brought armed attacks to bear on the enemy's populated centres. And, third, the strategic value of bombing was that it could destroy the enemy's will to fight by creating a "moral effect" that would disrupt life on the ground and terrorise civilians to such an extent that they would force their government to sue for peace.

In this chapter, I discuss how these theories and arguments concerning air power, its relation to the targeted population and the changing nature of warfare were translated from an article of faith into a programme for colonial control and policing. There are two reasons why I focus on the colonial exercise of air power in this chapter. First, I do so in order to counter the claim of military historians, mentioned in the previous chapter, that the doctrine of strategic bombing developed between the two World Wars was 'only a theory' that 'had never been put to practice' before

the start of World War II.<sup>1</sup> This kind of claim is not only found in military-produced histories but is also representative of a broader historiographical trend.<sup>2</sup> As Mark Neocleous observes, ‘the hold of WWII on the political imagination is a strong one’, so that when it comes to thinking about how the world is shaped by air power even ‘those seeking to grasp the *longue durée* of air power usually go back to WWII and no further’.<sup>3</sup> This fascination with World War II, however, distracts attention from the fact that aerial attacks had already been a staple feature of colonial warfare. Indeed, as Priya Satia writes, it was in the colonies that the ‘British first practiced, if never perfected, the technology of bombardment, there that they first attempted to fully theorize the value of airpower as an independent arm of the military’.<sup>4</sup> The colonial tactics of air power thus mark the unspoken condition of possibility of the subsequent bombing projects which capture the awareness of Eurocentric historical narratives. Second, in not treating colonial air policing as a marginal note in the history of warfare, I suggest that it constitutes a violent precedent for contemporary uses of armed drones. As such, it is a tradition of armed violence that can be cited as a historic counter-example to the dominant representation of drone violence as a practice of targeted killings. Though this chapter does not engage in a comparative analysis of colonial air policing and drone bombing, the connection between them features centrally in the following chapter where I interrogate the notion that drone warfare is a radically new form of state violence.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I offer a brief account of the historical context of colonial air policing. I indicate that while the use

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<sup>1</sup> John Pimlott, *Strategy & Tactics of Air Warfare* (Secaucus: Chartwell Books: 1979), 13.

<sup>2</sup> For historical accounts that place the World War II as the starting point of the practice of strategic bombing in war see John Dower, *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor, Hiroshima, 9-11, Iraq* (New York: Norton/New Press, 2010); Andreas Huyssen, “Air War Legacies: From Dresden to Baghdad,” *New German Critique* 90 (2003): 163-176; A. C. Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities: Is the Targeting of Civilians in War ever Justified?* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006); Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939-1945* (London: Penguin Books, 2013); Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (London: Cornell University Press, 1996); Frans P. B. Osinga and Mark P. Roorda, “From Douhet to Drones, Air Warfare and the Evolution of Targeting,” in *Targeting: The Challenges of Modern Warfare*, eds Paul A. L. Duchaine, Michael N. Schmitt and Frans P. B. Osinga, 27-76 (Hague: Asser Press, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Mark Neocleous, *War Power, Police Power* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 140.

<sup>4</sup> Priya Satia, “The Defense of Inhumanity: Air Control and the British Idea of Arabia,” *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 1 (2006): 16.

of aerial bombing for imperial domination was common practice amongst European powers, in the case of Britain and the Middle East air power was designed and implemented as a comprehensive policing apparatus, thus making the RAF the principal institution charged with the controlling of imperial territories. The second section focuses on how air policing was underpinned by the notion that warfare in the colonies was substantially different from “normal” wars. By reiterating a pre-existing racialised conception of colonial populations, the RAF called for a differential application of military force – air policing entailed an intensification and interminable extension of bombing. Finally, in the third section, I take a closer look at the violent tactics involved in coercing targeted populations into obeying the imperial mandate. The description of life under colonial air power draws a picture that is starkly similar to the one offered by the testimonies of victims of drone strikes.

### **Colonial Bombing: The Truncheon of Civilisation**

In the years between World War I and World War II, air power was used in ‘the formal empires of the European powers’ and also in ‘the informal dependencies of the United States, in mandates and protectorates, in the territories of the white dominions and in the margins of successor states’.<sup>5</sup> While in this chapter I focus on British air policing, it should be emphasised at the outset that bombing colonial populations was common practice for other European empires such as Spain, France and Italy. It is worth briefly reviewing some episodes in this history of colonial bombing before moving to the British case, as they exemplify how, following World War I, air power became a ubiquitous instrument of imperial domination.

During the Rif War of 1921-1926, the Spanish imperial forces employed air power in Morocco, with Primo de Rivera, the air-minded leader of Spain, ordering the African Air Corps to undertake a systematic bombing campaign using poison gas

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<sup>5</sup> David Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 208.

and incendiary bombs to target crops, livestock, markets and villages.<sup>6</sup> When France joined the Spanish side later in the conflict it used similar tactics, something that French newspapers rushed to defend by arguing that the use of poison gas did not contravene the recently ratified Geneva Convention (1925) because the air attacks were aimed against colonial rebels.<sup>7</sup> In 1925, the French forces also carried out a ruthless bombing offensive in Syria, where ‘massive bombardments of villages in the Druze region were followed by attacks on the towns of Hama and Suwayda’.<sup>8</sup> Subsequent French attacks on Damascus killed more than 2,400 civilians, ‘with uncounted more dead in attacks on rural areas’.<sup>9</sup> The French justified their indiscriminate use of bombing by asserting that what they were conducting in Syria was a “police action” targeting “bandits” and that such bombing attacks was part of their “guardianship” duty of civilising the “underdeveloped” Syrians.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, aerial bombing was a central feature of Italian military interventions in areas such as Libya and Ethiopia.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the colonisation of Ethiopia by the Mussolini regime was, in effect, an aerially enforced process. From December 1935 to 1936, the Italian *Regia Aeronautica* engaged in a massive bombing offensive against the Ethiopian population in which explosives as well as mustard gas and tear

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<sup>6</sup> According to Richard P. Hallion, in the space of five months the Spanish forces dropped a total of 24,104 bombs on rebel communities. The extensiveness and intensity of bombing attacks was so great that the Riffi forces developed a counter-tactic of picking up bombs that had failed to detonate, disassembling them and using them as booby traps against the Spanish ground forces. See Richard P. Hallion, *Strike from the Sky: The History of Battlefield Air Attack, 1910-1945* (Tuscaloosa: Alabama University Press, 1989), 67-68; and C. R. Pennell, *A Country with a Government and a Flag: The Rif War in Morocco 1921-1926* (Wisbech: Menas Press, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> It was not just right-wing newspapers that took this position but also leftist newspapers such as *Le Radical*, *L’Oeuvre* and *L’Ere nouvelle*. *Le Radical* wrote that any means of warfare should be used in the Rif war for ‘[i]t is necessary to tie up dangerous animals’; similarly, *L’Ere nouvelle’s* journalists authored nine articles demanding a massive aerial bombing. Quoted in David H. Slavin, “The French Left and the Rif War, 1924-25: Racism and the Limits of Internationalism,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 26, no. 1 (1991): 22.

<sup>8</sup> Beau Grosscup, *Strategic Terror: The Politics and Ethics of Aerial Bombardment* (London: Zed Books, 2006), 56.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 56. See also Quincy Wright, “The Bombardment of Damascus,” *American Journal of International Law* 20, no. 2 (1926): 263-280.

<sup>10</sup> Grosscup, *Strategic Terror*, 57.

<sup>11</sup> The first ever aerial bombing attack took place in Libya on 1 November 1911, when Lieutenant Giulio Cavotti of the Italian army dropped a hand-held bomb out of his monoplane on the town of Tagiura below. Neocleous, *War Power Police Power*, 143.

gas bombs were used.<sup>12</sup> In an unsuccessful attempt to appeal to the League of Nations, Haile Selassie, the Ethiopian emperor, protested that the Italian aggression involved bombing campaigns in which 'soldiers, women, children, cattle, rivers, lakes and fields were drenched with this never ending rain of death'.<sup>13</sup> As Beau Grosscup writes, the fascist regime's bombing of Ethiopia was thought to show 'how greatly the application of science to war had widened the gulf between the forces of civilized and uncivilized nations'.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, despite not having formal colonies, the United States also employed air power to suppress rebellions in its "sphere of influence" in Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Nicaragua throughout the "interwar" period.<sup>15</sup> The centrality of air attacks for the U.S. involvement in Nicaragua between 1912 and 1934 was emphasised by military historian Lejeune Cummins who noted that '[p]erhaps the only subject regarding the American intervention ... upon which all authorities are able to agree is the efficacy with which the marines employed the air power at their disposal'.<sup>16</sup> In this context, far from being a uniquely British practice, the use of air power for the repression of colonial populations was, as historian David Omissi observes, 'an almost universal feature of imperial domination between the two world wars'.<sup>17</sup> The appeal of air forces as an economical 'means of striking at rebels without risk of reply' was widespread among European powers, which 'maintained air forces in their overseas dominions and their bombers were used against those who actively challenged colonial power'.<sup>18</sup>

But, despite the commonalities between British air policing and that of other imperial powers, the former was distinctive in at least one significant way. While the

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<sup>12</sup> For a detailed analysis of the Italian use of chemical warfare in this conflict see Lina Grip and John Hart, "The Use of Chemical Weapons in the 1935-1936 Italo-Ethiopian War," *SIRPI Arms Control and Non-proliferation Programme* (2009); and Giorgio Rochat, "The Italian Air Force in the Ethiopian War (1935-1936)," in *Italian Colonialism*, eds Ruth Ben-Chiat and Mia Fuller, 37-46 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Grosscup, *Strategic Terror*, 56.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>15</sup> James S. Corum and Wray R. Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 11-50.

<sup>16</sup> Lejeune Cummins, *Quijote on a Burro: Sandino and the Marines, A Study in the Formulation of Foreign Policy* (Mexico City: La Impresora Azteca, 1958), 54.

<sup>17</sup> Omissi, *Air Power*, 208.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

other empires used air power as an auxiliary tool to augment traditional methods that involved army troops, 'Britain designed a new system of imperial policing known as "air control" and applied it in Iraq', a territory that the British had wrested from the Ottoman empire following the end of World War I.<sup>19</sup> As Omissi notes, the substitution of conventional means of policing with aircraft 'was the product of a particular financial, military and political conjuncture unique to the British Empire in the Middle East'.<sup>20</sup> A central element to the British air policing scheme was the institutional politics of the RAF – discussed in the previous chapter. For senior air officers, a permanent role in the colonies was crucial in the continued survival of the RAF, which was challenged following the end of World War I.<sup>21</sup> In 1918, the Air Staff released a memorandum emphasising that the 'Royal Air Force is an Imperial service' and its role was to 'be the first line of defence of the British Empire'.<sup>22</sup>

In their attempt to guarantee a peacetime role for the RAF, senior air officers found a staunch ally in Winston Churchill.<sup>23</sup> During his time as Secretary of State for War and Air, Churchill made clear that he viewed the nascent air service as key to controlling the vast expanses in Mesopotamia.<sup>24</sup> For Churchill, if the British Empire was to respond to its increased commitments in Iraq it needed to find solutions beyond traditional means of policing. Following major revolts in Palestine and Iraq through the summer of 1920 and running into 1921, Churchill organised a conference in Cairo in March 1921 to discuss and clarify imperial policy in the area.<sup>25</sup> At the conference, the Air Staff drafted a report which noted that 'the efficacy of the Royal Air Force as an independent arm should be put to proof by the transference to it of primary responsibility for the maintenance of order in some area of the Middle East, preferably Mesopotamia'.<sup>26</sup> Plans to promote an increased

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<sup>19</sup> Priya Satia, "The Defense of Inhumanity," 16.

<sup>20</sup> Omissi, *Air Power*, 208.

<sup>21</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>22</sup> As cited in Neocleous, *War Power Police Power*, 142.

<sup>23</sup> Jafna L. Cox, "A Splendid Training Ground: The Importance to the Royal Air Force of its Role in Iraq, 1919-32," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 13, no. 2 (1985): 157-158.

<sup>24</sup> Jeffery A. Rudd, "Origins of the Transjordan Frontier Force," *Middle Eastern Studies* 26, no. 2 (1990): 161-163.

<sup>25</sup> For a more detailed account on the 1920 revolts in Middle East and the British response to them see Mark Jacobsen, "'Only by the Sword': British Counter-Insurgency in Iraq, 1920," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 2, no. 2 (1991): 323-363.

<sup>26</sup> As cited in Omissi, *Air Power*, 25.

role of air forces in the colonies had already been underway before the Cairo conference, however. The fact that the French had made use of air power, in the form of reconnaissance and bombing, in their conquest of Morocco during 1912-1914 was not lost on RAF officers or its political supporters. In 1914, Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, commissioned a report suggesting that aircraft should be deployed in order to suppress unrest in Somaliland.<sup>27</sup> In the same year, Major Arthur Tremearne commented on the potential advantages of using air power in colonies:

I suppose in a few years aeroplanes or airships will be used in West Africa. They would be invaluable against hill pagans, and the terror caused by them would probably do away with any necessity for bloodshed. If one were stationed in each province, of Northern Nigeria, say, and a proper system of signalling instituted, help would always be at hand for the residents in the out stations. The initial cost even now would not be more than the W.A.F.F. vote, and the saving thereafter would almost equal the grant-in-aid, for the forces would be reduced to small flying detachments.<sup>28</sup>

This passage summarises some of the key points on the basis of which advocates of air policing subsequently made their case at the Cairo Conference of 1921. First, air power was presented by its advocates as a much cheaper solution in maintaining control of the vast expanses of Mesopotamia. For the RAF, the 1920 bombing campaign against the disobedient Mohammed Abdille Hassan – who the British derisively called the “Mad Mullah” of Somaliland – provided a case in point of the financial benefit of using air power instead of army troops.<sup>29</sup> The intervention in Somaliland cost the British colonial office 77,000 pounds worth of bombs – a miniscule fraction of the several million that the army had requested for suppressing the rebellion.<sup>30</sup> Also cited as a success were bombing campaigns undertaken for

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<sup>27</sup> David Killingray, “‘A Swift Agent of Government’: Air Power in British Colonial Africa, 1916-1939,” *Journal of African History* 25, no. 4 (1984): 429.

<sup>28</sup> Tremearne as cited in *ibid.*, 429.

<sup>29</sup> Randal Gray, “Bombing the ‘Mad Mullah’ – 1920,” *The RUSI Journal* 125, no. 4 (1980): 41-47.

<sup>30</sup> Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, trans. Linda Haverty Rugg (London: Granta Books, 2012), 101.

“pacification purposes” targeting Jalalabad and Kabul in Afghanistan and Waziristan (1919),<sup>31</sup> the town of Enzeli in Iran (1920)<sup>32</sup> and civilian populations in Transjordan (1920).<sup>33</sup> These were considered to show that the RAF could do the work of policing faster and cheaper than army forces.<sup>34</sup> Military aviation was framed, in this way, as a weapon ‘with the near-miraculous property of lengthening the arm of government whilst shortening its purse’.<sup>35</sup> In this context, Churchill and Trenchard convinced policy makers at the Cairo Conference that the enormous financial cost of controlling the newly acquired British mandate over Iraq could be alleviated by making the RAF the principal institution of policing Mesopotamia.<sup>36</sup>

Second, and related to the above, the substitution claim was also based on the argument that the independent use of air power would have been especially suitable in wide open spaces like Sudan, Mesopotamia and the North-West Frontier. As Satia notes, the topographical characteristics of Iraq were deemed as a crucial reason as to why a system of air control should have been implemented there: ‘its presumed flatness promised many landing grounds, little cover to insurgents, and the possibility of “radiating” British power throughout the country from a handful of

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<sup>31</sup> See Christopher M. Wyatt, “Change and Discontinuity: War and Afghanistan, 1904-1924,” *Action Affairs* 47, no. 3 (2016): 375-379.

<sup>32</sup> See Stephen J. Rockel, “Wedding Massacres and the War in Afghanistan,” in *Theatres of Violence: Massacre Mass Killing and Atrocity throughout History*, eds Phillip Dwyer and Lyndall Ryan (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012), 273.

<sup>33</sup> See Grosscup, *Strategic Terror*, 55.

<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that this evaluation of the outcome of those expeditions was contested by senior members of the War Office. In particular, Field Marshall Henry Wilson, the Chief of Imperial General Staff, voiced his concern over the implementation of an air control scheme for the policing of British overseas territories. Even though Wilson was keen to see the army relieved of the burden of occupying newly acquired territories like Iraq, he remained wholly unconvinced that Mesopotamia could be ruled by nothing more than ‘[h]ot Air, Aeroplanes and Arabs’. He argued that a policy of “control without occupation” was fundamentally counterproductive and would end up being more expensive because the violence and turmoil inflicted by air bombers would eventually make the deployment of ground troops necessary for the restoration of imperial authority. For Wilson, the ardent hopes of the RAF leadership that aircraft could prove a sustainable political weapon were entirely misguided: ‘air power’, he posited, ‘provides only a means of propaganda or an instrument of terrorism’. Wilson as cited in Keith Jeffery, *Field Marshall Sir Henry Wilson: A Political Soldier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 251.

<sup>35</sup> Charles Townshend, “‘Civilization and Frightfulness’: Air Control in the Middle East Between the Wars,” in *Warfare, Diplomacy and Politics: Essays in Honour of A. J. P. Taylor*, ed. Chris Wrigley (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986), 143.

<sup>36</sup> For a more detailed historical analysis of the 1921 Cairo Conference see Omissi, *Air Power*, 23-28.

fittingly spartan bases'.<sup>37</sup> When in 1920 the General Staff of the Army professed its inability to garrison the territorial expanses of Mesopotamia, Churchill's immediate response was to contact Trenchard to ask whether the RAF was prepared to assume the responsibility of policing Iraq. Not waiting for Trenchard's reply, Churchill followed up with another note where he detailed his ideas for controlling the area with

a series of defended areas in which air bases could be securely established. In these air bases, strong aerial forces could be maintained in safety and efficiency. An ample system of landing grounds judiciously selected would enable these air forces to operate in every part of the [mandate] and to enforce control, now here, now there, without the need of maintaining long lines of communication eating up troops and money.<sup>38</sup>

In Churchill's view air power was the perfect instrument for homogenising British administration, for it made possible, with little cost, the extension of imperial presence even into the most marginal and inaccessible areas of the empire. The Air Staff assured Churchill that his belief in the RAF was not misplaced, by emphasising the ubiquitous nature of air power and claiming that 'the speed and range of aircraft makes it practicable to keep a whole country under more or less constant surveillance'.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, exponents of the air control scheme emphasised the psychological properties of air attacks in order to argue that the use of aircraft would be less destructive and violent than traditional methods of policing. The doctrinal idea that the "moral effect" of bombing far outweighed its physical effects was seen to adapt perfectly to the principle of "minimum force" that underpinned the policy debates

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<sup>37</sup> Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain's Covert Empire in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 241.

<sup>38</sup> Churchill as quoted in Townshend, "Civilization and Frightfulness," 145. In his bibliographical notes Townshend writes that this memo from Churchill to Trenchard 'was clearly a very personal proposal' and that 'the War office later disclaimed all knowledge of the note'. See *ibid.*, 160.

<sup>39</sup> As cited in *ibid.*, 146.

over strategies of colonial control in mandatory Iraq.<sup>40</sup> As historian Townshend writes, a central element ‘in the pictures sketched by the RAF for political and public consumption’ was the notion that ‘the short, sharp shock administered by air action was the most humane form of pacification’, because the primary objective was not to slaughter and destroy but to ‘make life a burden’, which would in turn force targeted populations into submission. Churchill was particularly eager to point out that air action could take a non-lethal – and thus, in his eyes, a more humane – form. During the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, he expressed his bewilderment over ‘this squeamishness about the use of gas’, for he saw no reason why chemical warfare could not be adopted as a permanent method of policing the colonies.<sup>41</sup> Churchill explained that

[i]t is sheer affectation to lacerate a man with the poisonous fragment of a bursting shell and to boggle at making his eyes water by means of lachrymatory gas. I am strongly in favour of using poisoned gas against uncivilised tribes. The moral effect should be so good that the loss of life should be reduced to a minimum. It is not necessary to use only the most deadly gasses: gasses can be used which cause great inconvenience and would spread a lively terror and yet would leave no serious permanent effects on most of those affected.<sup>42</sup>

Churchill’s conviction that chemical warfare, even if it was prohibited by international law, would prove to be an effective tactic that ought to be used against colonial populations was echoed by Air Staff reports, which noted that gas shells used against rebels in Mesopotamia in 1920 created an ‘excellent moral effect’.<sup>43</sup>

In framing the violence of bombing principally in terms of moral effects, advocates of air policing placed themselves in a position from which to defend their

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<sup>40</sup> Captain David Willard Parsons, “British Air Control: A Model for the Application of Air Power in Low-Intensity Conflict,” *Air University Maxwell AFB AL School of Advanced Airpower Studies* (1997), available at <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a329097.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> Churchill as cited in Miguel de Larrinaga, “(Non)-lethality and War: Tear Gas as a Weapon of Governmental Intervention,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 9, no. 3 (2016): 522.

<sup>42</sup> Churchill as cited in *ibid.*, 522.

<sup>43</sup> Townshend, “‘Civilization and Frightfulness,’” 148.

claim that the RAF should be made into the main institution for the imperial control of Mesopotamia. In the eyes of men like Churchill and Trenchard, the non-lethal effects of morale bombing was proof that air power was not all-destructive but could instead be a means that would “pacify” the indigenous population by enforcing a regime of frightfulness. In theory, then, the concept of “control without occupation” would end up involving less violence than its traditional alternative, while at the same time being more efficient and cheaper in constructing and maintaining imperial order. But this was the case only in theory, for the duality of moral/material effects on which the RAF based its rhetoric of “humane” air policing abstracted from the fact that in practice there was no distinction between the two. Indeed, as Townshend observes, in order for air policing to create the potent moral effect that its advocates credited it with, it ‘would have to be cemented at the outset by exemplary violence’.<sup>44</sup> As I show in the remainder of this chapter, the idea that the mere presence of aircraft would ‘encourage the lawless to settle down and learn civilised ways’ was intrinsically bound up with practices of bombing that slaughtered, destroyed, impoverished and terrorised the population on the ground.<sup>45</sup>

### **“Aircraft in Warfare against an Uncivilised Enemy”**

In the previous section, I offered a brief account of the historical background of colonial air policing. While most imperial powers adopted air power as a means to enforcing their rule in colonial territories, I indicated how the British air control scheme applied in Iraq after 1921 was unique in that it was designed as a *comprehensive* policing system. Focusing on the British air control debates, I discussed some of the key claims on which the RAF and its supporters based their argument for air substitution. As I have shown, the notion that the principal effect of bombing was its “moral effect” was central to RAF’s contention that air power made for a legitimate, efficient and, indeed, humane alternative for policing imperial

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 147.

provinces. Finally, I concluded by pointing out that this differentiation between moral effects and material destruction was not reflected in the actual practice of aerial bombing where the two were inseparable from one another.

In the following two sections, I aim to interrogate this claim of “humane” air policing. Specifically, the present section demonstrates that air policing was, in fact, doctrinally framed as a practice that required a more extensive and rigorous use of armed violence than “conventional warfare”. This differential application of military force was not something introduced by air power – colonial warfare already presupposed an unrestrained approach to military action against indigenous populations. I show that this approach, which the concept and practice of “small wars” exemplifies, was exercised against the backdrop of a racialized profiling of colonial subjects; a profiling that the RAF employed in its theorisation and implementation of air policing. I continue in the next section with a discussion concerning the specific air tactics deployed in the pacification of colonial populations.

### *A Different Kind of Warfare*

The idea that wars in the colonies made necessary a departure from the conventional principles governing warfare was not specific to air control but instead characteristic of colonial policing more generally. In 1852, George Cathcart, then the Governor of the Cape Colony, wrote that while a “regular” war between states ‘may be terminated by the surrender or capitulation of the hostile sovereign’, the suppression of rebellions in colonies required further that ‘the refractory subjects of the ruling power must all be chastised and subdued’.<sup>46</sup> This emphasis on the more extensive scope of colonial wars was also expressed by Colonel C. E. Callwell in his influential book *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, originally published in 1896.<sup>47</sup> Printed by Her Majesty’s Stationary Office as a semi-official doctrine, *Small*

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<sup>46</sup> Cathcart as cited in Charles E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principle and Practice* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1906), 41.

<sup>47</sup> The first edition of *Small Wars* was published in 1896 and then got revised and reprinted into second and third editions in 1899 and 1906. The 1899 edition added the insight provided by the French expeditions in Antananarivo and Madagascar, the crushing of insurgencies in Rhodesia and other campaigns in Cuba, the Punjab frontier (1897-1898),

*Wars* is thought to be a seminal study of British colonial warfare and, as historian Daniel Whittingham writes, Callwell often features as ‘the first in a line of succession of theorist-practitioners, including Charles Gwynn, Robert Thompson, and Frank Kitson’.<sup>48</sup>

According to Callwell, “small wars” signifies a category of warfare that is subdivided into three parts: ‘campaigns of conquest or annexation, campaigns for the suppression of insurrections or lawlessness or for the settlement of conquered or annexed territory, and campaigns undertaken to wipe out an insult, to avenge a wrong, or to overthrow a dangerous enemy’.<sup>49</sup> He emphasises that the epithet “small” used to describe this type of wars has ‘in reality no particular connection with the scale on which any campaign may be carried out’ but instead denotes operations ‘against irregular, or comparatively speaking irregular, forces’.<sup>50</sup> In agreement with Cathcraft’s differentiation between conventional and colonial warfare, Callwell also posits that the “irregularity” of the enemy requires a shift in strategy:

The main points of difference between small wars and regular campaigns ... are that, in the former, the beating of the hostile armies is not necessarily the main object even if such armies exist, that moral effect is often far more important than material success, and that the operations

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Sudan as well as the U.S. intervention in the Philippines. The 1906 edition comprised, most significantly, the lessons Callwell drew from the Boer war (1899-1902), which included the British use of scorched-earth measures that displaced Boer women and children into concentration camps in order to separate the guerrillas from the population. See Daniel Whittingham, “‘Savage Warfare’: C. E. Callwell, the Roots of Counter-Insurgency, and the Nineteenth Century Context,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, no. 4-5 (2012): 593.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 592. For more detailed analyses of *Small Wars*, which also situate it within the broader military-produced literature on counterinsurgency see Laleh Khalili, *Time in the Shadows: Confinement in Counterinsurgency* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 11-44; Ian F. W. Beckett, “Another British Way in Warfare: Charles Callwell and Small Wars,” in *Victorians at War: New Perspectives*, ed. Ian F. W. Beckett, 89-102 (Chippenham: Society for Army Historical Research, Special Publication 16, 2007); and Alexander Alderson, “Britain,” in *Understanding Counterinsurgency: Doctrine, Operations and Challenges*, eds Thomas Rid and Thomas Keaney (London: Routledge, 2010), 28-45.

<sup>49</sup> Callwell, *Small Wars*, 22.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 21.

are sometimes limited to committing havoc which the laws of regular warfare do not sanction.<sup>51</sup>

In this context, “small wars” signify a type of warfare where strategic ends are not achieved by the defeat of enemy troops. For Callwell, the status of the enemy – as the recalcitrant and “uncivilised” subject of the empire – means that colonial warfare requires something more than mere victory: “The enemy must not only be beaten. He must be beaten thoroughly”.<sup>52</sup> He continues by arguing that the imperative to pulverise the colonial subjects rather than merely defeat them completely redefines the rules of military engagement. Callwell notes that ‘the theory of attack when regular troops are pitted against irregulars, differs fundamentally from the theory of attack designed to meet the case of great operations between armies of the first class’.<sup>53</sup> While on the ‘European battle-field the end to be attained in attack is ... to drive the enemy out of his position’, he notes that ‘in combat with irregular warriors something more than this is wanted’, because driving away the insurgents from their positions ‘rarely has any intrinsic importance of its own’ apart from ‘clearing the way for further advance’.<sup>54</sup> Unlike traditional warfare, Callwell observes, the essence of small wars is not to cease military action when the enemy retreats. Instead, ‘what is wanted is a big casualty list in the hostile ranks’ for if colonial subjects ‘have been brought up to the scratch of accepting battle, they must feel what battle against a disciplined army means’.<sup>55</sup>

According to Callwell’s understanding, therefore, a key difference between “traditional” and “small” wars is that in the case of the latter the exercise of military violence does not stop after the insurgents sue for peace. ‘Expeditions to put down revolt’, he writes, ‘are not put in motion merely to bring about a temporary cessation of hostility’ but their ‘purpose is to ensure a lasting peace’.<sup>56</sup> In the colonial context, peace thus becomes the continuation of war with the same means – a punitive process intended to render imperial domination over colonial subjects absolute.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 151-152.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 41-42.

Callwell comments that the extent and intensity of this excessive use of armed violence is predicated on the civilisational status of the native populations. Thus, he writes, the demonstration of the empire's power to punish takes different forms depending on whether it is undertaken 'against a savage race swayed by a despotic sovereign', 'gatherings of independent clans' or a 'semi-civilised state'.<sup>57</sup> In case there is not a ruling authority driving the insurrectionist movement and the rebel 'cannot be touched in his patriotism or his honour' then 'regular troops are forced to resort to cattle lifting and village burning and [in this way] the war assumes an aspect which may shock the humanitarian'.<sup>58</sup> The 'destruction of crops and stores of grain of the enemy' is, for Callwell, 'another way of carrying out hostilities'.<sup>59</sup> This tactic of burning the tribesmen's food supplies, he observes, creates a greater moral effect than taking their livestock, 'for while they appreciate the principle that the victor is entitled to the spoils, wanton damage tends to embitter their feeling of enmity'.<sup>60</sup> Ultimately, Callwell reasons, the necessity to carry out these brutal measures lies with the native populations: 'The most satisfactory way of bringing such foes to reason is by the rifle and sword, for they understand this mode of warfare and respect it. Sometimes ... their villages must be demolished and their crops and granaries destroyed'.<sup>61</sup>

A similar understanding of colonial warfare to Callwell's "small wars" can be found in the RAF doctrine. The first chapter of the 1922 *Operations Manual* explains that the principles of warfare are not to be applied universally. Rather, the application of these principles depends on the particular circumstances of the wartime situation, and the value of military thought 'depends largely on a knowledge of human nature, and how to handle it to the best advantage'.<sup>62</sup> The precise meaning of this statement is clarified in the last chapter of the manual, entitled "Aircraft in Warfare against an Uncivilised Enemy", which instructs that 'campaigns against savages, the armament, tactics and characteristics of the enemy

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>60</sup> Callwell observes that burning grain stores is even worse for indigenous populations than destroying their homes since 'the dwellings of these races can be reconstructed easily while their food supplies, if destroyed, cannot be replaced'. Ibid., 41.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>62</sup> Air Ministry, *Royal Air Force Operations Manual* (London: Air Ministry, 1922), 3.

... demand that the normal application of the principles of regular warfare be considerably modified', a modification 'such as *experience* has shown to be necessary'.<sup>63</sup> The last statement's invocation of past experience indicates the continuity between the air doctrine and previous frameworks of colonial warfare.

Indeed, much like Callwell, air doctrinaires present the "irregularity" of insurgents as the principal reason as to why campaigns against "uncivilised" enemies signify a different kind of war. The *Operations Manual* initially explains this irregularity in tactical terms, as a matter of the insurgent forces fighting in a manner fundamentally different from regular troops. The manual notes that the tribesman is characterised by 'his extreme tactical mobility': '[h]e is capable of assembling and dispersing in small groups. His clothing and equipment rendering him hard to locate in rough country; inconspicuous concentration at any point is easy to him'.<sup>64</sup> Hence, speed and elusiveness are presented as defining features of insurgent forces, which allow them to execute surprise attacks on imperial troops, inflicting heavy casualties and taking little loss, and then suddenly to retreat. It is important to note how, in this instance, the air doctrine employs this tactical portrayal of insurgent forces as a way to present air power as the most appropriate instrument to use against them. 'The most mobile of savage levies', the doctrine asserts, 'cannot compete with aircraft' and further 'they are dealing with a weapon, *causing considerable casualties and material damage*, against which they have no redress'.<sup>65</sup> The only action that tribesmen can take against air power would be to attack 'aircraft bases which, being situated outside [the tribesmen's] frontier, will be difficult to reach'.<sup>66</sup> By operating out of a dispersed network of airbases, moving quickly to execute raiding missions and offering no chance to retaliate, air power was thought to mirror and radically to extend the tactics of insurgents.<sup>67</sup> The aircraft was understood to be a flying insurgent, with T. E. Lawrence noting that '[w]hat the Arabs did yesterday the Air

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 126. Emphasis mine.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 127. Emphasis mine.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>67</sup> Consider how this kind of reasoning reflects the U.S. military's claim (discussed in Chapter 1) that contemporary counterterrorism strategy essentially involves creating "a network to fight a network".

Forces may do to-morrow. And in the same way – yet more swiftly'.<sup>68</sup> In this respect, the air doctrinaires presented the aircraft as the empire's technological solution to the problem of fighting against insurgents.<sup>69</sup>

In addition to this tactical profiling, the RAF also shared Callwell's racialized representation of colonial populations in order to explain and justify why bombing was an effective instrument for counterinsurgency. In the *Operations Manual* one can find descriptions of tribesmen as 'savage', 'ignorant', 'ill-disciplined' and 'wilful',<sup>70</sup> characteristics which should be factored in the decision to engage in aerial bombing:

The susceptibility of a savage enemy to moral influences is a most important factor in the campaign. Hesitation, delay or any retrograde movement will at once be interpreted as signs of weakness, and while the braver of the enemy will be encouraged, the waverers, always to be found amongst undisciplined forces, will be tempted to throw in their lot with what appears to be the winning side.<sup>71</sup>

The notion that tribesmen were especially susceptible to the horrors of aerial bombing was a deeply entrenched rhetoric in RAF circles, one which actually preceded the practice of aerial bombing. In 1910, Major Baden-Powel would confidently predict that 'the moral effect on an ignorant enemy would be great, and a few bombs would cause serious panics'.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, as Omissi notes the RAF staff also tended to translate 'existing social and economic conditions' in imperial provinces 'into racial assumptions about their inhabitants'.<sup>73</sup> An example of this can

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<sup>68</sup> T. E. Lawrence as cited in Basil Liddell-Hart, *T.E. Lawrence: In Arabia and After* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934), 438.

<sup>69</sup> In contrast, Callwell thought that imperial commanders should strive to make small wars as "regular" as possible. He noted that 'guerilla warfare is a form of operations above all things to be avoided. The whole spirit of the art of conducting small wars is to strive for the attainments of decisive methods', by which Callwell means trying to defeat the insurgents by engaging with them in a battlefield. Callwell, *Small Wars*, 125.

<sup>70</sup> See Air Ministry, *Operations Manual*, 128-130.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>72</sup> B. Baden-Powel, "How Airships are Likely to Affect War," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 54, no. 1 (1910): 565.

<sup>73</sup> Omissi, *Air Power*, 109.

be seen in Trenchard's maiden speech in the House of Lords in April 1930. During his speech Trenchard summarised his understanding of the tribesmen's warrior ethos as follows:

The natives of a lot of these tribes love fighting for fighting's sake, and for the sake of the glory and loot. They have no objection to being killed, some of them, if they can kill you and take your rifle, and it may be, some domestic article like your boots, but they do not like fighting if they may only lose their boots and have no chance of getting yours.<sup>74</sup>

Trenchard's framing of indigenous populations as naturally opportunist – so that they even welcomed death if there was a chance of a small profit – was another way to vindicate the suitability of using aircraft in the colonies. In Trenchard's eyes, the deployment of ground troops in imperial provinces was an open invitation for tribesmen to satisfy their bellicose and opportunist appetites. This was especially the case since the start of World War I had seen a great influx of modern and efficient rifles in the Middle East, which meant that the weapons gap between imperial army forces and insurgents closed significantly.<sup>75</sup> Conversely, air power was understood to offer an overwhelming technological advantage and to restore the asymmetrical dynamic between the British administration and colonial populations. The reversal of the weapons balance was so great that the RAF considered it to be unsurmountable – even as late as 1931, Wing-Commander Norman Bottomley claimed that a tribesman facing an aerial attack could do nothing more against the aircraft than 'shake his fist and hurl the curse of Allah'.<sup>76</sup> Trenchard went on to argue in his speech that since air power deprived colonial subjects of the opportunity to fight back, the moral effect of air campaigns would be so great that the 'mere appearance of the aeroplane' would do the work of pacifying the populations on the ground.<sup>77</sup> Known for framing his arguments in mathematical terms, he went on to

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<sup>74</sup> Hugh Trenchard, "The Air Force," (Speech, The House of Lords, April 9, 1930), *UK Parliament*, accessed April 29, 2017, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1930/apr/09/the-air-force>.

<sup>75</sup> Tony Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 133.

<sup>76</sup> Bottomley as cited in Omissi, *Colonial Power*, 112.

<sup>77</sup> Trenchard, "The Air Force."

claim: 'I believe that in 90 per cent of the cases in which the air has been used in the last eight years no bombs have been dropped'.<sup>78</sup>

Trenchard's belief that the RAF was, however, extremely constrained in its use of bombing was at odds with the directions provided by the *Operations Manual*. The doctrinal view that colonial populations were susceptible to moral effects was accompanied by a very clear instruction as to what this meant in practical terms:

A vigorous offensive is the *only* method of conducting operations. The most complete preparations, which include a careful study of the topography of the country, the supply of aircraft and stores necessary for technical efficiency, and *the habits and characteristics of the enemy*, should be made to ensure the campaign being carried through to its conclusion without any relaxation of effort. The freedom of an uncivilised enemy from the complicated organisation of regular armies, his individual independence, and his ability to disperse at will, necessitates a crushing blow if the result is to be decisive.<sup>79</sup>

In noting that "the habits and characteristics of the enemy" should be studied in order to carry out a relentless offensive, the air doctrine implicitly draws on the same categorisation of colonial enemies as fundamentally different from their European counterparts that Callwell uses in his *Small Wars* thesis. In fact, the *Operations Manual* shows that the RAF employed "civilisational" (if not explicitly racial) assumptions about native populations in order both to explain the efficiency

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<sup>78</sup> Later in his speech, Trenchard changed his argumentative strategy. Rather than not acknowledging the use of bombing in the colonies, he defended it by arguing that brutality was an inherent feature of military action and 'the Air Force is not more brutal than any other form of warfare'. According to Trenchard, bombing a village from the air was hardly more inhuman than having punitive army columns burning it to the ground. See *Ibid*.

<sup>79</sup> Air Ministry, *Operations Manual*, 129. Emphases mine. Furthermore, it should be noted that this doctrinal instruction is not dissimilar to subsequent prescriptions given by air power theorists about why bombing would have been particularly effective against European populations. As seen in the previous chapter, the military establishment was generally contemptuous of the ability of the popular masses to face the violence of aerial bombing without collapsing with fear. Bereft of the discipline inculcated by the institution of the military, the average citizen was seen to lack the kind of mental tenacity to withstand the moral effects of bombing, something that, for air power theorists, explained why strategic bombing should have been used in populated centres.

of aerial bombing and to justify its excessive use in the colonial milieu. On the one hand, tribesmen were presented as particularly susceptible to moral effects, which highlighted the efficacy of air power as an instrument of policing. On the other hand, because tribesmen were also thought to be undisciplined and bellicose, an awesome display of brutality was deemed necessary in order to guarantee their obedience – aerial bombing needed to be carried through “without relaxation of effort” so that it inflicted a “crushing blow”. In this context, the *Operations Manual* instructed that in ‘minor or savage warfare’ air forces should be grouped ‘in the largest possible units’ because ‘small air detachments are unsatisfactory by reason of their inefficiency for the purpose of enforcing respect’.<sup>80</sup> Using a small bombing force was to be avoided because

[a]ircraft depend to a great extent on the moral effect they create; if they are constantly used for operations on a small scale *which cause no material damage* and cannot, owing to the smallness of the unit, sustain their attack, respect will change to contempt and the re-inspiring of natives with a proper regard for aircraft would be a prolonged and expensive task. Air operations, therefore, must be carried out in a strength sufficient to inflict severe punishment, and numbers adequate to sustain the attack for as long a period as may be necessary must be employed.<sup>81</sup>

The air control scheme in Iraq and other imperial territories was thus practiced according to this doctrinal prescription that attacks against “uncivilised” populations needed to be overwhelmingly violent. As Satia notes, RAF officers stationed in Iraq rationalised the violent excesses of air policing by invoking arguments of cultural relativism according to which the Arabs’ ‘presumed fatalism [and] their faith in the incontrovertible “will of God”’, was used to promote the claim that colonial subjects were accustomed to random acts of violence in a way that ‘Europeans, coddled by secular notions of justice and human rights’ were not.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>82</sup> Satia, “The Defense of Inhumanity,” 40.

Imperial provinces were characterised as ‘a morass of ignorance’ and colonial officers often ‘advocated air substitution ... because only the weapons of the air force could withstand “tidal onslaughts of hordes of fanatics”’.<sup>83</sup> John Bagot Glubb, an RAF intelligence officer in Mesopotamia, observed that war ‘had no such terrors for the bedouin as it has for the modern city dweller’, and that the bedouin’s nomadic lifestyle meant that ‘if he were threatened by too strong an enemy he could strike his camp and slip away’.<sup>84</sup> ‘To the bedouins’, Glubb claimed, ‘war was not a desperate matter of life and death, but rather a romantic excitement to break the monotony of the pastoral life’.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, in his lectures to future air officers, Norman Bottomley explained the limitless use of military force in the colonies by claiming that ‘the more primitive a race is, the more it respects sheer power’.<sup>86</sup> The brutality of air control was, for its practitioners, a matter of where the targeted populations were situated in the civilisational spectrum. In the case of Iraq, Satia argues, RAF officers keenly pointed out that air policing did not have to abide to any restrictions, for the ‘Iraqis were used to a state of constant warfare, expected justice without kid gloves, had no patience with sentimental distinctions between combatants and noncombatants, and viewed air action as entirely “legitimate and proper”’.<sup>87</sup>

To conclude, air policing followed a principle of an unrestricted approach to armed violence as laid out by Callwell’s “small wars” framework. The notion that air control would lead to a more limited and “humane” application of armed violence – a central claim by proponents of the air control scheme during the 1921 Cairo Conference – because its aim was to create only “moral effects” obscured how the *RAF Operations Manual* held the exact opposite to be the case: the primacy of moral effects meant that no limits should be placed on aerial bombing. Furthermore, the doctrinal instruction that morale bombing should be conducted *only* by means of relentless air attacks suggests that Trenchard’s claim in the House of Lords, that the use of air power in the colonies was 90 percent bomb-free, reflected neither the RAF’s doctrine nor its practices.<sup>88</sup> In the next section, I take a closer look at the

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<sup>83</sup> Omissi, *Air Power*, 110.

<sup>84</sup> John Glubb, *The Story of the Arab Legion* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1948), 149.

<sup>85</sup> John Glubb, *Arabian Adventures: Ten Years of Joyful Service* (London: Cassell, 1978), 148.

<sup>86</sup> Bottomley as cited in Omissi, *Air Power*, 110.

<sup>87</sup> Satia, “The Defense of Inhumanity,” 37.

<sup>88</sup> Trenchard, “The Air Force.”

colonial tactics of air policing, demonstrating how bomber aircraft functioned as an instrument of terror and destruction.

### **Violence in the Land of the RAF**

As discussed above, the investment of RAF in the moral effect of aerial bombing defined and structured the application of air power in the colonies. Morale bombing was doctrinally framed as a punitive action that needed to be undertaken with an extraordinary degree of severity in order to make sure that respect for imperial authority was properly enforced among colonial people. The rationale for this severity was, in turn, couched in terms of a civilisational or racist representation of colonial subjects, who were depicted as both vulnerable and resilient to the psychological effects of violence from the air. In identifying insurgents as fundamentally different from European enemies, the RAF doctrine asserted that in order for air policing operations to be successful 'it may be necessary to depart from the ordinary rules of war'.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, these civilisational hierarchies within which colonial populations were situated profoundly shaped the form that air operations took. In this context, the *Operations Manual* notes that 'the nature of the objective will differ considerably according to the circumstances' in which air power is deployed, with the "nature of the objective" denoting the civilisational status of the population being punished. The manual proceeds to explain: '[i]n the case of peoples with a settled form of government, the force placed in the field must first be attacked and destroyed. This should then be followed up by continuous bombing of his capital and subsequently the surrounding villages, crops and live stock'.<sup>90</sup> Conversely,

[i]n the case of certain nomadic tribes the force in the field and the home town or camp may be synonomous [*sic*]. This will present an easy victory to the commander, the destruction of both at the same time creating a

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<sup>89</sup> Air Ministry, *Operations Manual*, 128.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

moral effect which should result in the almost immediate collapse of the enemy'.<sup>91</sup>

In distinguishing between “semi-civilised” populations (which were urban and had an established form of government) and “uncivilised” populations (which were peripheral and lived a nomadic life), the *Operations Manual* reveals that there was variation between different air campaigns. While aerial bombardment was generally viewed as an unwieldy instrument for policing densely populated urban environments,<sup>92</sup> its use in areas ‘so marginal to British public perceptions that exemplary violence was politically viable’ was encouraged.<sup>93</sup>

Direct attacks on tribal villages in the periphery was thus a vital component of air policing. To the RAF doctrinaires, the principal site of military activity was the homes of tribesmen. Rather than giving chase and trying to locate bands of insurgents, the manual instructed that ‘[t]he Air Force commander ... will carry out concentrated attack on the stockaded villages of the enemy so that when his field force returns from what has probably proved to be an ineffectual attack on the military forces they will find their village in ruins’.<sup>94</sup> While it was noted that an ‘endeavour should be made to spare the women and children as far as possible’,<sup>95</sup> no such distinction was made in actual bombing campaigns. In fact, British soldiers who visited villages devastated by bombing reported that women and children were frequently the principal victims of punitive air attacks. The account of one of those soldiers, Lieutenant Colonel A. Osburn, was published in the *News Chronicle* on 5 June 1933. It is worth quoting Osburn, not least because his description of the harrowing effects of colonial bombing is evocative of the testimonies of victims of drone violence, discussed in Chapter 1. Osburn writes:

How many who insist that the maintenance of the British Empire depends on our aviators being allowed to bomb the flocks and herds and the women and children in Arab and Indian villages trouble to visualise

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>92</sup> Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 241.

<sup>93</sup> Townshend, “Civilization and Frightfulness,” 145.

<sup>94</sup> Air Ministry, *Operations Manual*, 128.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 128.

what actually happens? On such occasions non-combatants are usually the chief victims. When our troops enter a bombed village the pariah dogs are already at work eating the corpses of the babies and the old women who have been killed. Many suffering from ghastly wounds, especially some of the young children, are found still alive, covered with flies and crying for water. As all uninjured adults have fled, these mutilated women and children must perforce lie unattended.<sup>96</sup>

This excerpt reveals that lurking beneath the obfuscating term of “moral effects” was the more destructive and horrifying reality of bombing. When official reports of RAF’s excessive violence reached London,<sup>97</sup> even bombing enthusiasts such as Churchill found the details disturbing. Asking to be spared such reports, Churchill expressed his indignation:

I am extremely shocked at the reference to bombing which I have marked in red. If it were to be published it would be regarded as most dishonouring to the air force ... to fire wilfully on women and children taking refuge in a lake is a disgraceful act, and I am surprised that you do not order the officers responsible for it to be tried by court martial.<sup>98</sup>

Churchill’s consternation about air policing not comprising merely the threat of violence but actually involving the use of aircraft as an instrument of terror and destruction was not shared by British airmen. Arthur Harris – notorious in his later role as the head of Bomber Command in World War II but at the time a squadron leader in Iraq – found nothing surprising in the fact that the RAF bombing practices slaughtered populations on the ground. In a 1924 report, he noted that

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<sup>96</sup> Osburn as cited in Hugh Richard Lawrie Sheppard, *We Say NO!: The Plain Man’s Guide to Pacifism*, ed. Kerry Walters (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 92.

<sup>97</sup> Such revealing reports was a rare occurrence. As historian Anthony Clayton observes, one of the benefits, for the RAF, of substituting soldiers with aircraft was that ‘observers could hardly be present as they used to be with troops, and official reports could be and on occasions deliberately were edited to remove reference to casualties’. Anthony Clayton, *The British Empire as a Superpower 1919-39* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 80.

<sup>98</sup> Churchill as cited in Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, 102.

[t]he Arab and Kurd ... now know what real bombing means, in casualties and damage; they now know that within 45 minutes a full sized village ... can be practically wiped out and a third of its inhabitants killed or injured by four or five machines which offer them no real target, no opportunity for glory as warriors, no effective means of escape.<sup>99</sup>

*Real* bombing, as Harris reveals, means casualties and damage as well as the terror of knowing that there was no way to defend oneself against the actions of the bomber. Unofficially, the position of the RAF leadership on the matter was that punitive air policing should be directed against the entire community in targeted villages. For instance, John Slessor claimed that there was nothing 'new or immoral or cruel' about inflicting collective punishment on tribal communities.<sup>100</sup> He explained that the principle of communal responsibility was 'universally recognised by the tribesmen themselves as a basis of tribal existence' and therefore the RAF was upholding a 'time-honoured method of enforcing on a tribal community responsibility for the acts of its individual members'.<sup>101</sup> Short of defending the indiscriminate nature of their bombing as a conscious effort to avoid giving cultural offense, RAF officers also pointed out that the killing of tribal women and children was not as objectionable in Iraq as public perception in London would have it be. As Grosscup writes, in the RAF headquarters 'killing Iraqi women was excused with the opinion that, unlike their European civilian counterparts, in Iraqi society they were viewed as a piece of property, the same as a cow or a rifle'.<sup>102</sup> In this context, T. E. Lawrence claimed that 'an Arab would rather offer up his wife than himself, to expiate a civil offense', which was 'too oriental a mood for us to feel very clearly'.<sup>103</sup> He then added that air bombing was 'of course infinitely more merciful than [traditional] police or military action as ... the killed are as likely to be negligible women and children, as the really important men'.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Harris as cited in Omissi, *Air Power*, 154.

<sup>100</sup> John Slessor, *The Central Blue: The Autobiography of Sir John Slessor, Marshall of the RAF* (New York, Frederick A. Preager, 1957), 55.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>102</sup> Grosscup, *Strategic Terror*, 56.

<sup>103</sup> Lawrence as cited in John Mack, *A Prince of Our Disorder: Life of T. E. Lawrence* (London: Harvard University Press, 1976), 385

<sup>104</sup> Lawrence as cited in *ibid.*, 385.

Another important point is that the conduct of the air control scheme was underpinned by the notion that colonial populations – especially nomadic tribes – were latent armies which posed a constant source of threat to imperial rule.<sup>105</sup> In 1932, F. H. Humphries, head of British administration in Iraq, warned that no limits should be placed on the capacity of the RAF to target the population. He asserted that ‘the term “civilian population” has a very different meaning in Iraq from what it has in Europe ... the whole of its male population are potential fighters as the tribes are heavily armed’.<sup>106</sup> Slessor supported this statement by writing that the tribesman ‘whether he was a Mahsud or Afridi of the Frontier, a Kurd of the Iraqi hills or a Bedouin of the Arabian, was very much the same sort of chap’ and ‘was as improperly dressed without his rifle as an Englishman without his umbrella ... brave, hardy and often treacherous, given to blood feuds, raiding was as much his national pastime as soccer in England’.<sup>107</sup> Stereotypes of tribesmen as people living and breathing war were part of a broader narrative that presented tribal villages as intrinsically militant communities.<sup>108</sup> As Satia explains, this narrative was a vital component of British air policing because it allowed the RAF to frame the indiscriminate nature of aerial bombing as ‘ideally suited to a place in which indiscriminate violence did not matter, as little in fact distinguished combatants from noncombatants’.<sup>109</sup> In presenting the entirety of the population as militants,

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<sup>105</sup> See Satia, “The Defense of Inhumanity,” 38-39.

<sup>106</sup> Humphries as cited in Satia, “The Defense of Inhumanity,” 38.

<sup>107</sup> Slessor, *Central Blue*, 58.

<sup>108</sup> This notion that all males in tribal societies were warriors has its roots in late nineteenth-century Social Darwinism. Herbert Spencer, a British liberal political theorist and sociologist developed an argument of social evolution that distinguished between what he termed “militant” and “industrial” societies. In his *Principles of Sociology* (volume II), Spence argued: ‘the economic organizations of primitive communities coincide with their military organisations. In savage tribes war and hunting are carried on by the same men ... [a]nd, similarly in rude societies the military unit and the economic unit are the same’. According to the logic of this argument, in these societies the army and the community is one and the same. Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, Vol. 2 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1902), 474. For a more detailed analysis of Spencer’s theory see also Daniel Pick, *War Machine: The Rationalisation of Slaughter in the Modern Age* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), 77-81.

<sup>109</sup> Satia writes that when ‘Churchill objected to the reporting of casualties under the comprehensive head of “men and women”, Trenchard insisted that in countries in which combatants and noncombatants and even the sexes could not be distinguished by visual markers, all casualties should be reported in bulk numbers without details as to sex or age’. See Satia, “The Defense of Inhumanity,” 39.

the RAF's casualty counts 'could legitimately assume that all were combatants without fear of travesty'ing the data'.<sup>110</sup>

The claim that the air control scheme was a "humane" alternative to traditional methods of colonial policing was viable because air power was applied in the periphery of imperial territories – and, therefore, at the margins of public scrutiny – and because it attacked 'a population conceived of as congenitally insurgent'.<sup>111</sup> In his correspondence with Basil Liddel Hart, Lawrence observed that the air force 'could rule the desert' and thus its use was suitable in the Middle East, but '[t]he system is *not* capable of universal application'.<sup>112</sup> Slessor similarly pointed out that in 'some countries for which we were responsible, such as Palestine, which was not wild tribal country, we could not apply the Air Method'.<sup>113</sup> The remoteness of targeted villages made it easier for the RAF to doctor its reports 'to make [casualties] look much smaller than they were' and, in this way, to uphold the image of a largely non-lethal air power.<sup>114</sup> In rendering the slaughter of entire villages invisible, the RAF lent credibility to its official position that 'the object [of air policing] was to get results without the loss of human life and, in point of fact, the casualties on either side were negligible'.<sup>115</sup>

The portrayal of tribal communities as military units was also a useful rhetorical tool in countering criticisms by army officers about the brutality of bombing campaigns. For instance, General Kenneth Wigram, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief in India, argued that the British experience of being bombed by Germans in World War I offered a case in point for why air power would inevitably be a counterproductive instrument of control. Wigram posited that the massacres caused by punitive air campaigns would create a general resentment against British rule, and asked:

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>112</sup> Lawrence to Liddell-Hart as cited in Liddell-Hart, *T. E. Lawrence*, 307.

<sup>113</sup> Slessor, *Central Blue*, 60. See also David Omissi, "Technology and Repression: Air Control in Palestine 1922-36," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 13, no. 4 (1990): 41-63.

<sup>114</sup> Townshend, "Civilization and Frightfulness," 147.

<sup>115</sup> Slessor, *Central Blue*, 54.

[i]s it fantastic to suggest that the psychology of the tribesman is not very dissimilar to that of the Britisher, and from that to deduce that their reactions will not be very dissimilar to those of the people of the British Isles during the war?<sup>116</sup>

The RAF's reply to Wigram's query was terse: '[i]t is of course fantastic to suggest that the psychology of the tribesmen, who spend half their lives shooting at each other, is similar to that of an English villager'.<sup>117</sup> In effect, the RAF Staff was reminding Wigram of the "small wars" mantra that army forces had adhered to long before air power took the reins of imperial policing: tribesmen were so underdeveloped and immersed in armed conflict that the only effective disciplinary measure in their case had to involve an extreme use of violence.<sup>118</sup> There was little doubt that airmen viewed the objections of their army colleagues as both irrational and hypocritical. In his autobiography, Slessor recounted an event during a skirmish in Waziristan where he, as Air Commander, was requested by the Army Commander present to bomb the local village. When Slessor was reluctant to do so, the Army Officer insisted, saying 'Oh come on, that will be all right, we'll say we shelled it'.<sup>119</sup> In retrospect, Slessor observed how '[t]hat indeed would have been all right and in accordance with the *extraordinary rules of the game*'.<sup>120</sup>

These explicit admissions of the brutality of colonial air policing were, nonetheless, always carefully weaved together with a principle of minimum use of force. Despite the fact that the RAF doctrine prescribed a maximum application of offensive power during air campaigns, it also warned air commanders that 'the use of aircraft in connection with the infliction of punishment on turbulent natives in an occupied area can be abused'.<sup>121</sup> The danger of misusing air power was, in fact, attributed to the nature of air power itself. The air weapon was principally

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<sup>116</sup> General Wigram as cited in Townshend, "Civilization and Frightfulness," 158.

<sup>117</sup> Air Staff as cited in *ibid.*, 158.

<sup>118</sup> It is worth reiterating Callwell's position on this, as a way of reminder: "The most satisfactory way of bringing such foes to reason is by the rifle and sword, for they understand this mode of warfare and respect it. Sometimes ... their villages must be demolished and their crops and granaries destroyed". Callwell, *Small Wars*, 41.

<sup>119</sup> Slessor, *Central Blue*, 66.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 66. Emphasis added.

<sup>121</sup> Air Ministry, *Operations Manual*, 132.

characterised by its ‘power to cover great distances at a high speed’; its ‘instant readiness for action’; and its ‘indifference to obstacles and the unlikelihood of casualties to air personnel’.<sup>122</sup> All these unique qualities of aircraft were thought ‘to encourage their use offensively more often than the occasion warrants’.<sup>123</sup> In developing its air policing methods, the RAF sought to address the tension between these two doctrinal imperatives of, on the one hand, using air power as an absolutely offensive means of policing and, on the other, of employing air action in a way that could be claimed to minimize the loss of life.

The most notable of these methods was that of the “air blockade”, which, as Townshend explains, by the 1930s ‘was to be so prominent in air doctrine that it was mistakenly identified with the general concept of air control’.<sup>124</sup> This was a straightforward air tactic which involved imposing an inverted blockade that would force insurgent groups out of, rather than keep them within, their settlements. The logic of air blockade revolved around the principles of destruction and dislocation. By bombing villages directly, the RAF would cause people to abandon their homes seeking refuge in nearby areas. During that time aircraft would destroy the material infrastructure of the tribal community, as ‘[a]ttacks on the enemy’s home territory should be directed against his large villages, live stock and crops’.<sup>125</sup> To make sure that people were kept outside their villages, the *Operations Manual* advised that during the air campaign ‘[i]nstantaneous and delay action bombs should be used equally so that the enemy people will not feel safe in returning to their villages even after the departure of aircraft’.<sup>126</sup> The protracted practice of this tactic was thought to cause a substantial moral effect: the normal life of tribal people would have been

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>123</sup> One should bear in mind that the principal concern of air doctrinaires when suggesting a considerate application of aerial bombing was not that it would cause too much havoc and destruction. Rather their main worry was that, in their eagerness to attack, commanders would not account for the logistical and practical difficulties involved in organising an air offensive: ‘[t]he limitations of military forces, the numbers of troops involved, and the preparation necessary for a successful expeditions are all factors which must have a steadying effect on the local commander’. Ibid., 132.

<sup>124</sup> Townshend, “Civilization and Frightfulness,” 158.

<sup>125</sup> Air Ministry, *Operations Manual*, 129.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 129.

interrupted to such an extent that they would find it unbearable to continue hostilities.<sup>127</sup>

A key reason why air blockade became so popular among the RAF ranks was because it was a tactic that made it easier to shift discussions about aerially inflicted violence away from the indiscriminate lethality of aerial bombing and towards the moral effects it created. John Salmond, the air officer in charge of all British forces in Iraq,<sup>128</sup> was a particularly keen exponent of air blockade. His central contention was that the moral effect of bombing had less to do with killing people than with attacking their material possessions:

It is commonplace here that aircraft achieve their results by their effect on morale, and by the *material damage* they do, and by the *interference* they cause to the daily routine of life, and not through the infliction of casualties. The casualties inflicted have been most remarkably small.<sup>129</sup>

By framing the bomber aircraft as a weapon targeting property rather people, Salmond diverted attention from the bloodbath that the practice of aerial attacks left in its wake, something that Trenchard found a convincing argument for the extension of air substitution to other imperial dominions such as India.<sup>130</sup> But it is important to note that, even within Salmond's watered-down enframing, air action still implied a brutal and indiscriminate use of armed violence. The severity of the air blockade as a punitive measure can be better understood by taking a closer look

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<sup>127</sup> Townshend comments on how the RAF used a wide variety of bombs in order to magnify the terror of experiencing a bombing attack: 'The list ran from delayed-action bombs, essential if villagers were to be kept out of their settlements by night, since the RAF had no night bombing capacity, through phosphorus bombs ... [and] crows' feet, by which "great numbers of cattle would be lamed and great numbers of people incommoded" (and discouraged from lying down on the approach of aircraft); aerial darts with whistling holes to magnify their psychological effect; "throwdowns", or fireworks, which should "keep the tribesmen on the jump and give them the impression that our bombing capacity is very large"' to crude oil that would poison water supplies'. Townshend, "Civilization and Frightfulness," 151.

<sup>128</sup> John Salmond was an influential officer and a rising star of the RAF who replaced Trenchard as the RAF Chief of the Air Staff in January 1930.

<sup>129</sup> Salmond as cited in Andrew Boyle, *Trenchard* (London: Collins, 1962), 510.

<sup>130</sup> See Townshend, "Civilization and Frightfulness," 149.

at what Salmond meant by “damage” and “interference”. According to Salmond, air attacks

[c]an knock the roofs of huts about and prevent their repair, a considerable *inconvenience* in winter-time. It can seriously interfere with ploughing or harvesting – a *vital matter*; or burn up the stores of fuel laboriously piled up and garnered for the winter; by attack on livestock, which is the main form of capital and source of wealth to the less settled tribes, it can impose in effect a considerable fine, or seriously interfere with the actual food source of the tribe – and in the end the tribesman finds it is much the best to obey the Government.<sup>131</sup>

It is noteworthy that the language Salmond uses in this passage exemplifies a description of violence from the air that seeks to negotiate the doctrinal tension regarding the use of air power, mentioned above. Material destruction is construed by Salmond as an “inconvenience” (a diluted term that reinforced the idea that air power was humane) and at the same time as “vital matter” for those who suffered the consequences of bombing (which proved the efficacy of air power in being a weapon that could target the “vital centres” of “underdeveloped” people). Air blockades were presented by the RAF as proof that air policing was the least violent way to enforce imperial dominion. For Salmond, the acid test of brutality was ‘the total number of casualties *to both sides* for a given period of control’.<sup>132</sup> Since the use of aircraft all but eliminated British casualties and the object of air control was not the loss of life of colonial populations but their terrorisation and the destruction of their means to life, the RAF maintained that there was nothing inhumane about punitive air campaigns. Not only was terror the underlying principle of air control, it also constituted the source of its humaneness. ‘We went out of our way to minimize the loss of life and human suffering that is inevitable in any form of

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<sup>131</sup> Salmond as cited in Boyle, *Trenchard*, 510.

<sup>132</sup> Salmond as cited in Slessor, *Central Blue*, 67. “Casualties” in this instance referred to those killed directly by bombing raids, and *not* to those that died from the lethal consequences of having the “vital” food production processes stopped.

warfare', Slessor wrote, 'and, be it noted, these are small *wars* that I am describing' – the implication here being that such a restraint was not truly necessary.<sup>133</sup>

What appeared less often in the RAF's official rhetoric, however, was the fact that it was not uncommon for airmen to bomb the wrong villages because they did not know which settlements harboured insurgent groups and which did not.<sup>134</sup> As a remedy to this issue, Slessor emphasised that if the population was to be the object of air policing, it had to be observed, categorised and known:

The Air Method does entail a detailed knowledge of the country and its people. One must know pretty intimately the habits and methods of livelihood of the different tribes and sections, exactly what villages or valleys they inhabit and the houses of all the headmen and principal inhabitants, the wells and waterholes, the grazing areas and tracks and so on.<sup>135</sup>

As this passage indicates, the aerial intelligence methods employed in current drone wars (discussed in Chapter 1) can actually be traced back to the colonial air policing programs of the 1920s and 1930s. What Slessor describes here is, in effect, the use of air power for establishing the pattern of lives of tribal communities. Though this colonial system of surveillance and intelligence may have lacked the complexity of contemporary digital systems, it is nevertheless the case that it follows the same logic of seeking to interpret the population's life in such a way that targets can be selected and attacked. In the case of the British air control scheme, its intelligence efforts were concentrated on identifying the "vital centres" of a given people: 'whether the offender concerned was an Indian Frontier tribesman, a nomad Arab of the northern deserts, a Morelli slaver on the border of Kenya or a web-footed savage of the swamps in the Southern Sudan, there are almost always some essentials without which he cannot maintain his livelihood', writes Slessor. Thus, air power has always carried out the function of looking at the world from above in

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 67. Emphasis in original.

<sup>134</sup> Omissi, *Air Power*, 167. See also Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder After 1914* (London: University of California Press, 2008), 198-199.

<sup>135</sup> Slessor, *Central Blue*, 65.

order to police and order it and, of course, enable and direct the infliction of armed violence.<sup>136</sup>

Air surveys reported on the material infrastructure of populated areas (the location of shelters or stores of grain and fuel; cultivated fields and important grazing areas; access points to water supplies such as springs, rivers and wells) and recorded significant activities of villagers (for instance, the time of the year they began engaging in ploughing or harvesting of their crops).<sup>137</sup> This information was then handed over to air officers to plan attacks on those communities. Salmond's idea that air power's moral effect was inseparable from the use of bombing as an instrument of socio-economic coercion dominated the RAF's colonial policy to such an extent that the method of air blockade 'scarcely admitted of refinement over the years'.<sup>138</sup> In 1932, ten years after Salmond communicated his support for air blockade to Trenchard, RAF officers reiterated his words almost verbatim in semi-official journals such as the *Royal Air Force Quarterly*:

Air operations are not planned to spread death and suffering, but to wear down the tribesman's morale [and] dislocate his normal life ... If desirable, small practice bombs are first dropped to give a final opportunity of escape to safety. Bombing is then regulated according to requirements to keep the villages empty and the tribesmen from attending to their crops, cattle and daily wants ... The tribesman, driven from his village which contains all his needs, finds the burden of his existence increasing daily; he is deprived of his normal shelter; stripped of his usual amenities; and interrupted in his sleep; his flocks are scattered ... Shelters or stores of grain and fuel may be bombed; crops may be destroyed.<sup>139</sup>

One may note that while air blockade was rationalised as a punitive measure against tribal communities thought to be inherently militaristic, its practice was predicated

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<sup>136</sup> See, for example, Colonel H. L. Crosthwait, "Air Survey and Empire Development," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 77, no. 3971 (1928): 162-182.

<sup>137</sup> See Neocleous, *War Power Police Power*, 144-145.

<sup>138</sup> Townshend, "Civilization and Frightfulness," 148.

<sup>139</sup> As cited in Neocleous, *Air Power Police Power*, 145.

on an understanding of these communities as essentially agrarian societies. In other words, the RAF claimed its policy was to bomb militants but organised and carried out its air campaigns with the view toward targeting farmers and shepherds. This incongruity is explained by the fact that “refractory” communities did not include only those actively engaged in an armed conflict against British rule but also those whose “militant behaviour” consisted simply of a refusal to pay taxes.<sup>140</sup> Air policing meant that that entire villages ‘were bombed for “general recalcitrance”’,<sup>141</sup> and that the bomb became a staple feature of “pacifying” communities that, as British officers observed, were ‘exceptionally poor’ and, thus, often unable adequately to respond to the government’s demands of revenue.<sup>142</sup> The nonchalance with which bombing attacks were carried out was so great that for airmen stationed in the periphery of imperial provinces they were often just another daily chore. Slessor describes that tribal disorder ‘could be dealt with by a few aeroplanes slipping off unobtrusively into the blue from their peace stations, returning unnoticed to slip off again unnoticed next morning – the officers who had been in action in Waziristan in the morning playing polo in Risalpur or Peshawar in the afternoon’.<sup>143</sup>

Finally, the purpose of deploying aircraft for surveillance missions was not just to facilitate a high-altitude view of the ground. The Air Ministry reminded its officers ‘that from the ground every inhabitant of a native village is under the impression that the occupant of an aeroplane is actually looking at him’ and that ‘the frequent appearance of aircraft apparently overhead will do much towards establishing the impression that all their movements are being watched and reported’.<sup>144</sup> Airmen

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<sup>140</sup> For bombing for tax collection in Iraq see Cox, “A Splendid Training Ground,” 156 and 169-172. David Killingray mentions similar tax collecting bombing practices against the Nuer in Africa; Killingray, “Swift Agent of Government,” 439.

<sup>141</sup> Satia, “The Defense of Inhumanity,” 34.

<sup>142</sup> Sir Percival Phillips, reporting for the *Daily Mail* in 1922 about the situation in Iraq noted that, [w]hatever the government may say to the contrary, rule by bomb in Mesopotamia has as one of its underlying motives the collection of taxes from turbulent Arabs’. Phillips as cited in Cox, “A Splendid Training Ground,” 172.

<sup>143</sup> Slessor, *Central Blue*, 58. Slessor’s description of bombing being an activity neatly fitting into the routine of RAF officers is strikingly similar to contemporary descriptions of how the lives of drone pilots are defined by a mixture of warfare and ordinary life. See for example BBC, “A Rare Insight into a Day at Work for a Pilot of a Drone,” *BBC News*, October 14, 2013, accessed September 3, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-24522150/a-rare-insight-into-a-day-at-work-for-a-pilot-of-a-drone>.

<sup>144</sup> Air Ministry, *Operations Manual*, 133.

understood well that aerial surveillance was not merely an innocuous and non-aggressive technique of gathering information; it also acted as a doleful reminder to people on the ground of the omnipresence and omnipotence of imperial rule. Far from innocuous, air patrols functioned as a disciplinary measure intended to have a psychological impact on the people who had experienced violence from the air – a ‘control by panoptical vision and continual threat of annihilation by bombs’.<sup>145</sup> The eye in the sky was also a spectacle; aircraft were meant to be seen, and feared, by people living under the regime of air control.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented an account of air policing, showing that the colonial milieu was vital for the development and application of air power as an instrument of terror and destruction. While I indicated that the use of aerial bombing was an almost universal feature of imperial domination, this chapter focused on the British air control scheme for two reasons. First, the British air control scheme in Iraq substituted, rather than complemented, traditional methods of imperial policing. As such, the deployment of the RAF in Mesopotamia was not sporadic or *ad hoc* but was programmed instead as a self-sustained system for the control of that area. Second, the importance to the RAF of its role in Iraq during the 1920s and 1930s meant that British air policing was accompanied by a narrative that highlighted the benefits of using air power as the sole means to project imperial power. In taking the British air control scheme as my object of inquiry, I was able to point its linkages to already entrenched conceptions and practices of “small wars” and also to interrogate some of the theoretical claims and applied tactics which emerged with air substitution and were specific to it. One such claim, which has featured centrally in this chapter, was that air control constituted a more humane approach to policing colonies because it prioritised moral effects over physical violence by way of forcing colonial subjects to adhere to British authority. I challenged this claim by emphasising that the

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<sup>145</sup> Thomas Hippler, *Governing from the Skies: A Global History of Aerial Bombing*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2017), 69.

creation of moral effects in fact depended on air tactics that systematically slaughtered, destroyed impoverished and terrorised entire communities which were identified as inherently recalcitrant.

There are numerous reasons as to why the colonial history of air power is important for a critical analysis of drone violence. Examining the colonial exercise of air power is crucial because, as Mark Neocleous notes, we ‘need to be clear about what air power was doing, not least because what it was doing then might tell us something about air power now’.<sup>146</sup> In this respect, though the scope of this chapter was to give an account of colonial policing in the specific historical context within which it was theorised and practiced, the analysis offered here is intended also to initiate a discussion, in the chapters that follow, of the continuities of drone warfare with this earlier application of air power. My argument is that the prevalent tendency to think of drone warfare in terms of its novelty does not leave us any wiser about the traditions of violence that underlie uses of a weapon like the armed drone. From a historical point of view, the victims of drone attacks live under a system of air control which, in its violent effects, is almost identical to its colonial predecessor. Certainly, the use of drones for targeted killings appears to serve different military priorities and objectives than RAF’s interwar variant. But, as I have emphasised, military representations of armed violence are very deceptive guides when it comes to think, and think critically, about the consequences of military violence. In the case of colonial air control, the RAF evaded accusations of brutality by framing the violence of bombing solely in terms of its moral effects. Similarly, the contemporary framing of drone warfare reduces its violence by presenting the effects of drone strikes solely as lethal action directed against individuals. In the next part of this thesis I offer a critique of this way of thinking about drone violence. The following chapter discusses how this dominant mode of representation is reflected in scholarly literature on drones. In Chapter 5, I conclude my critique by contesting the “targeted killings” framework developed by U.S. military theorists.

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<sup>146</sup> Neocleous, *War Power Police Power*, 143.

## CHAPTER 4: DRONE WARFARE: SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING BORROWED

[F]or whoever uses such a weapon, it becomes a priori impossible to die as one kills. Warfare, from being possibly asymmetrical, becomes absolutely unilateral. What could still claim to be combat is converted into a campaign of what is, quite simply, slaughter.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

In the first chapter of this thesis I presented two accounts of drone warfare: first, a description of its violent effects experienced by people that live under the field of operation of armed drones in areas like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Palestine and, second, an analysis of the targeting methodology employed by the U.S. military in finding and killing suspected terrorists. In the two chapters that followed, I developed a historical account of the emergence of air power in the early twentieth century. More specifically, Chapter 2 focused on the way in which strategic bombing became a central concept in air power theory and provided the main line of argument for the establishment of air forces as an independent military service. Finally, in Chapter 3, I showed that the practice of targeting civilian populations was further developed and consolidated through the implementation of air control schemes during the 1920s and 1930s, which saw the application of aerial bombing as the principal violent mechanism for the policing and pacification of imperial territories.

In the present chapter I argue that this history of air power is of critical value to discussions concerning contemporary uses of armed drones. My contention is that, in addressing the armed drone as a radically *new* instrument of war, existing

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<sup>1</sup> Grégoire Chamayou, *Drone Theory*, trans. Janet Lloyd (London: Penguin Books, 2015), 13.

literature has largely disregarded the continuities that link drone warfare with earlier regimes of violence from the air. Furthermore, I demonstrate that the tendency to treat the drone as a weapon without a history or tradition imposes significant limitations on the way in which current uses of drones have been theorised. In subjecting the violence of drones to historical scrutiny, one can not only fill the lacunae left by existing scholarship but also open up alternative avenues for the critical analysis of such violence, which I look into at the conclusion of this chapter.

Given that the aim here is to assess the claim that drone warfare presents a radical break with earlier forms of armed violence, the present chapter is structured as follows. The first section begins by examining the reasoning underlying this claim of discontinuity. By taking Grégoire Chamayou's *Drone Theory* as an entry point to current theoretical critiques of drone warfare, I show that this claim is based on the idea that drones *introduce* a state of violence characterised by radical non-reciprocity – in making use of these weapons, one can kill without ever being at risk of being killed. According to this line of argument, the lack of reciprocity of violence necessarily implies that “traditional” conceptions of war are no longer applicable in the context of drone warfare. In adopting this initial analytical position, many theorists have focused their attention primarily on finding and developing alternative frameworks – such as policing, manhunting and assassination – which, they contend, provide a more appropriate lens through which the violence inflicted by drones may be conceptualised. The second section aims to challenge this approach to the problem of drone warfare. By invoking the historical work of the previous chapters, I emphasise that non-reciprocal violence has been an integral component of air power since its inception. Therefore, drone warfare does not introduce the element of non-reciprocity, but instead *sustains* and *extends* already existing frameworks and practices of non-reciprocal violence. Finally, I propose that when accounting for the historicity of the violence of drones a more far-reaching critique can be furnished, which is not limited by the prevalent discursive framing of drone violence as individualised “targeted killings”. In order to pursue this point further, the concluding section suggests that critics should approach the targeted killings programme as a systematic practice of state terrorism.

## Drone Warfare: Something New?

The last decade has seen an intense production of scholarly work on military drones. The increase in the application and impact of drones in a broad spectrum of military operations has been met by a proliferation of academic research that seeks to address some of the critical questions raised by such weapons. The increase is not only one in quality but also in variety: by now, the drone has featured as an object of analysis in a great number of academic disciplines including security studies, philosophy, political sciences, geography, sociology and visual studies. The analyses that have emerged out of this multi-disciplinary body of work have unearthed and problematised a plethora of issues pertaining to the use of military drones. These issues include normative problems that the radical asymmetry of drone warfare gives rise to;<sup>2</sup> the (il)legal and political status of covert drone operations conducted by non-military agencies like the CIA;<sup>3</sup> the epistemic flaws inherent in predictive intelligence methodologies;<sup>4</sup> the violent biopolitics underpinning the lethal targeting of suspected terrorists;<sup>5</sup> the technological fetishism characterising

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<sup>2</sup> See especially, John Williams, "Distant Intimacy: Space, Drones, and Just War," *Ethics & International Affairs* 29, no. 1 (2015): 93-110.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin McKelvey, "Due Process Rights and the Targeted Killing of Suspected Terrorists: The Unconstitutional Scope of Executive Killing Power," *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* 44 (2011): 1353-1384. For further analyses on the legality of targeted killings see also, Mary Ellen O'Connell, "Unlawful Killing with Combat Drones: A Case Study of Pakistan, 2004-2009," in *Shooting to Kill: Socio-Legal Perspectives on the Use of Lethal Force*, eds Simon Bronitt, Miriam Gani and Saskia Hufnagel, 263-292 (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2012), and Melanie J. Foreman, "When Targeted Killing is Not Permissible: An Evaluation of Targeted Killing under the Laws of War and Morality," *Journal of Constitutional Law* 15, no. 3 (2013): 921-961.

<sup>4</sup> Claudia Aradau, "The Signature of Security: Big Data, Anticipation, Surveillance," *Radical Philosophy* 191 (2015): 21-28. For a critical analysis of uses of algorithms for predictive targeting see also, Louise Amoore, "Algorithmic War: Everyday Geographies of the War on Terror," *Antipode* 41, no. 1 (2009): 49-69.

<sup>5</sup> Kiarina Kordela, "Monsters of Biopower: Terror(ism) and Horror in the Era of Affect," *Philosophy Today* 60, no. 1 (2016): 193-205. For a more general analysis on the topic of vulnerable subjects see, Lauren B. Wilcox, *Bodies of Violence: Theorising Embodied Subjects in International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). For a necropolitical conceptualisation of the drone programme see Jamie Allinson, "The Necropolitics of Drones," *International Political Sociology* 9, no. 2 (2015): 113-27.

governmental narratives of drone weaponry;<sup>6</sup> and the racist and dehumanising discourses that permeate and perpetuate the U.S. drone programme.<sup>7</sup>

However, despite the fact that the subject of drone warfare has been tackled in many different ways, there have been few attempts in the literature to historicise drone violence in relation to previous practices of air power.<sup>8</sup> While this does not mean that the armed drone is viewed in an entirely ahistorical manner, the customary way of confronting such a history is with a passing nod rather than in-depth scrutiny.<sup>9</sup> Because the conventional wisdom among scholars has been that violence of drones is a recent phenomenon, they have also treated it as such. Consequently, drone warfare is principally understood in terms of its novelty: as a state of violence that abandons military tradition and radically breaks with concepts thought to be integral to the very notion of “war” itself. My argument is that, although this claim of novelty is a central and recurring theme in the literature, it is also one that remains largely unexamined. In order to demonstrate how this is the case, I shall now consider how the discontinuity of the drone is framed in Grégoire Chamayou’s book *Drone Theory* [*Théorie du drone*]. The reason why I start my analysis with *Drone Theory* is threefold. First, in Chamayou’s account one can find a clear articulation of the approach that I wish to problematise. Second, *Drone Theory* offers one of the most scathing and influential polemics on drones found in the literature. As such, it can function as key reference point to show the limits of *critical* analyses of drone violence more generally. Finally, even though my contention is that Chamayou’s theory of the drone does not adequately attend to the continuities linking the violence of drones with earlier forms of (colonial) warfare, his overall project develops some concepts and themes – particularly in regards to the

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<sup>6</sup> Jeremy Packer and Joshua Reeves, “Romancing the Drone: Military Desire and Anthropophobia from SAGE to Swarm,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 38 (2013): 309-331.

<sup>7</sup> Marina Espinoza, “State Terrorism: Orientalism and the Drone Programme,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 11, no. 2 (2018): 376-93.

<sup>8</sup> There is a small but significant body of work that does approach the drone historically and it will be drawn upon later in this chapter.

<sup>9</sup> For example, the typical historical reflection found in many scholarly analyses involves the acknowledgement of the fact that the drone was preceded by a techno-military process of creating long-distance weaponry; an endeavour wherein the drone features as its technological end-point.

predatory logic characterising contemporary uses of military drones – that are both original and insightful, and which I shall rely on in the next chapter of this thesis.

### *No Longer War*

Chamayou opens *Drone Theory* by noting that the intention of his book is ‘to subject the drone to a philosophical investigation’, by which he means an examination of the *nature* of the weapon and of the violence it inflicts.<sup>10</sup> He reasons that this type of approach is especially apposite to the study of drone warfare because the drone signifies ‘an “unidentified violent object”’: as soon as one tries to think about it in terms of established categories, intense confusion arises around notions as elementary as zones or places (geographical and ontological categories), virtue or bravery (ethical categories), warfare or conflict (categories at once strategic and legal-political).<sup>11</sup> For Chamayou, a key problem faced by scholars who seek to examine contemporary practices of drone violence is that such practices fall outside the scope of ordinary ways of conceptualising the conduct of war. Because of this rupture, drone warfare engenders multiple ‘crises of intelligibility’ that cannot be resolved by existing frameworks pertaining to war.<sup>12</sup> When it comes to describing drone strikes, basic terms and concepts that have long been considered crucial in theories of war, such as the “battlefield”, “combat” and “combatants”, become radically distorted or even entirely meaningless. For Chamayou, therefore, the conceptual confusion he seeks to deal with arises because of the discontinuity of drone warfare with earlier ways of understanding and theorising war.

But, if these epistemic crises are a symptom of discontinuity, then what is their underlying cause? Chamayou’s reply to this question is clear: ‘At the root of [these epistemic crises] lies the elimination, *already rampant but here absolutely radicalized*, of any immediate relation of reciprocity’.<sup>13</sup> In Chamayou’s eyes, the novelty of drones is located in that these weapons effectively remove the ability of one of the sides in the conflict to oppose physically the violence of the other. This

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<sup>10</sup> Chamayou, *Drone Theory*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 and 99.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 14. Emphasis mine.

technical capacity of drones brings about a fundamental shift, since war ceases to be a relation of violence that is reciprocal, or at least used to have a minimum possibility of being so. In doing away with reciprocity, he concludes, the drone has placed the very notion of “war” into a crisis. This change is so fundamental that even metaphysical concepts pertaining to war are challenged: ‘The attempt to eradicate all direct reciprocity in any exposure to hostile violence transforms not only the material conduct of armed violence technically, tactically, and psychically, but also the traditional principles of a military ethos officially based on bravery and a sense of sacrifice’.<sup>14</sup> In view of the all-encompassing discontinuity that Chamayou sees in drone warfare, his objective in *Drone Theory* then is to figure out ‘what kind of “state of violence” does [drone warfare] amount to’, if not that of war.<sup>15</sup> For him, this objective functions as ‘an initial analytical dimension’ over and above which he subsequently develops his argument.<sup>16</sup>

However, precisely because it takes the form of a preliminary proposition, this sort of claim about the novelty of the drone not only remains unexamined, but also permeates Chamayou’s entire theoretical account. This can be seen, for example, in the way that, elsewhere in the book, he notes that ‘by distancing itself totally from the model of hand-to-hand combat’, the conduct of war, ‘becomes something quite different, a “state of violence” of a different kind. [War] *degenerates* into slaughter or hunting. One no longer fights the enemy; one eliminates him, as one shoots rabbits’.<sup>17</sup> One can observe this argument appearing, almost verbatim, once again later in the book when Chamayou observes that ‘the situation introduced by the exclusive use of drones in asymmetrical warfare’ is one where ‘war *degenerates* into a putting-to-death’.<sup>18</sup> The reiteration of this point is indicative of the way in which the radical asymmetry of drone warfare is posited as a central and persistent problematic in *Drone Theory*, which Chamayou seeks to scrutinise.

As indicated above, this kind of approach is hardly unique to Chamayou’s work. Instead, the latter exemplifies a rather dominant theoretical position in the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 14. Emphasis mine.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 14. Emphasis mine.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 91. Emphases mine.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 162. Emphasis mine.

literature, which objects to the use of the conceptual language of war as a theoretical schema to examine the non-reciprocal violence of drones. For example, in his analysis of what he calls “riskless warfare”, Paul Kahn argues that there is an inherent paradox in labelling war as “riskless” since, ‘without the imposition of mutual risk, warfare is not war at all’.<sup>19</sup> A similar point is raised by Christian Enemark who observes that ‘when a mode of killing is risk-free to the individual killer, it is worth asking whether “war” is going on at all’.<sup>20</sup> Enemark continues by saying that while the character of war may be subject to changes, the nature of war remains immutable: ‘war, to be war, must be a contest’.<sup>21</sup> We can see that both Kahn and Enemark, like Chamayou, take reciprocity to be a necessary condition of war. Since the armed drone completely removes this condition of reciprocity, the conclusion drawn by scholars who adopt this position is that an armed conflict wherein one side employs drones is – and thus must be evaluated and criticised as – something other than war.

### *Alternative Paradigms of Violence*

Theorisations of drone warfare are typically developed in two stages. The first stage consists of questioning the applicability of “war” as a conceptual framework through which contemporary uses of armed drones can be understood: ‘Do drone strikes count as war?’<sup>22</sup> As I have demonstrated, most theorists of drone warfare respond to this question in the negative, by arguing that the non-reciprocal nature of drone violence fundamentally opposes traditional conceptions of war.

At the same time, for these theorists a negative description of drone warfare – that is, its definition as “not war” – can only be an intermediary conclusion.<sup>23</sup> As

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<sup>19</sup> Paul W. Kahn, “The Paradox of Riskless Warfare,” *Philosophy and Public Policy Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (2002): 4.

<sup>20</sup> Christian Enemark, “Drones, Risk, and Perpetual Force,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 28, no. 3 (2014): 366. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 366. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 366.

<sup>23</sup> There are some theorists, however, who stop at a negative definition. An example of this can be found in the work of Brunstetter and Braun who loosely define the drone bombing simply as *ad vim*, namely, a force short of war, Daniel Brunstetter and Megan Braun, “From *Jus ad Bellum* to *Jus ad Vim*: Recalibrating Our Understanding of the Moral Use of Force,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 27, no. 1 (2013): 87-106.

Enemark notes, ‘the knowledge of what something *isn’t* does not nearly equate to understanding what it *is*’.<sup>24</sup> In this context, even when it is perfectly clear that drone violence is not compatible to the notion of “war”, ‘one is [still] left wondering what the essence of the thing is’.<sup>25</sup> For Enemark, the epistemic vacuum created by the emergence of drone warfare demands a subsequent stage of analysis; in turn, this inevitably involves answering Chamayou’s inaugural question cited above: ‘If the “war of drones” is no longer quite warfare, what kind of “state of violence” does it amount to?’<sup>26</sup>

This analytical imperative to define the *essence* of drone warfare has led to the adoption of alternative theoretical paradigms, other than war, whose intended aim is to provide a more plausible account of practices of contemporary uses of armed drones. One such paradigm is what Chamayou names “cynegetic war”, that is, a war that takes the form of hunting.<sup>27</sup> Chamayou goes on to explain the basic features of cynegetic war, and how they differ from traditional warfare, as follows:

Contrary to Carl von Clausewitz’s classical definition, the fundamental structure of this type of warfare is no longer that of a duel, of two fighters facing each other. The paradigm is quite different: a hunter advancing on a prey that flees or hides from him. The rules of the game are not the same ... The hostile relationship now boils down, as in a game of hide-and-seek, to “a competition between the hiders and the seekers”.<sup>28</sup>

If the armed drone transforms the conduct of war, for Chamayou it does so by realising the ‘ideal of non-confrontation with death, and of domination without real combat’, which is a central feature of cynegetic warfare.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Enemark, “Drones, Perpetual Force,” 366. Emphases in the original.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 366. Emphases in the original.

<sup>26</sup> Chamayou, *Drone Theory*, 14.

<sup>27</sup> Chamayou explores in more detail the history of cynegetic power in an earlier manuscript published in English in 2012. In this context, for a more detailed commentary on his account of cynegetic power see Grégoire Chamayou, *Manhunts: A Philosophical History*, trans. Steven Rendall (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Grégoire Chamayou, “The Manhunt Doctrine,” *Radical Philosophy* 169 (2011): 4.

In addition, Chamayou views the capacity of the drone to pursue, track and kill as a *quintessential* aspect of the weapon. For him, the drone is an inherently predatory technology and ‘the emblem of contemporary cynegetic war’.<sup>30</sup> The drone, Chamayou elaborates,

creates to perfection the ideal of asymmetry: to be able to kill without being able to be killed; to be able to see without being seen. To become absolutely invulnerable while the other is placed in a state of absolute vulnerability. “Predator”, “Global Hawk”, “Reaper” – birds of prey and angels of death, drones bear their names well’.<sup>31</sup>

This passage indicates that a key reason why Chamayou thinks that cynegetic warfare constitutes a more apposite framework for the critique of drone violence is that manhunting corresponds to the non-reciprocal nature of such violence. He notes that while ‘a duel involves a reciprocal relation of exposure to death – each participant bearing his chest to the enemy – in the hunt, on the contrary, the master barely ever confronts his prey directly’.<sup>32</sup> The radically altered dynamics of this (non-confrontational) violence, Chamayou concludes, mean not only that ‘combat becomes superfluous’ but also that war itself ‘becomes pure power of murder’.<sup>33</sup>

This idea that the violence perpetrated by means of armed drones best resembles murder rather than warfare, is also central in the analyses offered by other critics such as Laurie Calhoun and Andrew Cockburn, who label drones as “high-tech assassins”.<sup>34</sup> Calhoun, in particular, adopts an approach very similar to Chamayou’s, since she begins her analysis by framing drone warfare primarily in terms of its discontinuity from conventional war. In her book *We Kill Because We Can: From Soldiering to Assassination in the Drone Age*, Calhoun notes that ‘the people who vehemently oppose the use of weaponized drones ... see a rupture between past and

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>34</sup> Laurie Calhoun, *We Kill Because We Can: From Soldiering to Assassination in the Drone Age* (London: Zed Books, 2015). Andrew Cockburn, *Kill Chain: Drones and the Rise of the High-Tech Assassins* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2015).

present military practices'.<sup>35</sup> She observes further that while 'war has always involved the intentional premediated killing of groups of people', drone warfare 'is innovative in that it involves the intentional, premeditated killing of *specific* people, one by one'.<sup>36</sup> After positing this distinction, Calhoun goes on to argue that drone warfare 'looks *indistinguishable* from what in centuries past was labelled *assassination* or *extra-judicial execution*'.<sup>37</sup> The high-tech aspect of weaponised drones, she claims, does not change the fact that they, like older instruments of assassination, have a singular purpose, namely, '*the death of particular persons*'.<sup>38</sup> According to Calhoun, the increasing rate in which assassin-drones have been used by the U.S. in the course of the so-called War on Terror, explains why the conduct of that war has moved away from standard military operations and is instead reduced to a technologically-driven policy of targeting suspected terrorists.<sup>39</sup> The dronification of that war, Calhoun observes, has led to the situation *now* where 'last resort has become first resort ... courage has become cowardice ... a former intelligence agency is now a killing machine ... just war has become naked aggression'.<sup>40</sup>

The latter observation demonstrates that Calhoun's approach resonates with Chamayou's in important ways. To begin with, for both of them, drone weaponry engenders a series of discontinuities (ethical, legal, political, military, historical and so on) with "traditional" warfare. These discontinuities, in turn, make it difficult, if not impossible, to conceive drone strikes as operations of war. Finally, for both Chamayou and Calhoun, the adoption of manhunting and assassination,

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<sup>35</sup> Laurie Calhoun, *We Kill Because We Can*, 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 33. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 33. "indistinguishable" my emphasis.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 33. Emphasis mine.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. For analyses of the Israeli use of drones for assassinations see also, Michael L. Gross, "Assassination and Targeted Killing: Law Enforcement, Execution or Self-Defence?" *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 23, no. 3 (2006): 323-335 and Marouf Hasian Jr, *Israel's Military Operations in Gaza: Telegenic Lawfare and Warfare* (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6. For more approaches that approach drone warfare in terms of the U.S. assassination campaign see also, Gloria Shkurti, "Making Drones Illegal Based on a Wrong Example: The U.S. Dronified Warfare," *Turkish Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 3, no. 1 (2016): 39-74; Pam Bailey, "Assassination Drones: A New Type of Warfare," *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 32, no. 1 (2013): 34-35; and Brian Glyn Williams, "The CIA's Covert Predator Drone War in Pakistan, 2004-2010: The History of an Assassination Campaign," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no. 10 (2010): 871-892.

respectively, is based on the argument that these paradigms are better suited for understanding the monopoly of violence necessarily implied by drone warfare.

This monopolisation of violence has also led to the emergence and popularisation of a third, related, paradigm – namely, the conceptualisation of drone strikes as acts of policing, rather than operations of war. A prominent example of this approach can be found in Kahn’s analysis of “riskless warfare”, mentioned above.<sup>41</sup> In viewing “policing” as a regime of violence that is conceptually and materially distinct from “war” (a tendency that I shall criticise in the next section), Khan suggests that a possible solution to the paradox of “riskless warfare” is to conceptualise asymmetrical conflicts as a transition from warfare toward policing.<sup>42</sup> Unlike Chamayou and Calhoun, however, Khan does not consider one-sided armed conflicts to be in themselves problematic: ‘I don’t mean to suggest’, he remarks, ‘that there is anything wrong with the movement from warfare to policing ... Morally this can only be seen as progress’.<sup>43</sup> In Khan’s eyes the problem lies instead in ‘the confusion of the traditional morality of the battlefield with the appropriate morality for contemporary, international policing ... If the military is engaged in policing, then it needs to rethink its rules of engagement’.<sup>44</sup> The reason why Khan lauds the transition from warfare to policing is because he thinks that ‘one consequence of an asymmetrical capacity to apply force can be a self-imposed effort strictly to adhere to the legal limits on targets’.<sup>45</sup> According to the logic of this argument, the use of armed drones signals a morally beneficial development: In extending the asymmetry of armed conflicts to its physical extreme, drone warfare raises the possibility of being thought of as a police operation and, in so doing, increases the

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<sup>41</sup> I do not consider Kahn’s analysis to be the best specimen of theoretical accounts that approach drone warfare in terms of policing. In this respect, the works of Mark Neocleous, Ian Shaw and Tyler Wall on this topic offer analyses that are far more insightful, detailed and critically informed than Kahn’s. However, I focus on Kahn’s argument because it exemplifies a prevalent tendency in the literature, which 1) thinks of “policing” and “war” as two analytically disconnectable phenomena of state violence and 2) assumes that police enforcement is a form of state violence which, in principle, is less intense compared to the waging of war. I intend to criticise this way of understanding policing by military means later in the chapter.

<sup>42</sup> Kahn, “Riskless Warfare,” 4.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

chance of the violence of war being moderated by the (more restrictive) moral framework of policing.

Manhunting, assassination and policing present three of the most prevalent ways in which the question of the discontinuity of drone violence has been addressed in the literature. It should be noted that, even though these paradigms possess their own conceptual particularities, they are nonetheless also closely associated. For instance, manhunting and assassination are related practices of violence, since assassination presupposes a kind of manhunt aimed at finding and killing the targeted person. Likewise, manhunting constitutes a key function of policing. As Tyler Wall notes in his critique of military drones being repurposed for domestic policing, 'police drones underline the unmanning of the police manhunt, *that foundational practice of police power*'.<sup>46</sup> In a similar way, in *Manhunts: A Philosophical History*, Chamayou posits that 'the police is a *hunting institution*, the state's arm for pursuit, entrusted by it with tracking, arresting and imprisoning'.<sup>47</sup> Because of these linkages, scholarly analyses that seek to determine the nature of drone violence often use these paradigms interchangeably, or in unison. Chamayou's *Drone Theory* is a case in point of this interchangeability: Not only does he offer descriptions of drones as instruments of assassination regularly throughout the book; he also identifies drone manhunts as 'the enfants terribles of the police and the army'.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, manhunting, assassination and policing are rarely taken to be rigid conceptual models – especially not in Chamayou's work. Rather they often appear in the literature as related frameworks, whose purpose is to make sense of the novelty of drone warfare as a kind of violence that due to its lack of reciprocity lies outside the scope of ordinary warfare.

In the following section, I contest this prevalent representation of drone warfare primarily in terms of a radically new phenomenon of military violence. It is worth emphasising that, in doing so, I do not intend to argue that the theoretical approaches presented above need to be rejected. On the contrary, I consider them to be important sources of criticism, in particular when it comes to challenging the

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<sup>46</sup> Tyler Wall, "Unmanning the Police Manhunt: Vertical Security as Pacification," *Socialist Studies* 9, no. 2 (2013): 34. Emphasis mine.

<sup>47</sup> Grégoire Chamayou, *Manhunts*, 89. Emphasis mine.

<sup>48</sup> Chamayou, *Drone Theory*, 32-33.

counterterrorist logic that underpins the current use of armed drones in the “War on Terror”. Rather, my argument is that, in neglecting to consider the ways in which drone warfare is *not* a radically new form of military violence, these approaches are *insufficient* critiques. My aim in the section that follows is to discuss some of the key issues that arise from not accounting for the history of drone violence.

### **Drone Warfare: Something Old**

The present section discusses some of the underlying issues in current representations of drone warfare as discontinuous with “old” forms of military violence. I begin this discussion by challenging the notion that this discontinuity must be the starting point, and subsequent focal point, for critical analysis. I then proceed to scrutinise the claim that the novelty of drone warfare is located in the abolition of reciprocal war. I suggest that this purported abolition, even if it contradicts so-called classical or traditional modes of war, is compatible with previous practices of military violence – the colonial exercise of air power examined in the previous chapter provides a case in point. Finally, in the last part of this section, I argue that a historically informed analysis is crucial for contesting dominant Eurocentric narratives about war and its tradition, as well as for opening up new ways to critique the violent effects of current uses of drones.

#### *A Weapon of Postcolonial Amnesia*

Does drone warfare have a historical precedent? For Chamayou, it does, but it is crucial that we overlook it. In one of the strangest passages in *Drone Theory*, he posits the argument that, for a critique of drone warfare to be sustained, the latter must be understood primarily in terms of its novelty. Chamayou reasons that throughout its history, warfare has been subjected to drastic changes. ‘Today as yesterday’, he observes, ‘the radical imbalance in exposure to death leads to a redefinition of relations of hostility and of the very sense of what is called “waging

war”<sup>49</sup> This leads him to acknowledge that the manner in which current uses of drones challenge conventional understandings of warfare is not entirely new. However, while Chamayou accepts that drone warfare is the latest in a series of transformations that have made the conduct of war increasingly more asymmetrical, he also warns against perceiving it in this way. He explains why as follows:

But every time such situations arose, certain contemporaries were troubled. Faced with a spectacle of armed violence that so manifestly contravened “the conventional understanding of war as an activity in which human dying and killing are exchanged,” it was not long before they expressed their indignation. But when these people began to express their objections too openly, they were often faced with a very ancient discursive strategy used to calm uneasy consciences and silence the most vociferous: the reassuring discourse of historical permanence. It is a matter of showing, with the backing of many historical examples, that there is nothing fundamentally new about this kind of situation, so it is perfectly acceptable.<sup>50</sup>

Chamayou’s worry is that if drone warfare is viewed as a seamless part of the history of conducting wars, then there might be less reason to object to it. It becomes incumbent on the critical mind, therefore, to maintain its sense of alertness by rejecting ‘arguments of the “there is nothing new under the sun” type’, which ‘are designed to assuage the present troubled situation by referring to a past considered to set a legal precedent’.<sup>51</sup>

One such argument, and the specific target of Chamayou’s criticism, appears in David Bell’s article, titled “In Defense of Drones: A Historical Argument”.<sup>52</sup> According to Bell, current uses of weaponised drones are not a foreign element in the history

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>52</sup> David Bell, “In Defense of Drones: A Historical Argument,” *The New Republic*, January 27, 2012, <https://newrepublic.com/article/100113/obama-military-foreign-policy-technology-drones>.

of warfare, but instead an integral one.<sup>53</sup> 'It is a commonplace', Bell writes, 'that, from the very beginnings of warfare, combatants have sought technological advantages that allow them to kill their enemies with minimum risk to themselves'.<sup>54</sup> As a result, he proceeds to explain, 'both remote control warfare, and the queasy feelings it arouses in many observers, are best seen as parts of a classic, and very old history'.<sup>55</sup> Not only Bell is sceptical of objections to drone warfare that understand it to be 'something altogether new – a fantasy of science fiction that has become reality' but he also observes that '*if our technology is new, the desire to take out one's enemies from a safe distance is anything but*'.<sup>56</sup>

Chamayou offers a compelling reply to Bell's latter observation: 'That is no doubt true, but how such a "historical" reminder could possibly constitute a "defense of drones" remains more mysterious'.<sup>57</sup> In Chamayou's response, however, one can see an implicit acknowledgement on his part that the historical connections between drone warfare and previous forms of armed violence are not necessarily ones that lead to the legitimisation of current uses of drones. This acknowledgment becomes far more explicit a few lines later when he observes that 'the soothing invocation of history', effected by arguments like Bell's, 'comes at the price of mutilating the real meaning of historical continuity'.<sup>58</sup> In this context, Chamayou suggests that colonial warfare constitutes an object lesson on why one should be suspicious and critical of new military technologies that facilitate asymmetrical wars. He notes that 'the desire to take out one's enemies from a safe distance', that Bell speaks of, 'was never better satisfied than in the "glorious" episodes of colonial wars, in which natives were felled en masse while the armies of the whites were hardly scratched'.<sup>59</sup> If the weaponised drone has a historical lineage, it is that of imperial domination and of the systematic decimation of colonial populations. In this sense, Chamayou writes, the 'current use of drones, in its own way, falls into place in the continuous line of such "asymmetrical wars" involving machine guns marshaled [*sic*] against spears or

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Chamayou, *Drone Theory*, 95.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 93.

rusty old guns'.<sup>60</sup> Chamayou's final remark on the matter is that, in arguments such as Bell's, one can see how

[t]he spectre of colonial violence is tacitly called upon in order to revitalize present violence by setting it within the tranquil continuity of a past tradition, and then it is immediately covered up, for no attempt is made to spell out the real content of that tradition. The drone is the weapon of an amnesiac postcolonial violence.<sup>61</sup>

However, though Chamayou explicitly renounces historical defences of drones, at the same time he leaves ambiguous how critical analysis should respond to that "ancient discursive strategy". For the most part, it appears that Chamayou's, as well as other critics', counter-strategy principally lies in marginalising the linkages between drone warfare and earlier colonial violence, by instead focusing their analyses primarily on the discontinuity that the drone represents.

This discursive counter-strategy, however, is not without its flaws. While historical analysis has been employed in defence of current uses of drones, there are at least two ways in which the reverse is also true. The first is one that Chamayou himself recognises; namely, the capacity of historical analysis to incite, rather than lull, criticism by exposing the significant ways in which present atrocities are contingent on past ones. In fact, an important reason why "historical analyses", such as the one posited by Bell, might be effective as defences of armed drones to begin with, is because critical thought has *not* been sufficiently attentive to the colonial legacy of such weaponry. As Talal Asad observes, 'little attention has been paid in the growing literature on new military technologies and strategies to the continuities of the new wars with earlier colonial wars', where 'Euro-American soldiers discovered that the opportunities for killing were much greater than the risks of dying in battle and that "uncivilized" enemies were not entitled to be treated with the same restraint as "civilized" ones'.<sup>62</sup> What these continuities reveal, Asad proceeds to explain, is that 'insofar as military interventions by Western powers

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 93-94.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 94-95.

<sup>62</sup> Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 35.

continue this colonial tradition, it should be evident that their primary aim is not the protection of life as such but the construction and encouragement of specific kinds of human subjects and the outlawing of all others'.<sup>63</sup>

Second, just as there is a discursive strategy that defends drone warfare by making use of historical precedent, so too there is one that seeks to do the same by pointing to the novelty of armed drones. In the latter case, the defence of current uses of drones is articulated *contra* history, by invoking scientific and technological progress in order to rationalise new military practices as “more restrained”, “rational” and ultimately “ethical” than earlier ones.<sup>64</sup> The narrative that critics are confronted with, in this instance, is one that portrays drone warfare as a technologically-driven transition to a more ethical conduct of wars; a narrative that has featured centrally in defences of armed drones posited by military men,<sup>65</sup> government officials,<sup>66</sup> journalists<sup>67</sup> and academics.<sup>68</sup> What is more important,

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>64</sup> One can see an example of this moralisation of technological advancements in war in the claim made by Carvin and Williams that ‘science, and especially applied science ... has been seen as the key to controlling war, allowing the United States to achieve overwhelming and quick military victories, which are nevertheless relatively humane and worthy of its core liberal values’. Stephanie Carvin and Michael John Williams, *Law, Science, Liberalism and the American Way of Warfare: The Quest for Humanity in Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1.

<sup>65</sup> Consider, for instance, how Lieutenant Colonel Douglas A. Pryer in arguing *against* the current use of drones by the U.S., nonetheless finds nothing immoral in using drones more generally. Quite the opposite, Pryer comments: ‘I will not argue that waging war remotely does not have ethical advantages, for it clearly does. For one, armed drones and other robots are incapable of running concentration camps and committing rape and other crimes ... Indeed, removing combat operators from the stress of life-threatening danger reduces their potential to commit those crimes that they could still conceivably commit via drones’. Douglas A. Pryer Lt. Col., “The Rise of the Machine,” *Military Review* (2013): 15.

<sup>66</sup> Former CIA director John Brennan is one of the most well-known defenders of drones on the basis that such weapons offer a more ethical alternative than older technologies of war. For more, see a transcript of his April 2012 speech on counterterrorism strategy, John Brennan, “The Efficacy and Ethics of U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy,” *Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars*, transcript and webcast, April 30, 2012, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/the-efficacy-and-ethics-us-counterterrorism-strategy>.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Michael W. Lewis, “Drones: Actually the Most Humane Form of Warfare Ever,” *The Atlantic*, August 21, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/08/drones-actually-the-most-humane-form-of-warfare-ever/278746/>.

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Bradley Strawser, “Moral Predators: The Duty to Employ Uninhabited Aerial Vehicles,” *Journal of Military Ethics* 9, no. 4 (2010): 342-368, and Steven Clark, “Targeted Killings: Justified Acts of War or Too Much Power for One Government?” *Global Security Studies* 3, no. 3 (2012): 15-33.

however, is that this conflation of technological innovation with moral progress in warfare is not new – as seen in the previous chapters, the invention and practice of aerial bombing in the early twentieth century was accompanied with similar ideas and arguments concerning the status of aerial warfare as a more humane way of fighting wars. According to Marina Espinoza, this discursive strategy of humanitarianism, precision, and rationality, ‘proves to bear myriad traces of colonial reasoning’: imperial powers, she notes, ‘have almost universally aligned themselves with science, progress, rationality and modernity’ in order to ‘legitimise violence and domination for centuries’.<sup>69</sup> One such colonial trace, Espinoza argues, can be seen in the way in which the ‘purported “rationality” of US [drone] targeting ... upholds and reinforces hierarchies of US *rational* violence versus *irrational* terrorist violence’.<sup>70</sup> Like Asad, so Espinoza understands the narrative concerning drone’s “humanitarian” violence to be in line with colonial tradition: in appealing to the novelty of the violent means used in war, this discursive strategy reconstitutes the old dichotomy of “rational” and “irrational” forms of violence. As such, it is a discursive strategy that functions also as a strategic discourse, insofar as it materially promotes and consolidates the deployment of increasingly asymmetrical means of war on account of their humane and rational nature.<sup>71</sup> Paying attention to this continuity with colonial rationalisations of military violence is thus crucial in criticising the language of techno-military humanitarianism invoked by defences of current uses of drones.

As I have shown above, Chamayou’s contention is that because the drone is set within an unexamined historical continuity, it is “the weapon of an amnesiac postcolonial violence”. However, the same holds true when drone warfare is likewise situated in an unexamined discontinuity. For, when critics represent drone warfare predominantly as a radical break from past warfare, then their analyses too exhibit signs of postcolonial amnesia. Ultimately, what is forgotten is that the

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<sup>69</sup> Espinoza, “Orientalism Drone Programme,” 379.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 379.

<sup>71</sup> Consider, for instance, how the argument that strategic bombing marked a more humane way of waging wars was used in the early twentieth century in order to push for the substitution of ground warfare with war in the air – this argument was central in discussions regarding the implementation of the air control scheme in Iraq. For more, see Chapters 2 and 3.

colonial structures of violence that support current uses of drones are themselves a problem that critical thought needs to reckon with. They are a problem because, as I show in the rest of this section, the omission or marginalisation of these structures has meant that theoretical accounts of drone warfare (including those of a more critical stripe) epistemically reduce the violent effects of drones to almost exclusively the *killing* of targeted *individuals*.

*What is “War”? Military Traditions of Non-reciprocated Violence*

In an article entitled “What’s in a War? (Politics as War, War as Politics)”, Étienne Balibar examines the reasons why the idea of a “War on Terror” has stirred a great deal of epistemological confusion in the literature that tries to deal with it in terms of “war”. According to Balibar, the first, and for him the most crucial, reason for this confusion lies in how,

many, if not all, of the current discussions are in fact obscured and affected by the obscurity of a preliminary question which remains undecided throughout, and in the “end”, i.e., when it comes to either drawing lessons from the war, or deriving consequences, or proposing alternatives, is embarrassing for any speaker, namely, the simple question: *what is a “war”?*<sup>72</sup>

The confusion arises, therefore, because scholars who think that the “War on Terror” (a war that the U.S. fights primarily by means of armed drones) departs from the very notion of “war” itself reflect little on the contents of that notion. For Balibar, the preliminary question of “what is “war”?” does not constitute ‘a verbal puzzle, a pure nominalistic requisite’, but instead ‘has consequences for our reasoning concerning the current situation, and the kind of historical determinations that it reveals’.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Étienne Balibar, “What’s in a War? (Politics as War, War as Politics),” *Ratio Juris* 21, no. 3 (2008): 366. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>73</sup> Balibar, “What’s in a War?” 366.

In agreement with Balibar, I argue that the claim that drone warfare makes necessary a redefinition of traditional understandings of war is true only with respect to what that “tradition” is taken to be in the first place. In the previous section, I showed that this claim is based on the representation of war as a reciprocated exchange of armed violence. For theorists such as Chamayou, Calhoun and Kahn, it is the breakdown of reciprocity that, in the final analysis, renders drone warfare a situation altogether different from “war”. In framing warfare in this way, these theorists work strictly within the parameters of Carl von Clausewitz’s “classical” definition of war as a duel between two opponents, each of whom seeks to compel the other to its will.<sup>74</sup> In this respect, a more accurate formulation of the discontinuity argument would be as follows: drone warfare makes necessary a redefinition of traditional conceptions of war, insofar as that tradition is the Clausewitzian understanding of war as a duel.

I want to draw attention to some problems associated with framing war and its tradition in this manner. The first one has to do with the idea that, because the classical definition of war as a duel presupposes the physical confrontation of armed forces, past military practices of violence have also conformed to this format. In the previous chapters, I showed that air power – and, in particular, strategic bombing – brought into being a mode of warfare where the infliction of violence was principally one-sided. Take the following passage, written by an RAF officer in 1938, as an example of how air power is not reliant on the idea of immediate reciprocity of violence:

At one fell swoop the barriers are lowered, the walls breached, the rivers crossed and the mountains overtopped. The clash of armies in the field, or fleets at sea, becomes at once a private and professional corner of

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<sup>74</sup> The full definition by Clausewitz reads as follows: ‘War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale. Countless duels go to make up war, but a picture of it as a whole can be formed by imagining a pair of wrestlers. Each tries through physical force to compel the other to do his will; his *immediate* aim is to *throw* his opponent in order to make him incapable of further resistance. *War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.* Force, to counter opposing force, equips itself with the inventions of art and science. Force ... is thus the means of war; to impose our will on the enemy is its object. To secure that object we must render the enemy powerless; and that, in theory, is the true aim of warfare’. Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, eds and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1984), 75. Emphasis in the original.

dispute. While ships are being sunk, and battalions denuded of their strength, wings are whirring overhead, and *neither the accuracy of gunners nor the gallantry of men can avail one jot or tittle to avert the destruction which is being wrought far afield by the regiments of bombers.* The heart of a nation is being attacked, the vital organs also, *for aircraft can come and go at will, with practical immunity on the way, and well will an enemy have studied in what quarter to apply his resounding blows.* As before, when armies gained ground inch by inch in the face of opposition, *the people and their spirit of resistance* will be the object of attack. *But now it will be attainable by the simple process of appearing overhead to pull a level and release a bomb, and on each occasion in numberless succession to render ruinous and lifeless the area on impact on the ground below.*<sup>75</sup>

This description shows that in breaking with notions such as “armed combat”, “battlefield” or “direct exchange of violence”, contemporary uses of drones fall in line with the principles that characterised war from the air since its inception. In this context, drone warfare partakes in, and preserves, a century-old tradition of unleashing indiscriminate death, horror and destruction into populated areas by means of aerial bombing.<sup>76</sup>

A second problem concerns the way in which the use of Clausewitz’s definition as a conceptual template has, as Mark Neocleous writes, led to ‘a very narrow idea of war as a formal military engagement between states’.<sup>77</sup> For Neocleous, this so-called classical understanding of war as a duel has not only reduced scholarly analyses of war to ‘little more than a series of footnotes to Clausewitz’, but more crucially engendered a theoretical environment where colonial violence ‘through which millions have been slaughtered and resources of whole continents appropriated’ is marginalised or even entirely omitted as an object of analysis because it appears outside the dominant narratives through which we are expected to think about

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<sup>75</sup> L. E. O. Charlton, G. T. Garratt and R. Fletcher, *The Air Defence of Britain* (London: Penguin Books, 1938), 17. Emphases mine.

<sup>76</sup> For more, see Chapters 2 & 3.

<sup>77</sup> Mark Neocleous, *War Power, Police Power* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 5.

war.<sup>78</sup> One can see how this erasure is effected in the way that Clausewitz is regularly invoked by scholars who seek to differentiate between past wars (which are supposedly Clausewitzian) and contemporary wars (which are not).<sup>79</sup> In this context, Mary Kaldor argues that the twenty-first century is characterised by a decline in “old war” – for her, a ‘war involving states in which battle is the decisive encounter’ – and the emergence of “new wars”, which ‘are different both from classic inter-state wars and classic civil wars’ in that they ‘involve networks of state and non-state actors and most violence is directed against civilians’.<sup>80</sup> By positing Clausewitz as her historical point of reference, Kaldor thus fails to consider not only that there has been a long tradition of what she calls “new wars”, but also that, far from being atypical, this kind of warfare exemplifies the way that European powers deployed their military forces for centuries.

Another, related, issue concerns the underlying assumption that theoretical frames of war can be adopted objectively as analytical tools that can help classify and hierarchize state violence. As the history of colonialism demonstrates, however, there is nothing neutral and objective about frameworks whose purpose is to normalise one form of organised state violence as “ideal type” wars while naming, categorising and regularly disregarding others as “something other than war”. On the contrary, precisely because of the ideological function that these frameworks performed, and still perform, in bracketing an entire history of military violence – by re-labelling it as “small wars”, “counterinsurgency”, “policing”, “pacification” and so on – they need to be critically engaged with. Khan’s argument, seen above, shows the result of an unexamined commitment to these frameworks. In understanding “riskless warfare” as a decisive transition from the paradigm of war to that of policing, Khan partakes in the broader tendency that not only thinks of “war” and “policing” as analytically separable phenomena but also interprets the latter as a

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<sup>78</sup> Neocleous, *War, Police*, 5-6.

<sup>79</sup> Examples of this approach can be found in the work of scholars such as Herfried Münkler, Martin Van Creveld and Mary Kaldor. Herfried Münkler, *The New Wars*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Cambridge: Polity, 2005). Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War: The Most Radical Reinterpretation of Armed Conflict Since Clausewitz* (New York: The Free Press, 1991). Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

<sup>80</sup> Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, vi.

more moderate (and thus more acceptable) instantiation of the former.<sup>81</sup> In conceptually separating war and policing, however, this tendency ignores how both are fundamentally intertwined exercises of state violence. In this context, the previous chapter demonstrated not only that the British air control scheme during the 1920s-1930s institutionally unified the practice of war and policing, but also that its policing dimension demanded an intensification and interminable extension of military violence since, in addition to the defeat of insurgencies, the object of the scheme was to maintain colonial populations constantly subdued.

Finally, the lack of a critical awareness concerning the content of past traditions of war has meant that many scholars who criticise drone warfare often do so by appealing to a romanticised view of old wars. Consider, for instance, Chamayou's multiple references to how, with advent of drone weaponry, war "degenerates" into "slaughter", "murder", "assassination", "hunting" or "a putting-to-death" – a statement that implies some sort of deterioration or perversion of war from its previous, loftier mode of existence.<sup>82</sup> Likewise, as the blurb of Calhoun's *We Kill Because We Can* puts it: 'Welcome to the Drone Age. Where self-defense has become naked aggression. Where courage has become cowardice. Where black ops have become standard operating procedure'.<sup>83</sup> On the one hand, the notion of "The Drone Age" – an age where military ethos is in crisis and the conduct of war is reduced *now* to something morally based and unjustifiable – can act as a powerful tool of critique since it presents drone warfare as a negative development and opens up to a critique of armed drones as 'inhumane weapons deployed during a post-heroic age'.<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, however, this approach is also problematic because it perpetuates a narrative of "old war" as a form of armed violence which used to bear redeemable

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<sup>81</sup> Mary Kaldor articulates an argument similar to Kahn's, by noting that 'all forms of contemporary violence can be regarded as wholly illegitimate, requiring a policing rather than a political/military response' – in this context, Kaldor explains, '[t]here has been widespread criticism of the term 'war on terror' because it implies a military response to terrorist violence when policing and intelligence methods, it is argued, would be more effective'. Mary Kaldor, "In Defence of New Wars," *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 2, no. 1 (2013): 6.

<sup>82</sup> Chamayou, *Drone Theory*, see, more specifically, pages 91, 159 and 162.

<sup>83</sup> Calhoun, *We Kill Because We Can*, review excerpt on back cover.

<sup>84</sup> Marouf Hassian Jr., *Drone Warfare and Lawfare in a Post-Heroic Age* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016), 5.

ethical, legal, and military qualities. One can see this narrative at work in the following comment by Calhoun:

The practice of targeted killing is truly controversial, even more so than war itself, which in the past appeared to many (not all) military supporters to be subject to “rules” set out centuries ago by the early just war theorists and later incorporated in modern protocols such as the Geneva Conventions and the *Charter of the United Nations* (1945)...what remote-control killers do today bears nearly no resemblance to what soldiers did in the past. While sitting before computer screens, drone operators snipe unwitting targets who... [are] stripped even of the right to surrender enshrined in orthodox military protocols forged over centuries.<sup>85</sup>

Similar to Kaldor’s approach seen above, Calhoun here fails to take into account that in order for her understanding of “old war” to hold true, she first needs to swipe the historical slate clean of any trace of colonial warfare. Here lies the Eurocentrism of analyses that consider “The Drone Age” as a historical turning point from past traditions of war: If the violence of drones appears as a novelty for scholars, it is because they view it in isolation from the broader context of imperial violence. In so doing, these scholars have thus obscured the many ways in which drone warfare does not go against the grain of previous structures of imperial violence but instead sustains and is sustained by these structures. They overlook, for instance, that the legal history of the FATA region – a region that, due to its colonial past, now lies outside the Pakistani state’s constitutional jurisdiction – has been conducive to the creation of a geo-legal space that facilitates the deployment of U.S. drone strikes in that area.<sup>86</sup> Or they ignore that the imperative of mastering aerial surveillance by means of drones is not new but goes hand in hand with the all-encompassing visual logic of European colonisation, a logic that, as Caren Caplan explains, ‘has created

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<sup>85</sup> Calhoun, *We Kill Because We Can*, 5.

<sup>86</sup> Ian G. R. Shaw and Majed Akhter, “The Unbearable Humanness of Drone Warfare in FATA, Pakistan,” *Antipode* 44, no. 4 (2012): 1504.

the context for a cosmic view that is articulated through air power'.<sup>87</sup> And they disregard that the air power principles that underlie the current U.S. deployment of armed drones – the ideas, for instance, of “air superiority”, “invulnerability of air forces” and “constant aerial presence” – are principles that were inaugurated, shaped and consolidated by the experience of British colonial air policing almost a century ago.<sup>88</sup> From a historical point of view, therefore, the armed drone is far from being “an unidentified violent object”, as Chamayou describes it; it is rather a disturbingly familiar instrument of violence, one which upholds and furthers the tradition of unreciprocated violence carried by its colonial predecessors.

### *Drone Violence: Going Beyond “Targeted Killings”*

Mainstream critiques of drone warfare invariably revolve around the prevalent representation of drones as a military technology that enables the lethal targeting of particular persons. This is not surprising considering that these weapons have been the principal means through which the U.S. conducts its “War on Terror”. Thus, the U.S. drone programme is organised as a discursive practice of “targeted killings”: Its stated purpose is to pursue, find and kill individuals suspected to be terrorists. It is precisely this context of lethal targeting that makes criticisms like Chamayou’s and Calhoun’s so convincing. In tethering their critiques to frameworks such as manhunting and assassination, Chamayou and Calhoun are able to expose and condemn the murderous logic of counterterrorism that underlies current uses of armed drones. In so doing, however, they – as well as other critics who follow a similar approach – unwittingly engage in a reduction of the violent phenomenon they seek to criticise.

As shown in Chapter 1, the violent effects of drone bombing extend well beyond the moment of the targeted killing. Not just death, but life too under drones is unbearably violent: In addition to killing, drone strikes also mutilate and disfigure

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<sup>87</sup> Caren Kaplan, “Mobility and War: The Cosmic View of US “Air Power”,” *Environment and Planning* 38, no. 2 (2006): 401.

<sup>88</sup> For more on this, see Chapter 3 and also the following work by Mark Neocleous and Priya Satia: Mark Neocleous, “Air Power as Police Power,” *Environment and Planning* 31, no. 4 (2013): 578-593. Priya Satia, “Drones: A History from the British Middle East,” *Humanity* 5, no. 1 (2014): 1-31.

the bodies of bystanders, who have to continue their lives bearing those injuries; they destroy homes, leaving people dispossessed; the constant presence of drones disrupts everyday life, leading to the social degradation of the targeted communities; and the constant fear of being bombed – or of having been previously bombed – inspires a general feeling of terror and fatigue.<sup>89</sup> These are some of the violent effects of drones that frameworks like manhunting and assassination cannot properly account for. I say properly, because it should not be understood that critics who adopt these frameworks do not comment on these broader violent effects. But insofar as they do, they do so only indirectly, for they understand that violence to lie outside the intended purpose and function of drone weaponry. One can see an example of this indirect approach in Chamayou's analysis. In countering the claim that drone bombing, because of its precision, is less violent than aerial bombing campaigns in the past, Chamayou observes:

But if Dresden (or, let's say, Hiroshima) is considered a pertinent standard as far as precision is concerned, any military procedure will successfully pass the test. The fact is that when it comes to selecting pertinent terms of comparison there is a confusion between the *form* of the weapon and its *function*. Given that the drone is a flying object, one automatically compares it to the military flying machines that preceded it. Compared to a World War II bomber, the drone undeniably gains in precision. However, that type of comparison is erroneous. To evaluate it properly, the drone should be set alongside weapons currently available for the same tactical function.<sup>90</sup>

Chamayou thus thinks that the (ethical) evaluation of the violence wreaked by drones should, in the final analysis, be made in relation to the military end which the weapon is meant to serve. For Chamayou, the drone is a disproportionate weapon because it generates effects beyond the intended aim for which it is designed. In this respect, Chamayou proceeds to explain that

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<sup>89</sup> For a more detailed description of the effects of drones, see Chapter 1.

<sup>90</sup> Chamayou, *Drone Theory*, 140-141. Emphases in the original.

[i]f one avoids *being misled by some external attribute*, the right form of comparison involves not a similarity of forms but an equivalence of functions. The drone is not a means of carpet bombing, and World War II bombers were not weapons designed for targeted assassination. The useful comparison here is not between a present-day flying weapon and an aerial weapon of the past, leading to the conclusion that progress has been made, but rather between this weapon and other present-day means for functions of the same order.<sup>91</sup>

Chamayou's conclusion here is both compelling and problematic. It is compelling because it criticises effectively the counterterrorist logic of using drones as a means for the assassination of targets: When compared with other tactical choices available, drone strikes constitute the most violent option. At the same time, it is problematic because Chamayou here frames the drone in a particular way: as the "assassin-drone", a weapon whose violence is (and, for Chamayou, should be) defined exclusively in relation to its function of killing individual targets.<sup>92</sup> While critical, Chamayou's essentialist approach gives rise to two related problems. First, if we are to define the drone only in terms of the counterterrorist strategy it is currently used for, then we epistemically reduce the violence of drone strikes by making "targeted killings" the exclusive lens through which to theorise such violence. Second, the form of the weapon *does* matter, for it exposes the critical continuities that link contemporary uses of drones with earlier colonial practices of air power. When drone strikes are situated in the longer violent tradition of aerial bombing, their broader non-lethal effects are shown to be as much a part of how the armed drone functions as its lethal violence. As for Chamayou's worry that a comparison to older forms of aerial bombing might result in drone strikes being seen as progress, the kind of reasoning that underlies such an evaluation is predicated on a further related reduction. In this case, the reduction takes the form of presenting drone strikes in their singularity, that is, as individual discharges of violence. The experience of drone strikes from the ground, however, is not that of

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 141. Emphasis mine.

<sup>92</sup> Alternatively, in other parts of his book Chamayou likewise essentialises the drone in terms of its manhunting capabilities, i.e. as the "hunter-drone".

momentary violent acts surrounded by periods of non-violence. The destruction and suffering that a drone strike leaves in its wake, as well as the terror of living in a situation defined by continual attacks from drones, point instead to a prolonged and systematic practice of violence the horrors of which go beyond the immediate violent effects of one specific strike.

To summarise: because of their theoretical commitment to the notion of discontinuity, critics of drones often disregard the tactical and technical genealogy of these instruments of violence. While manhunting and assassination are useful frameworks for criticising the strategic rationale that underpins the U.S. deployment of drones in areas such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq (as well as the Israeli deployment of drones in Palestine),<sup>93</sup> they still present the violence of drones almost exclusively in terms of the targeted killings policy. In being discursively compliant to the parameters set by this policy, manhunting and assassination do not fundamentally challenge the dominant narrative in which the drone features as a weapon designed to kill specific persons. In fact, the adoption of these frameworks has led critics inadvertently to reinforce that narrative, since they assign to the drone and its violence an essential identity – for instance, “assassin-drone” or “hunter-drone” – which corresponds to the idea that these weapons are first and foremost precise killing machines.

## **Conclusion**

### *Something Borrowed: Drone Bombing as State Terror*

In a recent intervention, Oliver Kearns has drawn attention to the prevalent tendency in drone scholarship to examine drones by looking at ‘the traces of the operationalisation of drone strikes policy’, by which he means ‘the materials, discourses and networks’ that underpin the operation of drone bombing.<sup>94</sup> As I have

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<sup>93</sup> See for example, Michael L. Gross, “Fighting by Other Means in the Mideast: A Critical Analysis of Israel’s Assassination Policy,” *Political Studies* 51, no. 2 (2003): 350-368.

<sup>94</sup> Oliver Kearns, “Secrecy and Absence in the Residue of Covert Drone Strikes,” *Political Geography* 57 (2017): 14. Emphasis in the original.

already discussed, at least one problem with this operation-centric approach is that it reduces the violence of drones to its rationalisation by those who currently make use of such weaponry. In the context of the U.S. drone programme, the bombing violence is explained in terms of targeted killings, that is, as a violent relation between the drone and the individual target chosen for killing. Consequently, effects such as the terror experienced by people who live under the field of operation of armed drones are either entirely omitted from consideration or relegated to a secondary category as “collateral” or “unintended” components of drone violence. This hierarchy of effects – whereby some effects are considered as more relevant to the operation of drones than others – can only lead to an interpretation of drone violence which is state-produced or, at any rate, state-oriented. Upholding this hierarchy neglects the other half of the violent equation: the perspective of those who suffer the violence of drones.

My argument is that the state terror exercised in colonial air policing goes hand in hand with current uses of drones. It should come as no surprise that, regardless of the technological transformation of aircraft and bomb, the principle of strategic terror is still a driving force in the thought of contemporary air officers. Charles J. Dunlap, a senior U.S. Air Force officer, has noted that the U.S. aerial precision strikes are ‘analogous (on a much larger and effective scale) to the effect that insurgents try to impose ... through the use of improvised explosive devices’.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, for Dunlap, ‘*properly* employed, the air weapon can impose ... extreme psychological stress’.<sup>96</sup> As far as the military is concerned, terrorising effects are an inalienable feature of aerial bombing. Thus, the invention of armed drones does not signal a break with the notion of air terror. It simply expands the array of technical options available when inflicting such violence: ‘Airmen may soon have a new weapon to carry out such devastating attacks – the MQ9 Reaper unmanned aerial vehicles’.<sup>97</sup>

The question for drone scholars, is then: What can the historical connections between air power and the practice of state terror tell us about the violence wrought by armed drones today? Are these connections to be ignored, simply because

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<sup>95</sup> Charles J. Dunlap, “Air-Minded Considerations for Joint Counterinsurgency Doctrine,” *Air and Space Power Journal* 21, no.4 (2007): 65.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 65. Emphasis mine.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

contemporary deployments of drones appear not to take the population as an object of strategic importance? Or should, alternatively, these connections compel critical thought to re-interpret radically drone warfare as a practice of state terrorism?

I do not suggest that the current strategic policies driving drone warfare should not be criticised; rather, my contention is that when those policies are viewed through the lens of 'terrorism' new possibilities for critique emerge. Understanding the drone as an instrument of state terrorism allows for an account that refuses to accommodate and privilege the viewpoint of those who make use of drones. It is an approach that explicitly challenges descriptions of drone attacks as momentary and disjointed eruptions of calculated lethal force. It also makes possible a reckoning with the history of such a weapon – a history which shows that pervasive terror is a consequence that a weapon such as the drone necessarily implies. The notion that U.S. drones transform air power into individualised and precise killing is not an achievement of technological innovation. This "transformation" is instead a discursive development: the logic of drone "targeted killings" imposes an evaluation of violent effects at the level of the individual target and, at the same time, conceals the fact that the terrorisation of the population living under drones (a population which is still thought of as "deviant") persists as an intended consequence of air control. The fact that drones do not just kill but also terrorise is well known to contemporary U.S. military officers, as Dunlap's words clearly attest. In fact, for Dunlap, such capacity posits a further reason why air weapons should be employed. Rather than being accidental or unintentional, the terrorism of drones occurs by design.

## **CHAPTER 5: THE HUNTER-DRONE AND THE EMERGENCE OF MANHUNTING THEORY**

### **Introduction**

The overarching aim of this thesis is to develop a critique that addresses certain significant lacunae in current discussions concerning the violence of armed drones. In pursuing this aim, I have sought to problematise approaches to drone warfare that view its violence exclusively through the lens of “targeted killings”. In Chapter 1, I offered a point of entry into this problematic by revealing the crucial differences between, on the one hand, a description of drone strikes drawn from testimonies of people living under armed drones and, on the other, an account of these strikes based on the targeting methodology the U.S. military follows. In the following two chapters, I used a genealogical historical method in order to show that the broader violent effects wrought by drone strikes – which testimonies reveal, but current military doctrine effaces – are intrinsically bound up with the development of the air weapon. As I have shown, the emergence of air power was predicated on a discursive practice that both conceptualised (Chapter 2) and exercised (Chapter 3) aerial bombing as a military means that inflicted precisely the kind of the horror and destruction which is at present marginalised in mainstream critiques of drone warfare. In Chapter 4, I argued that at the root of this marginalisation lies the tendency among critics to frame drone warfare as more or less a radical break with previous modes of armed violence. This unexamined preoccupation with the novelty of drones has, in turn, forced critical thinking into the discursive straightjacket of the “targeted killings” narrative. Conversely, I suggested that an approach which is mindful of the historicity of drone warfare (for instance, one which emphasises the latter’s continuity with colonial practices of air terror) offers a powerful critical perspective from which to contest the widespread and long-lasting violence of drone strikes.

In the present chapter, I conclude my analysis by offering a critique of the “targeted killings” framework, focusing on the manhunting doctrine developed in

recent years by U.S. military theorists. More specifically, in what follows I engage critically with these theorists' central assumption that contemporary counterterrorist operations signify a transition from previous modes of military violence toward one which makes warfare "personal".<sup>1</sup> I will challenge this assumption by showing that it is premised on – and, in turn, reinforces – three discursive erasures. First, these military scholars occlude any historical perspective taken on drone wars (other than that of manhunting) by asserting that contemporary military manhunts are a radically new paradigm of war. Second, they render the *bombing* violence of drone strikes unobservable by presenting the U.S. counterterrorist policy solely in terms of the operational ends it pursues (targeting suspected terrorists) and offering little reflection on the specific means that are used to fulfil these ends. And third, they erase the population from being considered as a site of military intervention by conceptually defining manhunts as a kind of military action that is exclusively directed against individual targets.

The present chapter is structured as follows. In the first section, I suggest that a critical understanding of the manhunt doctrine requires an attentiveness to the political, institutional and ideological context out of which it has emerged. Specifically, I show that the attempt of contemporary military theorists, in particular of George A. Crawford, to construct a new doctrine for warfare is underpinned by a mode of reasoning similar to that of air power theorists discussed in Chapter 2. For Crawford, manhunting is a paradigm that revolutionises warfare. In his eyes, this means that manhunting needs to be defined and structured in *opposition* to past military traditions. In the second section, I outline the key features of this doctrine, focusing specifically on the way in which it gives rise to a framework of armed violence that coalesces around the category of "the individual target". Hence, in this section my aim is to engage critically with the key texts of manhunting theory, particularly those by military men presumed to be authoritative speakers on this emerging paradigm of war. In the third section, I argue that while drone bombing carries the traces and legacies of previous regimes of aerial bombing, the adoption

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<sup>1</sup> I take the term "personal" from George A. Crawford, who in his 2008 book *Manhunting: Reversing the Polarity of Warfare* writes: 'Put more bluntly, [in this book] I advocate the transition of warfare from a conflict between nation-states, toward making warfare personal'. George A. Crawford, *Manhunting: Reversing the Polarity of Warfare* (Baltimore: Publish America, 2008), 29.

of the manhunting doctrine has led to a discursive transformation that conceals these traces and legacies.

### **Constructing the “Age of Manhunting”**

The present section gives an account of the political, institutional and ideological context from which the doctrine of manhunting has emerged. One of the key arguments of the preceding chapter was that while scholars like Chamayou offer a scathing critique of the murdering logic that underlies current drone wars, their approach fails to challenge the underlying assumptions upon which this logic is founded. In paying little (if any) attention to the fact that military theories are highly politicised and ideological discursive constructs,<sup>2</sup> these critics take the manhunting paradigm for granted as a basis analysing the violence of drones. A central aim of this section is to question this approach, by suggesting that the manhunting doctrine is inseparable from the politics of its emergence. I begin by briefly reflecting on how the U.S. administrations have for the last two decades heavily invested in a strategy of global manhunting. I then demonstrate that this manhunting strategy has elicited an institutional argument within the U.S. military structure, with certain military theorists proposing that a radical reconceptualization of war is necessary in order better to respond to the growing political commitment to manhunting.

#### *The Birth of a Manhunting National Strategy*

For the United States government, militarised manhunting has in recent years become a centralised function of national security strategy. An early indication of this shift towards manhunting can be traced back to the *National Security Strategy Report*<sup>3</sup> published by the White House in 2002, where it was proclaimed that while

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 2 and 3 for more on this.

<sup>3</sup> According to the National Security Strategy Archive website, ‘The National Security Strategy Report is published by the executive branch of the United States government. It is intended to be a *comprehensive statement articulating the worldwide interests, goals, and objectives of the United States that are important to its security*’. “Overview”, National

Afghanistan was successfully “liberated”, ‘the coalition forces [will] continue to hunt down the Taliban and al-Qaida’.<sup>4</sup> This commitment to a manhunting strategy was reinforced five months later by George W. Bush in a speech inaugurating the new Terrorist Threat Integration Center at the FBI’s headquarters. Bush opened up his speech by noting that ‘[b]efore September the 11<sup>th</sup> [2001] ... we all thought oceans could protect us from attack’, but that day was ‘a stark reminder of the new era we’re in; that we’re at war and the war goes on’.<sup>5</sup> He then proceeded to describe this new era of warfare as follows:

Let me first tell you this: we’re winning the war on terror. We’ve hauled in thousands of terrorists. They’re captured. They’re off the street. They’re not a problem ... We’re dismantling al Qaeda one person at a time ... And slowly, but surely, we’re bringing them to justice. We’re at war in a different kind of war. It’s a war that requires us to be on an *international manhunt*. We’re on the *hunt*. It’s a war that causes us to need to get the enemy on the run. We got them on the run. And it’s just a matter of time before we bring them to justice.<sup>6</sup>

Just like the 2002 *National Security Strategy Report*, Bush viewed the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan not as a conclusive military intervention but rather as the first step towards a far more ambitious and extensive military plan. In fact, later in his speech, Bush uses the context of an international manhunt in order to anticipate, and preemptively justify, the next war his government ended up launching itself into:

This war requires us to understand that terror is broader than one international network, that these terrorist networks have got connections – in some cases to countries run by outlaw dictators. And

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Security Strategy Archive, accessed October 15, 2016, <http://nssarchive.us/>. Emphasis mine.

<sup>4</sup> George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002), 5.

<sup>5</sup> George W. Bush, “President Speaks at FBI on New Terrorist Threat Integration Center,” *Federation of American Scientists*, February 14, 2003, <https://fas.org/irp/news/2003/02/wh021403b.html>.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* Emphases mine.

that's the issue with Iraq. When I speak about the war on terror, I not only talk about al Qaeda, I talk about Iraq – because, after all, Saddam Hussein has got weapons of mass destruction and he's used them.<sup>7</sup>

Though one might consider interpreting these words as the transient rhetoric of one bellicose politician and his administration, Bush's call for an international manhunt has been firmly established as a foundational pillar of every U.S. *National Security Strategy Report* published since.<sup>8</sup> For instance, the 2006 report declared that the 'hard core of the terrorists cannot be deterred or reformed' and, therefore, 'they must be tracked down, killed, or captured'.<sup>9</sup> The 2010 report, issued by the Obama administration, called for a further expansion of the state's 'capability to prevent, attribute and apprehend those who carry out attacks'.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the 2015 report noted that the U.S. security apparatus engaged in a definite strategic shift from 'a model of fighting costly large-scale ground wars' to 'a more sustainable approach that prioritizes targeted counterterrorism operations'.<sup>11</sup> And, finally, the latest report published in 2017 by the Trump administration proclaimed that the 'U.S. military and other operating agencies will take direct action against terrorists networks and pursue terrorists who threaten the homeland and U.S. citizens regardless of where they are'.<sup>12</sup> Whether the message is delivered by the state or its statesmen, therefore, its content has for the last seventeen years remained the same: "We are, now, on the hunt."

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> The United States National Security Strategy Reports are not published annually but periodically, whenever there is a perceived change in the United States government's security objectives. In this respect, the publication years, following the 2002 Report, are 2006, 2010, 2015 and 2017.

<sup>9</sup> George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006), 12.

<sup>10</sup> Barak Obama, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2010), 24.

<sup>11</sup> Barak Obama, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2015), 9.

<sup>12</sup> Donald J. Trump, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2017), 11.

While I reveal what the security goals set by these strategic reports<sup>13</sup> have typically come to mean in practice later in this chapter (for example, the kind of geopolitical narrative<sup>14</sup> they promote, or the type of politics of constant military intervention they prescribe), in the present section I want to discuss in more detail the specific reaction of military scholarship to this strategic shift towards manhunting.

### *Manhunting Theorists: Reversing the Polarity of War*

I have often commented cynically to my friends that, once Usama bin Laden conforms to US military doctrine, we will kick his butt. I was trying to point out that we in the United States military – indeed, the government and society as a whole – have not yet adjusted our thinking to the enemy we face. There is no official military or government doctrine for manhunting.<sup>15</sup>

On July 1, 2002, Donald Rumsfeld dispatched a memo to his undersecretary staff, titled “Manhunts”.<sup>16</sup> This memo was one of many that the Secretary of Defense sent out during the summer and, much like the others, it requested that military planners rewire the U.S. military machine in order to conduct counterterrorist operations more efficiently: ‘How do we organize the Department of Defense for manhunts? We

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<sup>13</sup> For a more general discussion on the crucial role of National Security Strategy Reports in setting in motion national military strategies see Ian G. R. Shaw, “Predator Empire: The Geopolitics of US Drone Warfare,” *Geopolitics* 18, no. 3 (2013): 536-559 and Martin Müller, “Reconsidering the Concept of Discourse for the Field of Critical Geopolitics: Towards Discourse as Language and Practice,” *Political Geography* 27, no. 3 (2008): 322-338.

<sup>14</sup> For scholarly analyses that look specifically at the 2002 National Security Strategy Report and the way it has inaugurated a geopolitical division of the world between nations that subscribe to the United States neoliberal ideals and those that fail to do so, see Susan Roberts and Anna Secor, “Neoliberal Geopolitics,” *Antipode* 35, no. 5 (2003): 886-897 as well as Luiza Bialasiewicz, David Campbell, Stuart Elden, Stephen Graham, Alex Jeffrey and Alison J. Williams, “Performing Security: The Imaginative Geographies of Current US Strategy,” *Political Geography* 26, no. 4 (2007): 405-422.

<sup>15</sup> Crawford, *Manhunting*, 164.

<sup>16</sup> Sean Naylor, *Relentless Strike: The Secret History of Joint Special Operations Command* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2015), 161.

are obviously not well organized at the present time', wrote Rumsfeld.<sup>17</sup> A number of military theorists, foremost among them George Crawford, Steven Marks, Thomas Meer and Matthew Nilson, took Rumsfeld's request seriously.<sup>18</sup> For these military theorists, the political decision to embark on a global manhunt of unlimited scope and duration reflected a critical moment for the U.S. military. This is particularly the case for Crawford, who in his book *Manhunting: Reversing the Polarity of Warfare* notes that 'the current conflict, referred to by the Bush administration as the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), has called widely held military and national security concepts into question'.<sup>19</sup> According to Crawford, the epistemic crisis created by this new kind of warfighting has in turn caused considerable tension in the institution of the military. He reveals that '[a] quiet, but urgent struggle is taking place within the Department of Defense'; a struggle that has divided military theorists between those 'enamored with preserving those capabilities that brought the United States to its current place as the world's only superpower' and those 'who believe we cannot rest on those laurels, but must continue to move forward in new and innovative ways'.<sup>20</sup> In this context, Crawford goes on to compare the current situation of the U.S. military to 'the period between the First and Second World Wars', when 'innovative military theories originated with junior officers who saw the potential applications of new

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<sup>17</sup> Rumsfeld as cited in Rowan Scarborough, *Rumsfeld's War: The Untold Story of America's Anti-terrorist Commander* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2004), 20.

<sup>18</sup> I mention these four military theorists in particular not only because they are self-proclaimed pioneers of establishing a manhunting doctrine but also because their work represents a unified movement towards establishing a new paradigm of war based on manhunting. On 9-10 March 2005, Marks, Meer and Nilson organised a manhunting conference at Monterey, California under the auspices of the Naval Postgraduate School. Crawford attended that conference, which 'intended to "collate best practices in the art of manhunting by drawing on expertise of individuals and agencies that excel at identifying, locating, and capturing fugitives"'. As Crawford notes, participants in that conference comprised '[r]epresentatives from DOD, U.S. Marshals Service, local law enforcement and private firms'. On the basis of that conference, Marks Meer and Nilson submitted, in June 2005, their Master's Thesis for the Naval Postgraduate School, entitled *Manhunting: A Methodology for Finding Persons of National Interest*. It was this thesis that inspired Crawford subsequently to write a book on manhunting, entitled *Manhunting: Reversing the Polarity of Warfare* and published in 2008. Finally, these two documents formed the basis of an official Joint Special Operations University report in September 2009 written by Crawford and entitled *Manhunting: Counter-Network Organization for Irregular Warfare*. In compiling this report, Crawford aspired for it to function as a kind of draft doctrine for the establishment of an independent manhunting organization in the U.S. military structure.

<sup>19</sup> Crawford, *Manhunting*, 27.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

technology or methodology in order to change the status quo of trench warfare'.<sup>21</sup> That revolutionary wave of military theorists, he notes, comprised

[v]isionaries like Fuller, Liddell-Hart, Triandafilov, von Thoma, Guderian, Douhet and Mitchel [who] were the first to grasp the potential applications of mechanization, radio communication and airpower for warfare. Urged on by far-sighted leaders – Tukhachevsky, Patton, LeMay, Arnold and even Hitler – they were able to plant seeds that drove a new way of warfighting.<sup>22</sup>

Crawford does not evoke these names fortuitously. In these military theorists – a number of which figured prominently in Chapter 2 of this thesis – he sees not only his intellectual forebears but, more importantly, “success stories” that positively credit the present quest for institutional reformation pursued by advocates of the manhunting paradigm. He makes this point with considerable clarity a few lines later, where he notes that ‘[t]oday’s military includes thinkers who are equally fit to take their place in the ranks alongside the visionaries listed above’.<sup>23</sup> The task of manhunting theorists, Crawford contends, is to follow the footsteps of these visionaries in order ‘to revolutionize armed conflict’ and ‘to establish the doctrinal concepts needed to combat those who would try to topple our society and civilization’.<sup>24</sup>

The argument that manhunting signifies a radical break with traditional approaches to warfare can also be encountered in the work of Marks, Meer and Nilson. In their 2005 thesis *Manhunting: A Methodology for Finding Persons of National Interest*, they observe that while the ‘U.S. military has made waging war a science’, manhunting is instead ‘more an art than [sic] science’ since hunting down a suspected terrorist requires ‘creativity and thought’.<sup>25</sup> They attribute this

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>25</sup> Steven Marks, Thomas Meer and Matthew Nilson, *Manhunting: A Methodology for Finding Persons of National Interest* (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2005), 76. It is worth noting that this distinction between “art” and “science” approaches to warfare can be traced back to a specific debate among the ranks of military scholars, which pits the social-oriented

methodological shift to the fact that a manhunt is structurally different from conventional war:

In the competition between two enemy combatants, the goal is to win the battle by defeating the adversary – both combatants must confront to win. However, a manhunt scenario differs in that each player’s strategy is different. The fugitive always wants to avoid capture, while the pursuer always wants to engage and capture the target – the pursuer must *confront* to win, whereas the fugitive must *evade* to win.<sup>26</sup>

A crucial consequence of the “the nature-of-war-is-now-different” type of rhetoric that underlies these theorists’ position is that it allows them to decontextualize the violence of contemporary counterterrorism and separate it from the broader history of organised military violence. This erasure of historical perspective operates on two levels. First, as seen above, there is a refusal to acknowledge that the counterterror operations the United States engages in at present bear any resemblance to the kind of armed violence to which military institutions have been traditionally committed. Second, manhunting theorists construct a singular historical perspective; a perspective through which these operations are viewed only in relation to previous manhunting expeditions. The case studies that these military theorists invoke in their research are indicative of this historiographical fetishism of the manhunt: the 1832 hunting of the Black Hawk tribe by U.S. militia,<sup>27</sup> the 1916 military expedition to capture Pancho Villa in Mexican territory,<sup>28</sup> the British plans to assassinate Hitler,<sup>29</sup> the Israeli targeted killing of Black September

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Counterinsurgency model of warfare against the technologically-oriented Revolution in Military Affairs movement popular in the 1990s. For more see Jon R. Lindsay, “Reinventing the Revolution: Technological Visions, Counterinsurgent Criticism, and the Rise of Special Operations,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no. 3 (2013): 422-453; and Laleh Khalili, *Time in the Shadows: Confinement in Counterinsurgency* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 45-47.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>27</sup> George A. Crawford, *Manhunting: Counter-Network Organization for Irregular Warfare*, Joint Special Operations University Report 09-7 (Hulburt Field: JSOU Press, 2009), 41.

<sup>28</sup> Marks, Meer and Nilson, *Manhunting*, 5.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen T. Hosmer, *Operations Against Enemy Leaders* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2001), 32-34.

members by Mossad<sup>30</sup> and the manhunt of Pablo Escobar in 1990s<sup>31</sup> are but a few examples of what counts, in the eyes of manhunting advocates, as military precedents for current drone wars. Manhunting theorists thus do invoke history, but *only* insofar as it reflects the context of past militarised manhunts.

This process of narrowing the perspective through which contemporary uses of drones can be understood historically is carefully engineered. Erasing alternative historical perspectives reinforces these theorists' institutional claims, for this erasure permits them to identify the "War on Terror" as a conflict that fundamentally breaks with past military tradition.<sup>32</sup> In this context, Marks, Meer and Nilson argue that the necessity for a new doctrine arises because '[g]enerally speaking, the U.S. military does not conduct manhunts'.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, Crawford contends that manhunting 'operations have historically been the exception rather than the norm' in military practice.<sup>34</sup> The claim of an absence of historical context thus holds a key ideological function in the attempt to establish a new paradigm of war: it both explains why there have been 'few formal efforts to institutionalize this [manhunting] capability for our nation' and, crucially, why these theorists need to fight against military tradition in order to perform that task.<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, being able to appeal to historical precedent – albeit narrowly construed – is just as ideologically important for advocates of manhunting as being able to deny its existence. In this case, one encounters a different discursive

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<sup>30</sup> See Graham H. Turbiville Jr., *Hunting Leadership Targets in Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorist Operations: Selected Perspectives and Experience*, Joint Special Operations University Report 07-6 (Hulburt Field: JSOU Press, 2007), 14; and Norman Wade, *The Battle Staff Handbook* (Lakeland: The Lightning Press, 2010), 1-5.

<sup>31</sup> William H. Shoemate, "Paradigm Change: Targeting Enemy Leadership in a Complex Environment," (Master's Thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2011), 29-36.

<sup>32</sup> This erasure of past military tradition by manhunting theorists for institutional purposes parallels the rejection of empirical evidence by early air power theorists, discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>33</sup> Marks, Meer and Nilson, *Manhunting*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> Crawford, *Manhunting*, 34.

<sup>35</sup> Crawford, *Manhunting*, 34. In addition, Marks, Meer and Nilson make a similar point by arguing that 'throughout history, finding and apprehending an individual from another sovereign nation has rarely been considered a national security issue. Only recently has the military increased its role in apprehending international war criminals, terrorists, and drug traffickers. The U.S. military's limited experience in conducting manhunts has created a doctrinal, legal and procedural void'. Marks, Meer and Nilson, *Manhunting*, 6.

manoeuvre at play, the explicit aim of which is to construct a historical narrative that legitimises the violence of contemporary counterterror operations. A characteristic example of this use of history is Crawford's argument that '[h]istoric government operations demonstrate that manhunting is not only a legitimate form of warfare, but has been taking place with accelerating frequency over the last three decades'.<sup>36</sup> For Crawford, history offers

ample legal precedent to justify manhunting. Preemptive or preventive action, including lethal force, can be employed in order to prevent innocent loss of life. Law enforcement officers have historically employed lethal force to prevent deaths in hostage situations. Military forces have repeatedly been employed to interdict terrorist hostage situations. Legal policies to control acts of piracy on the high seas date back to ancient Rhodes. Congress has Constitutional power to issue letters of marque and reprisal in order to seize persons of property. Britain, France and the United States issued these letters until the 1856 Declaration of Paris banned the practice.<sup>37</sup>

By drawing a line of descent that seamlessly integrates the "War on Terror" with previous, seemingly legitimate, manhunts, thinkers such as Crawford employ "manhunting" as a historical theme to legitimise the violence of counterterror operations.<sup>38</sup> For manhunting theorists, justifying their doctrine thus becomes a question of presenting enough military and legal precedents to demonstrate that manhunts, though "irregular", nonetheless have been a more or less accepted practice of state violence.

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<sup>36</sup> Crawford, *Counter-Network Organisation*, 2.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>38</sup> This discursive manoeuvre is employed not just by military theorists but also by legal scholars who present legal defences of drones by historicising the "War on Terror" predominantly in terms of targeted killings. See, for example, Nils Melzer, *Targeted Killing in International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9-10; Mark V. Vlasic, "Assassination & Targeted Killing: A Historical and Post-Bin Laden Legal Analysis," *Georgetown Journal of International Law* 43, no. 2 (2012): 259-334; and Kevin H. Govern, "Operation Neptune Spear: Was Killing Bin Laden a Legitimate Military Objective?" in *Targeted Killings: Law and Morality in an Asymmetrical World*, eds Claire Finkelstein, Jens David Ohlin and Andrew Altman, 347-373 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

A key feature of the preceding chapter was a discussion of the inability of prominent critiques of drone warfare to reckon adequately with the fact that the armed drone is, as Chamayou puts it, 'the weapon of an amnesiac postcolonial violence'.<sup>39</sup> By focusing here on the institutional politics out of which the doctrine of manhunting emerged, I want to suggest that military histories of drone warfare constitute a key source of this postcolonial amnesia. Lurking underneath the surface of the narrative promoted by military theorists like Crawford is the assumption that the only historical perspective that may be taken on armed drones is one that needs to reflect the strategic rationale that underpins contemporary uses of such weapons. In not troubling this basic assumption, scholarly analyses either do not engage with the violence of drones historically<sup>40</sup> or, insofar as they do, they prioritise a history of its ends (targeted killings) rather than of the violent means (air power) principally used to pursue these ends.<sup>41</sup> My argument is that military narratives do not reveal some kind of universal, objective historical truth about drone warfare. Rather, because of their ideological function, they actively engage in erasing some historical perspectives, while promoting others. A critical approach to the history of drone warfare cannot be based on a genealogy of targeted killings alone, however; it also needs to destabilise these military narratives and interrogate the way they divert attention from the weapons being employed and their crucial continuities with regimes of colonial violence other than manhunting.<sup>42</sup> As I show in the next

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<sup>39</sup> Grégoire Chamayou, *Drone Theory*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 2015), 95.

<sup>40</sup> As discussed in Chapter 4, this ahistorical approach is grounded on the assumption that drone warfare poses a fundamental break with traditional notions of warfare; an assumption that as I showed in this section can be traced back to military theorists' claims about the novelty of contemporary uses of drones.

<sup>41</sup> Take, as a characteristic example of this prioritisation of ends, Laurie Calhoun's claim that drone warfare 'looks indistinguishable from what in centuries past was labelled *assassination* or *extrajudicial execution*. The tools have changed, but the aim is the same: the death of particular person'. In focusing principally on the military objective of assassinating targets, Calhoun gives little thought to what the change of means might entail in terms of the violence inflicted in current drone wars. Laurie Calhoun, *We Kill Because We Can: From Soldiering to Assassination in the Drone Age* (London: Zed Books, 2015), 33. Emphases in the original.

<sup>42</sup> I do not propose here that inquiring into the history of manhunting necessarily leads to postcolonial amnesia. On the contrary, many critics have situated the current U.S. counterterrorism within the context of imperial (or more recent neo-imperial) projects, precisely by revealing how its predatory logic has been a central feature in the exercise of colonial power and of practices of rendition, secret detention and torture. For example, see Ruth Blakeley, "Drones, State Terrorism and International Law," *Critical Studies on*

section, this diversion is pivotal for upholding the notion of “targeted killings”, for it allows military theorists to frame drone bombing as a means of warfare that affects only individual targets.

### **Manhunt Doctrine: “Creating the Force for the Future”**

Perhaps, instead, it would be better to make a clean break away from existing institutions. If, as I believe, manhunting capability could significantly enhance the United States’ national security, then it might be worthwhile to establish an organization whose personnel are solely dedicated to making life hard for those individuals who seek to destroy American lives or interests. An organization whose sole purpose is to wield the sword of “Assured Individual Destruction”.<sup>43</sup>

The aim of this section is to challenge the very basis of the “targeted killings” framework that dominates current discussions concerning the violence of drones, by laying bare the hidden assumptions that manhunting theorists make when offering their prescriptions for an individualised and personalised warfare. This section critically engages with two key aspects of the manhunt doctrine. The first concerns the category of the “individual target” which, as I show, serves as the cornerstone of this doctrine. The second aspect is the representation of manhunting as a military practice which allows for nonviolent courses of action.

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*Terrorism* 11, no. 2 (2018): 321-341; Kyle Grayson, *Cultural Politics of Targeted Killing: On Drones, Counterinsurgency, and Violence* (London: Routledge, 2016); Mark Neocleous, “The Dream of Pacification: Accumulation, Class War, and the Hunt,” *Socialist Studies* 9, no. 2 (2013): 7-31; John Dinges, *The Condor Years* (New York: New Press, 2004); and Ian G. R. Shaw, *Predator Empire: Drone Warfare and Full Spectrum Dominance* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

<sup>43</sup> Crawford, *Counter-network Organization*, 271.

### *Assured Individual Destruction*

The argument for a transformation of military forces from bulky armies to small and flexible hunter-teams is central in the work of manhunting theorists. For developers of the manhunt doctrine, this demand for organisational reform is justified on the grounds that manhunting is a radically new paradigm of war. Rather than being an engagement between armed forces, manhunting is understood to be a form of military action directed against individual human targets. In this context, Marks, Meer and Nilson define the militarised manhunt as follows:

An organized, extensive search for a person of national interest conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments that employ[s] specialized military capabilities to identify, locate, neutralize, or capture designated individuals. Manhunts differ from typical surveillance, reconnaissance, and direct action missions by the degree and methods used to search for, investigate, and apprehend the targeted individual(s).<sup>44</sup>

In agreement with this definition, Crawford also understands manhunting to involve 'the deliberate concentration of national power to find, influence, capture, or when necessary kill an individual to disrupt a human network'.<sup>45</sup> In manhunting operations, he argues, '[a]ll of a nation's resources can be brought to bear against an individual', against whom 'diplomatic, information, military, economic, financial, intelligence, and law enforcement (DIMEFIL) capabilities' may be used.<sup>46</sup> What this means, in his eyes, is that with counterterrorism operations there is a 'transition of warfare from a conflict between nation-states, toward making warfare personal'.<sup>47</sup>

However, while the category of the "individual target" takes a centre stage in the doctrine, there is little clarity as to what criteria need to be met in order for a person to be considered a target of counterterror manhunt operations. In developing their rationale as to why these operations might have a strategic value, advocates of

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<sup>44</sup> Marks, Meer and Nilson, *Manhunting*, 99

<sup>45</sup> Crawford, *Counter-Network Organization*, 8.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Crawford, *Manhunting*, 29.

manhunting seem to suggest for the most part that the term “individual target” denotes the leaders of terrorist networks.<sup>48</sup> In other words, militarised manhunts are presented as a counter-leadership strategy,<sup>49</sup> which pivots on the idea that ‘killing regime leaders not only might be a fair game, but also might be the best alternative under certain circumstances’.<sup>50</sup>

This narrative of decapitating the enemy leadership, however, conceals the contours of a far more extensive targeting scheme. Crawford writes, for instance, that manhunting is best understood as an activity ‘wherein government experts would track individuals who meet a *critical threshold of threatening behaviour*’.<sup>51</sup> He goes on to explain:

When an individual or group of individuals elevate themselves to the point where it is in the interest of U.S. national security to track the activities of a network, the manhunting operational planning will begin. In other words, an individual *chooses* to become a target by threatening U.S. or allied interests.<sup>52</sup>

The criterion of “threat” transforms the individual target into a much more fluid category. It inserts a preventive element into manhunting, something that is emphasised by Crawford who argues that ‘[t]he post-9/11 strategic environment makes it imperative to engage [targets] actively – to detect, deter, disrupt, detain, or destroy networks *before* they can harm innocents’.<sup>53</sup> Here, the question of who might be a target becomes considerably open-ended, for the power of the state to prey on human beings is not defined by the killing of specific individuals of a more or less known background. Instead, manhunting unfolds as a risk-management policy that may target anyone who is deemed to have the potential to *become*

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<sup>48</sup> For example, see Marks, Meer and Nilson, *Manhunting*, 1, 4, 5, 9, 10, 12, 14-15.

<sup>49</sup> Turbiville., *Hunting Leadership Targets*, 1.

<sup>50</sup> Catherine Lotrionte, “When to Target Leaders,” *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (2003): 73.

<sup>51</sup> Crawford, *Counter-Network Organization*, 36. Emphasis mine.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 37. Emphasis mine.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, *Counter-Network Organization*, 8. Emphasis mine.

dangerous.<sup>54</sup> As Bruce Braun notes, '[t]oday, security's principal answer to the problem of "unknown unknowns" is the speculative act of *pre-emption*, which takes as its target potential rather than actual risk'.<sup>55</sup> Or, to take the words of a senior U.S. official (speaking anonymously): 'We might not always have their names but ... these are people whose actions over time have made it obvious that they are a threat'.<sup>56</sup> Under this kind of targeting regime, what is being targeted is not a person but their behaviour.<sup>57</sup> This means that the category of "individual target" opens up to extraordinary breadth to include people that never have engaged in any terrorist activity: for Crawford, a person of national interest might not be a terrorist but rather 'the person who schedules the terrorist's travel'.<sup>58</sup> Conceptualised in this way, the category of the individual target expands to the point that there are no discernible limits as to who may become the target of a drone strike.<sup>59</sup> In fact, as I demonstrate in the following section, the criteria for identifying individual targets are configured in such a way that, in effect, the entirety of the population living under drones is the object of targeting.

### *The Manhunting Spectrum*

Another key aspect of the manhunt doctrine concerns the representation of manhunting as a multifaceted process,<sup>60</sup> in which armed violence features only as a

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<sup>54</sup> Stephen Graham, *Cities under Siege: The New Military Urbanism* (London: Verso, 2010), 94.

<sup>55</sup> Bruce Braun, "Biopolitics and the Molecularization of Life," *Cultural Geographies* 14, no. 6 (2007): 19. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>56</sup> As cited in Christian Enemark, "Drones, Risk and Perpetual Force," *Ethics and International Affairs* 28, no. 3 (2014): 373.

<sup>57</sup> Craig Martin, "A Means-Methods Paradox and the Legality of Drone Strikes in Armed Conflict," *International Journal of Human Rights* 19, no. 2 (2015): 160.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>59</sup> Consider, for example, how intelligence methods like pattern of life analysis (discussed in Chapter 1) do not target specific individuals but instead the everyday habits and routines of people under drones; the social environment on the ground thus becomes a unending source for "suspicious" signatures which trigger attacks by drones. For more detailed analyses of signature strikes see Louise Amoore and Rita Raley, "Securing with Algorithms: Knowledge, Decision, Sovereignty," *Security Dialogue* 48, no. 1 (2016): 3-10; Neal Curtis, "The Explication of the Social: Algorithms, Drones and (Counter-)terror," *Journal of Sociology* 52, no. 3 (2016): 522-536; and Ian G. R. Shaw, "Robot Wars: US Empire and Geopolitics in the Robotic Age," *Security Dialogue* 48, no. 5 (2017): 451-470.

<sup>60</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the methodological elements of this process, see the discussion of the F3EAD targeting loop in Chapter 1.

small and very rarely used part. According to Crawford, '[o]ne can visualize manhunting as an entire spectrum of activities', which for the most part comprises processes that are neither intrusive nor violent.<sup>61</sup> At the lower end of this spectrum there are the kind of activities that make manhunts possible: data collection, archiving and analysis, infrastructure and logistics, creating areas of interest and monitoring the conditions in those regions.<sup>62</sup> When 'an individual breaches the threshold to become a PONI [Person of National Interest]', activities enter the mid-range region of the spectrum, where the target is considered enough of a threat to unleash the "hunter-analysts" who 'begin work to determine patterns of behaviour, or to predict the location of a targeted individual or network'.<sup>63</sup> Military intervention is required only at the last few fractions of the spectrum and then 'the first option for action would be to change an opponent's mind'.<sup>64</sup> Crawford explains that '[o]nly at the very extreme end of the manhunting spectrum would a nation take action to employ force, and only in extreme circumstances would manhunting employ lethal force'.<sup>65</sup> Instead, the 'most important lesson' for the future success of counterterrorism is to be aware that 'it is possible to employ nonlethal means in manhunting operations'.<sup>66</sup>

This representation of manhunting as a multifarious, rational and almost non-belligerent form of warfare is predicated on a number of unspoken assumptions. For instance, Crawford presents taking armed action as a "last resort" type of option, which is determined by the 'magnitude of threat' that the targeted individual poses.<sup>67</sup> Thus, he writes, '[l]ethal force would clearly be justified if a terrorist were in possession of a weapon of mass destruction and intent upon its use'.<sup>68</sup> However, in framing the use of armed force as a matter of a self-evident choice (one *clearly* knows when the threat is too great not to kill a targeted individual), Crawford conceals the political and ideological context within which these "calculations of threat" take place. One can consider, for example, how the practice of U.S.

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<sup>61</sup> Crawford, *Counter-Network Organization*, 38.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>63</sup> Crawford, *Manhunting*, 176.

<sup>64</sup> Crawford, *Counter-Network Organization*, 38.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>67</sup> Crawford, *Manhunting*, 176.

<sup>68</sup> Crawford, *Counter-Network Organization*, 38.

counterterrorism has been defined and structured according to Dick Cheney's "One Percent Doctrine" – a policy measure which prescribes that even '[i]f there's a one percent chance of terrorists getting a weapon of mass destruction', the United States security apparatus must treat such probability 'as a certainty in terms of [its] response'.<sup>69</sup> Counterterrorism, Cheney explains, is 'not about our analysis, or finding a preponderance of evidence', but 'about our response'.<sup>70</sup> Following the logic of this argument, the existence and magnitude of a threat is not determined by a deliberation on available evidence, as the manhunt doctrine suggests is the case, but by the action taken against that threat. What Cheney's "One Percent Doctrine" essentially establishes is a policy of attacking first and justifying later.<sup>71</sup> Rather than a rare and exceptional occurrence, therefore, the use of violence is a common and recommended measure in counterterrorism, for a sliver of suspicion constitutes sufficient reason to take armed action against a target.<sup>72</sup>

Furthermore, though he does not draw attention to it, Crawford is well aware that counterterror manhunts always involve the use of armed force. Despite his advice that the first course of action should be to change the enemy's mind, he nonetheless adds that 'some individuals cannot be reasoned with'.<sup>73</sup> He observes that 'terrorists ... have a fair degree of paranoia and personality disorder',<sup>74</sup> something that means that while the policy of "Assured Individual Destruction" will surely 'deter rational actors from taking attributable action against the United States and the west', the United States will have to 'continue to confront irrational actors' and will 'be forced

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<sup>69</sup> Dick Cheney as cited in Ron Suskind, *The One Percent Doctrine: Deep Inside America's Pursuit of its Enemies Since 9/11* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 62.

<sup>70</sup> Dick Cheney cited in *ibid.*, 62.

<sup>71</sup> For an analysis of how this kind of rationale underpinned the decision to go to war with Iraq in 2003 see Norman K. Denzin, "The Secret Downing Street Memo, the One Percent Doctrine, and the Politics of Truth: A Performance Text," *Symbolic Interaction* 30, no. 4 (2007): 447-461.

<sup>72</sup> The seriousness with which Cheney's uncompromising approach to counterterrorism was taken in the U.S. security apparatus can be seen by the removal of Robert Gernier, the director of the Counterterrorist Centre, from office in February 2006 for being 'insufficiently forceful in the battle with al Qaeda'. Barton Gellman and Dafna Linzer, "Top Counterterrorism Officer Removed Amid Turmoil at CIA," *The Washington Post*, February 7, 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/07/AR2006020700016.html?noredirect=on>.

<sup>73</sup> Crawford, *Manhunting*, 176.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

to take action to apprehend or kill them'.<sup>75</sup> Crawford's framing of the (categorically non-Western) enemy as an irrational human being is a staple feature of U.S. counterterrorism and, as I have demonstrated in Chapter 3, a core trope of colonialism.<sup>76</sup> It reflects a mode of military thinking that abandons any analysis of the history and politics that shape relations of hostilities or motivates insurgents, instead viewing the "War on Terror" through the lens of a binary structure of "rational" and "irrational" actors.<sup>77</sup> Importantly, this binary structure helps sustain the image of manhunting as a "benevolent" form of warfare, for the employment of lethal action is attributed solely to the irrational nature of the targeted person and not to the logic of manhunting itself.

By adopting "the irrational enemy" as an analytical category that explains and justifies the continuous use of armed violence, manhunting theorists are able to dismiss the effect that such violence has upon revitalising relations of hostilities.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, for Crawford, the fact that manhunts continue being violent provides further reason to think of the enemy as a 'radical irreconcilable'.<sup>79</sup> Rational people, he writes, would simply give up the fight once they grasp the reality of the situation, namely, 'that the United States or our Allies can "take them out" if they run afoul of our collective interest'.<sup>80</sup> Thus, much like Cheney, Crawford ultimately views the use

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>76</sup> Jessica Wolfendale, "The Narrative of Terrorism as an Existential Threat," in *Routledge Handbook of Critical Terrorism Studies*, ed. Richard Jackson (London: Routledge, 2016), 258-259.

<sup>77</sup> For more in-depth analyses on this binary framing of the "War on Terror" see Akbar Ahmed, *The Thistle and the Drone: How America's War on Terror Became a Global War on Tribal Islam* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 300-310; Maryam Khalid, "Gender, Orientalism and Representations of the 'Other' in the War on Terror," *Global Change, Peace & Security* 23, no. 1 (2011): 15-29; and Ben Fermor, "Shifting Binaries: The Colonial Legacy of Obama's War on Terror," in *The Obama Doctrine: A Legacy of Continuity in US Foreign Policy?*, eds Michelle Bentley and Jack Holland (London: Routledge, 2017), 84-98.

<sup>78</sup> For example, Baitullah Mehsud, a Pakistani Taliban leader, has commented on how U.S. drone strikes provided helped his recruitment efforts enormously. He noted: 'I spent three months trying to recruit and only got 10-15 persons. One U.S. attack and I got 150 volunteers!' Baitullah Mehsud as quoted in Shuja Nawaz, *FATA – A Most Dangerous Place: Meeting the Challenge of Militancy and Terror in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2009, 18, [csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/081218\\_nawaz\\_fata\\_web.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/081218_nawaz_fata_web.pdf).

<sup>79</sup> Crawford, *Manhunting*, 179.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 179.

of armed force as proof for the existence of threatening individuals, rather than the other way around.

In addition, the claim that manhunting is rarely violent – and only violent when armed force is used for killing an individual – is made possible by abstracting counterterror manhunts from their real violent content. This process of abstraction is a complex one. It involves, to begin with, a methodological abstraction from the specific instruments of violence employed in the context of U.S. counterterrorism. In this context, there is little mention of armed drones in the writings of manhunting theorists, despite the fact that these weapons have formed the central pillar of the U.S. targeting strategy for the last fifteen years.<sup>81</sup> The targeting of individuals is instead portrayed as a strictly rational and instrumental process wherein military practitioners choose the appropriate means following an objective evaluation of the ends pursued by military practitioners.<sup>82</sup> Yet, as Chamayou correctly observes, this appeal to an instrumental rationality obscures how ‘the means adopted are binding, and a combination of specific constraints is associated with each type of means adopted’.<sup>83</sup> For Chamayou, ‘[t]hose means not only make it possible to take action but also determine the form of that action’.<sup>84</sup>

In other words, contrary to what manhunting theorists suggest, the practice of manhunting does not readily assume *any* form and does not usually open up to different courses of action with some being nonviolent. Rather, the fact that armed drones have become the preferred instrument by which the U.S. conducts its counterterror operations – and, in the case of countries like Pakistan, the *only* means<sup>85</sup> – denotes that manhunting takes a *specific* form (air control) and inflicts the horrors and brutality which are characteristic of this form of state violence. The

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<sup>81</sup> Shaw, “Predator Empire,” 542.

<sup>82</sup> This understanding of the targeting process is clearly seen in the U.S. military’s *Targeting Manual* examined in Chapter 1. According to the manual ‘[a] targeting methodology ... assigns assets against targets systematically to create those effects that will contribute to achieving the commander’s objectives’. The idea which this statement promotes is that military practitioners have a range of available means at their disposal and their choice depends solely on their evaluation of the situation. Thus, they can claim that the form and outcomes of targeting processes are principally defined by the *objectives* of the operation.

<sup>83</sup> Chamayou, *Drone Theory*, 15.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>85</sup> Shaw, “Predator Empire,” 542.

“capture or kill” dilemma only exists in the realm of doctrinal prescription, since with a weapon like the armed drone the capture of suspected terrorists is never an available recourse of action.<sup>86</sup> Consequently, while Crawford posits that the U.S. manhunting policy is ‘to seek the root cause of the national security problem ... by seeking out and bringing to justice the network of individuals responsible for the aggression against our nation’, he fails to point out that, in practice, “bringing to justice” translates into dropping high-explosive projectiles on people who the security apparatus of his state has designated as terrorist suspects.<sup>87</sup>

This methodological erasure of the specificity of drone manhunts is also accompanied by a distorting representation of what constitutes an act of violence during a manhunt operation. As seen above, for Crawford, the manhunting spectrum unfolds as follows: it has a beginning (comprising data collection, archiving and analysis), a midpoint (comprising targeted surveillance and intelligence), and an end (comprising taking action against the target). Crawford is able to sanitize most of this spectrum of any traces of violence by confining the point when manhunts become violent to the very last stage of the process. Thus, in his eyes, manhunts are violent only when they become targeted killings and, therefore, their only violent effect is the killing of the target. However, there are at least two ways in which this understanding of violence must be challenged. First, these processes dehumanise people by reducing their lives to intelligence patterns, security signatures and “threatening behaviours”.<sup>88</sup> Methodologically speaking, therefore, the micropractices of data collection, surveillance and intelligence are violent insofar as they are the condition of possibility of drone strikes.<sup>89</sup> Second, apart from their methodological connection to the act of bombing, these processes are also violent

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<sup>86</sup> Not that “capture” signifies in any way a less violent course of action, especially considering its links to institutional practices of rendition, detainment and torture. For critical investigations into the subject of counterterror confinement and torture see Khalili, *Time in the Shadows*; and Ruth Blakeley and Sam Raphael, “British Torture in the ‘War on Terror’,” *European Journal of International Relations* 23, no. 2 (2017): 243-266.

<sup>87</sup> Crawford, *Manhunting*, 33.

<sup>88</sup> As Sassan Gholiagha notes, “[d]rone strikes, in whatever form they occur, and whether they can be legitimized via existing international law or whether new legal rules develop, socially construct the individual human being as a targeted dehumanized body in international relations’. Sassan Gholiagha, “Individualized and Yet Dehumanized? Targeted Killing via Drones,” *Behemoth* 8, no. 2 (2015): 145.

<sup>89</sup> See for example Chapter 1 on how the F3EAD targeting methodology takes surveillance and intelligence as inseparable from the military action taken.

because they require the presence of drones over populated areas already scarred by the experience of aerial bombing.<sup>90</sup> As seen in Chapter 1, contrary to the doctrinal representation of drone bombing, its lived experience does not become manifest as separate and self-contained events of violence. It is precisely because manhunts take the form of aerial bombing that their violent effects unavoidably ripple out beyond the killing of the target. Understanding manhunts through the lens of air power means acknowledging that their violent effects do not end with the drone strike but linger long after. Likewise, though the processes that lead up to strikes procedurally precede the act of bombing, they nonetheless take place in an environment already shaped by the experience of previous strikes. As one victim of the operation of drones in Northwest Pakistan explains, '[w]e fear that the drones will strike us again ... my aged parents are often in a state of fear. We are depressed, anxious, and constantly remembering our deceased family members ... it often compels me to leave this place'.<sup>91</sup> The principle of persistent and pervasive surveillance that underlies manhunting means that armed drones maintain a continued presence in the sky, often for 24 hours a day.<sup>92</sup> For the people on the ground the constant buzzing of drones above is neither nonviolent nor nonintrusive; rather it constitutes both a painful reminder of previous strikes and a terrorizing threat of a future strike.

I want to conclude this section by pointing out that the erasure of the violence of drones replicates the discursive practice – discussed in Chapter 3 – of rendering colonial violence invisible or justifiable. In this context, the manhunt doctrine displays critical continuities with the RAF's rhetoric about the humaneness of air control. Traces of colonialism can be seen, for instance, in the categorisation of the targeted enemy as an "irrational" individual, one against whom the most extreme violent option available is a legitimate recourse of action. In claiming that the U.S. fights an enemy with an aberrant psychology – who cannot be reasoned with, but only killed – Crawford invokes an argument on the basis of which entire colonial

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<sup>90</sup> One may consider at this point the RAF's air policing maxim that the aircraft is not merely an eye in the sky but also a spectacle that induces fear in people on the ground.

<sup>91</sup> Christopher Rogers, *Civilian Harm and Conflict in Northwest Pakistan* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2010), 81, available at [https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Pakistan\\_Report\\_2010\\_2013.pdf](https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Pakistan_Report_2010_2013.pdf).

<sup>92</sup> Jane Perlez and Pir Zubair Shah, "Drones Batter Al Qaeda and Its Allies Within Pakistan," *The New York Times*, April 4, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/05/world/asia/05drones.html>.

populations have been slaughtered and brutalised for centuries, all in the name of promoting civilisation. Furthermore, the focus on the objectives of manhunting rather than the real violent content of its practice is another trace of colonialism. Just like the RAF's leadership employed the notion of "moral effects" to marginalise the brutality of air control, so too the manhunting doctrine effaces the brutality of contemporary U.S. counterterrorism by presenting its violent effects solely in terms of "targeted killings". The assumption that a variety of means may be used when targeting makes it possible to maintain the doctrinal fiction that U.S. counterterrorism can be non-violent or violent only against individuals. What tends to be muted is the fact that the specific form that these manhunts have taken – namely, drone warfare – is shaped by a political narrative which identifies non-Western enemies as more killable than others. Additionally, because no attempt is made to spell out the centrality of armed drones in the U.S. counterterrorism policy, the manhunt doctrine occludes any reflection on the fact that the use of such weapons necessarily implies the violent effects of *aerial bombing*. Taken together with the erasure of the history of aerial bombing discussed in the previous section, this erasure of the specific means used makes possible a heavily reductive representation of drone violence which fails to recognise that contemporary manhunts are, in their violent effects, the contemporary manifestation of colonial systems of air control. As I demonstrate in the following section, the targeted killings mode of representation is also predicated on a third, related erasure: the exclusion of the broader population from being considered as a victim of drone violence.

### **Targeting the Population**

In this section, I discuss the way in which the manhunt doctrine frames the relation between the "targeted individual" and the population living under drones. As shown above, the category of the "individual target" lies at the core of the manhunting doctrine. For its advocates, manhunting reverses the polarity of war because it takes individual targets as the central object of warfare; an object that needs to be observed, tracked down, categorised and killed. If the individual is to be the sole

object of warfare, however, the rest of the population needs to be disqualified from being a site of military intervention. Otherwise, manhunting cannot be claimed to be “personal”. Put differently, even though manhunting theorists reflect little on the concept of the population, the latter plays a crucial role in the formulation of their theories, for it is only by excluding the population as a target of attacks that they can sustain the notion of individualised killings. While the doctrinal erasure of history and means of violence I have examined in the previous sections also work towards effacing the fact that the population is the object of military attacks,<sup>93</sup> in the present section I focus more specifically in the different registers on which the discursive practice of manhunting *conceptually* erases the population.

The first point I want to draw attention to is that manhunting theorists are aware that targeted individuals do not exist in a vacuum. Despite the fact that the population never features as an explicit object of analysis for manhunting theorists, it does get mentioned in their work. In describing the post-9/11 strategic environment that made the shift to manhunting necessary, Crawford observes that the emergent terrorist enemy ‘swam in a sea of humanity, conducting nefarious activity behind a shield of non-combatants’.<sup>94</sup> Crawford’s metaphor of “sea of humanity” is uncharacteristically evocative of the fact that targeted killings operations principally take place in populated areas.<sup>95</sup> In contrast, the typical way that the population is acknowledged in military writings is through various misnomers. For instance, Major William Shoemate writes that hunting teams ‘provide the capability to thoroughly, by all means necessary, locate individuals of national interest in a *complex environment*’. In a subsequent iteration, Shoemate notes that with manhunts the military’s ‘operational environment is

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<sup>93</sup> For instance, the erasure of the history of air power works towards excluding from consideration that drone bombing is continuous with military traditions of violence that have targeted the population. Similarly, the erasure of the specificity of means employed in contemporary manhunts leads to a framing of the manhunting process that effaces the violent effects that the working out of these means (i.e. drone bombing) necessarily implies.

<sup>94</sup> Crawford, *Manhunting*, 32.

<sup>95</sup> It is worth noting that Crawford uses this descriptive metaphor only in his *Manhunting: Reversing the Polarity of War* book, and not in his subsequent *Manhunting: Counter-Network Organization for Irregular Warfare* monograph which was published by the Joint Operations University Press. Similarly, his view about the irrational nature of the non-Western enemies are more subdued in the monograph (though it is still part of his argument).

transcending'.<sup>96</sup> Likewise, John Dodson, a former U.S. Chief Warrant officer, argues that a targeted individual's decision-making process is influenced to a great extent by its "nexus zone", by which he means 'the level of comfort or intimacy [an individual] has for a specific geographical location' because of 'family ties, previous visits, close associates residing in the area, of a shared ethno-linguistic identity (known as nexus zones)'.<sup>97</sup> Terms like "complex environment" and "nexus zones" are military jargon for (not explicitly) saying that the process of targeting a person requires armed intervention in populated areas. Thus, one way in which the erasure of the population takes place in military doctrine is through linguistic tinkering and the use of phrases such as "the operational environment is transcending" to describe what is, in effect, a situation in which armed violence is brought to bear on the homes, working places and the everyday life of people living under drones.

In addition, the notion that the targeted individual is a socially-situated subject is emphasised by Marks, Meer and Nilson. One particularly revealing passage in their thesis reads as follows:

Educational bonds are relationships developed during the sharing or exchange of knowledge. For instance, a [targeted individual] who attended a specific university at a certain time should have developed a social network at that university. Therefore, *an intelligence analyst can develop a target list based on all the students and teachers who attended that university during that time.* This does not mean that all individuals who attended that university are terrorists, but it does expand the fugitive's potential social network and may reveal important information on the network's infrastructure.<sup>98</sup>

Hence, the manhunting process is not restricted to the surveillance of individuals alone; the social network of those individuals also needs to be observed, categorised and known. For Marks, Meer and Nilson the extent of this social network is

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<sup>96</sup> Shoemate, *Paradigm Change*, 4. Emphasis mine.

<sup>97</sup> John R. Dodson, "Man-hunting, Nexus Topography, Dark Networks and Small Worlds," *Joint Information Operations Center, IO Sphere* (2006): 8, available at, [http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/info-ops/iosphere/iosphere\\_win06\\_dodson.pdf](http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/info-ops/iosphere/iosphere_win06_dodson.pdf).

<sup>98</sup> Marks, Meer and Nilson, *Manhunting*, 70. Emphasis mine.

considerable, as the enemy individual is embedded into a number of social affiliations (familial, educational, political, religious, economic and so on) all of which need to be subjected to scrutiny.<sup>99</sup> What is more crucial, however, is that inherent to this process of scrutiny is the possibility that people who share a social connection with a targeted person may themselves become future targets. As discussed in Chapter 1, the targeting method used by the U.S. military is cyclical rather than teleological. Killing a person does not end the cycle of violence but constantly renews it, claiming more and more members of the population as targets to be killed. The erasure of the population, in this instance, takes place on the level of the targeting methodology which gradually, but systematically, integrates members of the population into the category of the individual target. This process of individualisation obscures the fact it is the population that is being constantly targeted. To understand how this is the case, one may consider the example of activity-based intelligence and its pattern of life analysis.<sup>100</sup> The underlying principle of that intelligence practice is that the entirety of the population must be subjected to the targeting process, for, even if an individual target might not even exist, the methodological assumption is that the population under surveillance always contains individuals that must be targeted.<sup>101</sup> The population is, in this sense, the unspoken condition of possibility of targeting individuals.

Another, related mode of erasing the population is by claiming that the dismantlement of terrorist network does not only involve targeting its members but also its “affiliates”.<sup>102</sup> In this respect the 2011 National Strategy for Counterterrorism, a report published by the Obama administration, maintains that ‘the paramount terrorist threat’ the United State faces has ‘continued to evolve, often

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<sup>99</sup> See *ibid.*, 69-73.

<sup>100</sup> See Chapter 1 for a more detailed analysis of pattern of life analysis.

<sup>101</sup> It might be useful here to remind the reader of Letitia Long’s description of activity-based intelligence as cited in Chapter 1: “Today, intelligence gathering is like looking in a global ocean for an object that might or might not be a fish. It might be anything and it might be important, but at first, *we are not sure it even exists*. And whatever it might be is constantly moving and interacting with a huge number of other objects. They might make up an organized school of fish or they might not be related at all. But *we do know that we need to find it*, identify what it is, and figure out how it relates to all the other objects – whether fish or sea fowl – we either know or think might be important’. Letitia A. Long, “Activity Based Intelligence: Understanding the Unknown,” *The Intelligencer Journal of U.S. Intelligence Studies* 20, no. 2 (2013): 7.

<sup>102</sup> Shaw, “Predator Empire,” 541.

in response to the successes of the United States and its partners around the world'.<sup>103</sup> The report states that this state of affairs means that 'the source of the threat ... has shifted in part toward the periphery' to include 'groups affiliated with but separate from the core of the [terrorist groups] in Pakistan and Afghanistan'.<sup>104</sup> In re-defining the scope of what constitutes "threat", the Obama administration has also extended its counterterrorism policy to make possible the targeting of places<sup>105</sup> and people that might be connected to al-Qaida's agenda 'whether through formal alliance, loose affiliation, or mere inspiration'.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, the report states in a footnote that "affiliates" is not a legal term but 'a broader category of entities against whom the United States must bring various elements of national power, as appropriate and consistent with the law, to counter the threat they pose'.<sup>107</sup>

The security imperative that "loose affiliation" or "mere inspiration" is enough to think that an individual is connected to a terrorist network means in effect that the entire community in which terrorists are suspected to exist is a target for drones. Because of the manhunting precept that individual targets are actors deeply entrenched in their social environment – as Marks, Meer and Nilson claim – then that environment is essentially rendered into a constant source of targets. The extent in which the notion of "affiliate" widens the web of targeting is better understood through the testimony of people who have found themselves being categorised as such. Consider, for instance, the story of Daud Khan from North

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<sup>103</sup> The White House, "National Strategy of Counterterrorism 2011," *White House* (June 2011): 1, available at [https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/counterterrorism\\_strategy.pdf](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/counterterrorism_strategy.pdf).

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>105</sup> As Ian Shaw writes, this discursive expansion of the "War on Terror" has meant 'an escalation of military force in "areas of focus" that are far removed from those traditionally related to that war. He observes that '[t]hese peripheral and "ungoverned spaces" marked by "persistent insecurity and chaos" include the Yemen-based al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP); al-Qa'ida in East Africa – particularly al-Shabab in Somalia; al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI); and finally al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) – which is based in Algeria'. See Shaw, "Predator Empire" 542. Furthermore, while the 2011 National Strategy for Counterterrorism does not mention the use of drones, these technologies have been the weapon of choice in U.S. interventions in the areas mentioned. The labelling of these areas as "peripheral" and the military decision to heavily deploy drone bombing there bears a striking resemblance to the British colonial air control system, discussed in Chapter 3, and the arguments that led to its implementation.

<sup>106</sup> White House, "Counterterrorism," 3.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

Waziristan.<sup>108</sup> Daud recounts how one day some Taliban arrived to his house and demanded he give them lunch: 'I feared them and was unable to stop them because all the local people must offer them food'.<sup>109</sup> After staying for an hour the Taliban left. The very next day Daud's house was bombed and his only son Khalid killed, with Daud describing how he 'saw his [son's] body completely burned'.<sup>110</sup> Lacking the money to restore their destroyed home, Daud and his family were forced to abandon their village in North Waziristan.<sup>111</sup> This account reveals how effortlessly people are rendered into targets. In the case of Daud an hour's visit was sufficient for him and his family to be seen as becoming "affiliated" with terrorists. As Ian Shaw observes, because of 'the unavoidable intermingling of such militants with the lives of ordinary people, it is likely that [strikes] could have killed many innocent people'.<sup>112</sup>

The problem with Obama's strategic imperative is not simply that it ends up killing ordinary and innocent people; it is also that it already frames the population below in such a way that none of its members is ever considered ordinary or innocent to begin with. On the one hand, the erasure of the population occurs *during* the targeting operation, with members of the population being singled out and rendered into targets. On the other hand, the erasure also *precedes* targeting operations since the strategic imperative is to treat all "affiliates" – a category so loosely defined that it can very well include anyone and everyone from the broader populace – as threats to be killed. One may once again recall Cheney's "One Percent Doctrine" and its maxim that counterterrorism is 'not about our analysis, or finding a preponderance of evidence', but 'about our response'.<sup>113</sup> This maxim implies that when Khalid, Daud's son, was killed in the strike, his categorisation as a target was not only determined by the processes of surveillance and intelligence (which presumably isolated Daud's house as a site of military intervention); it was also

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<sup>108</sup> Christopher Rogers, *Civilian Harm and Conflict in Northwest Pakistan* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2010), 80-81, available at [https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Pakistan\\_Report\\_2010\\_2013.pdf](https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Pakistan_Report_2010_2013.pdf).

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.* 81

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>112</sup> Shaw, "Predator Empire" 547.

<sup>113</sup> Dick Cheney cited in Suskind, *The One Percent Doctrine*, 62.

conditioned by the fact that the boy was a member of a population that was already collectively defined as targetable by the U.S. national security strategy.

In this register, the erasure of the population invokes colonial ways of viewing, and framing communities located at the periphery of the international system as inherently militant. The United States' dronified counterterrorism constitutes, in this sense, the air control scheme of our present day. It enforces a regime of violence from the air that collapses the distinction between militants and the population, for the tacit doctrinal – but also the broader political – assumption is that those two are synonymous. Categories of targeting such as the “affiliate” show that the geopolitics of the drone is the geopolitics of colonialism discussed in Chapter 3. The real brutality of drone campaigns is obscured and hidden because the notion of individualised targeting, with its erasure of the population, functions in a manner similar to the notion of “moral effects” employed by the RAF in the 1920s and 1930s. Like its historic precedent, the drone air control scheme is being justified by confining the violence of bombing to one specific effect, and discursively erasing all the rest.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I revealed the discursive erasures that contemporary military theorists engage in when framing drone bombing in terms of lethal action against individuals. Whilst I presented these erasures separately, I do not take them as being clearly distinct from one another. The erasure of the history, the violent effects and the victims of drone bombing work inter-relatedly and in unison. In occluding any analysis of the specific means used in contemporary manhunting, its theorists are able to reduce the historical perspective taken on armed drones to one that engages only with the history of manhunting and not with that of air power. Similarly, the reduction of the history of drones to a narrative about manhunting reinforces an abstraction from what is specific about the armed drone and its violence – drones are placed alongside, and often assumed to be indistinguishable from, other instruments of manhunting. A history of manhunting – as developed by military

theorists and critics alike – identifies the weapon used in contemporary manhunts as the “hunter-drone” and the “assassin-drone”, often obscuring its historical character as the “bomber-drone” and the “terror-drone”. Finally, both these erasures work toward disqualifying the members of the targeted populations from being victims of drone violence. People living below drones, who are traumatised mentally and physically, whose homes are destroyed and their lives left in ruin, do not often feature in these narratives of manhunting – unless they are killed. Their descriptions are crucial in understanding what drone bombing is and what it does, and against whom, but their voices are silenced.

## AFTERWORD

My aim has been to unsettle and destabilise orthodox representations of drone bombing, and to interrogate the main building block that informs these representations: the notion of targeted killings. Analyses that see the drone as an instrument that targets individuals fail to capture the multifaceted violent content of contemporary practices of drone bombing. They stand on critically impoverished epistemological foundations.

The discourse on drones is full of stories unheard, of histories buried and of horrors concealed. In offering an account of drone bombing, I have tried to reveal how these aspects of drone violence are violently suppressed, in favour of a perception that reduces and distorts the violence of the drone to that of targeted killings. This suppression is dangerous: it cultivates a discursive climate in which the only story that is told is one that obscures and nullifies what it means to live below armed drones. Drone bombing occurs in areas which centuries of colonialism have made into the periphery of the international political system, in areas where for more than a century dropping bombs has been the equivalent of a policeman's baton. As I discussed in this thesis, a crucial reason why colonial brutality had such a firm foothold in those areas was because its violent contents were epistemically mediated by military enframings that sought to explain and justify such brutality. The same holds true today in relation to drone bombing, with those areas being targeted again – or *still* – in a way perceived and presented, even in critical accounts, as being entirely discontinuous with aerial violence of the past.

Understanding drone bombing through a historical lens is not merely of academic interest. It matters politically, for it reveals not only the continuation of structures of violence but also the insufficiencies of critical thought that fails to trouble and dislocate received understandings about the contents of that violence. Simply recovering these histories of colonial brutality, however, is not enough. There is also a need to bring these histories to bear on the present in order to contest the Eurocentric concepts and vocabulary that have kept traditions of colonial violence in the periphery of academic focus and discussion. Engaging with these traditions is

crucial in challenging present modes of state violence and also in understanding how they are historically situated, discursively structured and politically maintained and justified.

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