

Dis/Ordering the Orient: scopic regimes and modern war

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Orientalism and order

When Edward Said elected to describe Orientalism as a discourse he was calling attention to its performative power: to its capacity to produce the effect it names ('the Orient'). That capacity was – and remains – contingent. It depends on the constellations, conjunctures and circumstances in which Orientalism is activated. Said focused on its imbrications with British, French and American modalities of power and their production of a particular 'Orient' – the 'Middle East' – whose designation was itself a profoundly colonial locution/location.¹ There were other modalities and other 'Orient's', but in this case Said identified two closely connected cultural-political performances. First, 'the Orient' was summoned as an exotic and bizarre space, and at the limit a pathological and even monstrous space: 'a living tableau of queerness.' Second, 'the Orient' was constructed as a space that had to be domesticated, disciplined and normalized through a

¹ Thomas Scheffler, 'Fertile Crescent', 'Orient', 'Middle East': the changing mental maps of southwest Asia', *European review of history*, 10, 2003, pp. 253-72; James Renton, 'Changing languages of empire and the Orient: Britain and the invention of the Middle East, 1917-1918', *Historical Journal*, 50, 2007, pp. 645-667.

forceful projection of the order it was presumed to lack: ‘framed by the classroom, the criminal court, the prison, the illustrated manual.’²

These performances wrought considerably more than epistemological violence. The Orientalist projection of order was more than conceptual or cognitive, for the process of ordering also conveyed the sense of command and conquest. Said knew this very well, and his critique of Orientalism was framed by a series of wars. The book opens with the civil war in Lebanon, a place that had a special significance for Said; it was a belated response to his puzzlement at the jubilation on the streets of New York at the Israeli victory in the 1967 and 1973 wars; and it located the origins of a distinctively modern Orientalism in Napoleon’s military expedition to Egypt between 1798 and 1801.³

And yet, even as he fastened on the importance of the French invasion and occupation, Said’s focus was unwaveringly on the textual appropriation of ‘ancient Egypt’ by the *savants* – the engineers, scientists and artists – who

² Edward Said, *Orientalism*, London: Penguin, 1978, pp. 41, 103. I have phrased Said’s argument thus to draw out the Foucauldian tenor of *Orientalism*. Said’s attitude to Foucault’s work was a resolutely critical one, of course, and he constantly despaired at Foucault’s preoccupation with metropolitan France and his apparent unwillingness to explore its colonial formations of power-knowledge in any depth or detail, but the relation was more complex (and, I think, more constructive) than the usual contrast between Said’s ‘humanism’ and Foucault’s avowed ‘anti-humanism’.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 87. More recently Juan Cole has endorsed a parallel claim. In invading Egypt, he argues, ‘Bonaparte was inventing what we now call “the modern Middle East”’, and ‘the similarities of the Corsican general’s rhetoric and tactics to those of later North Atlantic incursions into the region tell us much about the persistent pathologies of Enlightenment republics’: *Napoleon’s Egypt: invading the Middle East*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 247. So they do, but the ‘Middle East’ has its origins in European and eventually American discourses of diplomacy, geopolitics and security, whereas ‘the Orient’ has a more diffuse cultural inflection. The conjunction of the two in the French occupation of Egypt is of crucial importance, and the same can be said of the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

accompanied the French army. Their collective work was enshrined in the monumental *Description de l'Égypte*, which Said described as a project 'to render [Egypt] completely open, to make it totally accessible to European scrutiny', and so to usher the Orient from what he called 'the realms of silent obscurity' into 'the clarity of modern European science.'⁴ The phrasing is instructive: visibility is a leitmotif of Orientalism. Said repeatedly notes that under its sign 'the Orient is watched', that the Orient was always more than *tableau vivant* or theatrical spectacle, and that the Orientalist technology of power-knowledge was, above all, about 'making visible', about the construction 'of a sort of Benthamite panopticon' from whose watch-towers 'the Orientalist surveys the Orient from above, with the aim of getting hold of the whole sprawling panorama' in every 'dizzying detail'.⁵

Napoleon's military expedition was about more than annexing Egypt as what Said calls 'a department of French learning', however, and its execution inflicted more than cultural violence. Its capacity to do both these things was indeed visually mediated – though, strangely, there is not a single illustration in *Orientalism* – but so too was the conduct of the campaign itself. Historically, wars have always been shaped by (and have in turn shaped) visual fields, each of which, so Cullather argues, provided 'a distinct optic which set the limits of leaders' sights and determined what strategy and victory would look like.'⁶ There are increasingly close connections between (late) modern war and 'scopic regimes'. Metz proposed the latter term to distinguish the cinematic from the theatrical way of staging and

⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 85-6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 103, 127, 158, 239.

⁶ Nick Cullather, 'Bombing at the speed of thought: intelligence in the coming age of cyberwar', *Intelligence and National Security*, 18, 2003, pp. 141-154: 141.

seeing the world, but it has since been uncoupled from any specific forms, displays and technologies to denote a mode of visual apprehension that is culturally constructed and prescriptive, socially structured and shared.⁷ Like its companion term *visuality*, which denotes culturally or technoculturally mediated ways of seeing, the concept is intended as a critical supplement to the idea of vision as a purely biological capacity (I say ‘supplement’ because the embodiment of vision remains of more than incidental importance). Scopic regimes are historically variable, and different regimes can co-exist within a single cultural and social formation, but the closest attention has been paid to the ligatures between *visuality* and modernity. Apart from a handful of studies, however, of which Virilio’s *War and cinema* is probably the best known, little systematic attention has been given to the ways in which the conduct of modern wars is mediated by scopic regimes.⁸

This blind spot has become ever more acute, because many of the wars fought directly by the United States and its allies during the Cold War took place in the ‘Far East’ – Korea, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia – and since 9/11 they have all taken place within the orbit of US Central Command (CENTCOM) whose Area of Responsibility is a greater ‘Middle East’, (excluding Israel which falls within US European Command). And yet there has been little examination of the ways in which these conflicts have been inflected by the visual codes and conventions of Orientalism – by American

⁷ Christian Metz, *The imaginary signifier: psychoanalysis and the signifier*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982, p. 61; Martin Jay, ‘Scopic regimes of modernity’, in Hal Foster (ed), *Vision and visuality*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1988, pp. 3-23; Antonio Somaini, ‘On the scopic regime’, *Leitmotiv*, 5, 2005-6, pp. 25-38.

⁸ Paul Virilio, *War and cinema: the logistics of perception* (trans. Patrick Camiller), London: Verso, 1989; originally published in French in 1984.

fabrications of the ‘Orient’ in which they took place – so that the interrogation of modern war has been doubly blind. For these reasons we need to establish how changing scopic regimes have mediated the triangulations of modernity, Orientalism and war that frame our own, still profoundly colonial present. To fashion a preliminary answer to this question, I spool back to the French invasion of Egypt and then fast-forward to contemporary counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Modernity, Orientalism and War

Although Said says remarkably little about it, the French occupation of Cairo and the subsequent rampage through the Levant were hideously bloody affairs. In fact, Bell claims that the Napoleonic wars wrought such an ‘extraordinary transformation in the scope and intensity of warfare’ that they constituted ‘the first total war’ of the modern period.⁹ This probably needs qualification, but the proximity of modern Orientalism to modern warfare is reinforced in other ways too. Said notes more or less in passing that what most impressed the first Arab chronicler of the occupation, Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, ‘was Napoleon’s use of scholars to manage his contacts with the natives.’¹⁰ This was expediency more than cultural sensibility; the *savants* grumbled that they were required to provide all sorts of practical information for the army on a more or less daily basis and to produce what was, in effect,

⁹ David Bell, *The first total war: Napoleon’s Europe and the birth of warfare as we know it*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007; cf. Michael Broers, ‘The concept of “Total War” in the Revolutionary-Napoleonic period’, *War in history*, 15, 2008, pp. 247-68.

¹⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 82; Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, *Journal d’un notable du Caire durant l’expédition française 1798-1801* (trans. Joseph Cucocq), Paris: Albin Michel, 1979. In fact, Jabarti provided three different accounts of the occupation: see André Raymond, *Égyptiens et français au Caire, 1798-1801*, Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1998, pp. 3-5.

military intelligence. Neither they nor the troops were prepared for their first contact with Cairo – it resembled ‘a great intestine filled with houses stacked on top of one another,’ complained one officer, ‘*without order, without regularity, without method*’ (my emphasis) – and so it was necessary to transform its multiple opacities into a singular transparency. As I said at the start, this is a characteristically Orientalist gesture – ordering what was assumed (incorrectly, as it happens) to be disordered – and in this particular case Cairo was to be opened to the French military gaze: transformed into a spatialised object of knowledge that would make possible the surveillance, regulation and exaction of the city and its population.

This required a rapid but detailed mapping of the city and its environs. It was not difficult to establish a series of points from which to construct a *plan géométrique* – the first were fixed on the mounds of rubbish that ringed Cairo, from which an expanding series of triangles was folded out into the city using the minarets of the mosques as markers – but as the surveyors moved inside the city so their task became formidably difficult because the intricacy of the streets and the numerous dead-ends made it impossible to take the long sightings that would have expedited levelling.¹¹ When the map was finished it fell to one of the *savants*, Edme Jomard, to provide its interpretative matrix. He spent two months annotating the plan, identifying the names of quarters and streets, numbering them and keying them to the map, and drafting a series of memoranda that were eventually incorporated into a plenary essay for the *Description* that was keyed to illustrations prepared by other *savants*. The overall objective was to exhibit Cairo within

¹¹ Pierre Jacotin, ‘Mémoire sur la construction de la carte de l’Égypte’, in *Description de l’Égypte* vol. 17, Paris: Panckoucke, 1824, pp. 546-7.

a space of European reason, geometricized and systematized, for, as Jomard explained,

‘The internal plan of the city is nothing like European cities: not only are its streets and squares highly irregular but – with the exception of a few major streets – the city is almost entirely made up of very narrow streets and zig-zag branches that debouch into countless dead-ends. Each one of these districts is closed by a gate, which the inhabitants open as they please: *with the result that the interior of Cairo is very difficult to know as a whole. This could not be done until the French were masters of the city.*’¹²

By these means Solé concludes that the *ingénieurs-géographes* succeeded in untangling the ‘*capitale-labyrinthe*’ and ‘forcing it to give up its secrets.’¹³ This was true in the most physical of senses too. Napoleon ordered the heavy wooden gates to each neighbourhood to be removed and destroyed, an exercise that was redoubled after the first insurrection in October 1798, and which caused widespread public alarm both times.¹⁴ Such a project was counter to the visual codes of Islam; opening the residential quarters of the city to the gaze of outsiders, especially French men, violated the intricate performances of private, semi-private and public

¹² Edme Jomard, ‘Description de la ville et de la citadelle du Kaire’, *Description*, vol. 18, pp. 115-6; my emphasis.

¹³ Robert Solé, *Les savants de Bonaparte*, Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1998, p. 163.

¹⁴ Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, *History of Egypt* (ed. Thomas Philipp and Moshe Perlmann), Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1994, Vol. III, p. 21; *Napoleon in Egypt: Al Jabarti's Chronicle of the French occupation, 1798*, Princeton NJ: Markus Wiener, 1993, pp. 46, 101.

space that were intrinsic to the conduct of everyday life in Cairo. It is scarcely surprising that, during the first insurrection, one of the targets of the crowd should have been the billet of ‘the inspector for fortifications and trenches’, where ‘many strange mechanical and optical devices’ used by the surveyors were smashed or carried off. The French ‘searched long for these instruments,’ Jabarti recorded, ‘and gave those who returned them huge rewards.’¹⁵ Clearly occupiers and occupied alike understood that mapping was a weapon of war.



Figure 1: The map of Cairo from the Description de l'Égypte

¹⁵ Jabarti, History, p. 49. The chief cartographer was killed during the attack.

I have rehearsed the production of this map – Figure 1 is the reduced (1:100,000) version that appears in the *Description*: the original was drawn at a scale of 1:2,000 – for two reasons. First, you might protest that there is nothing intrinsically Orientalist about a modern, ‘scientific’ map, even this one, and perfectly properly insist that cartography has never been an exclusively European or even colonial project. But this is to treat the map as an object – as what Latour calls an ‘immutable mobile’ – whereas a contrary, more powerful analysis views the map as an *event* and directs attention to the *mappings* through which it flickers into momentary presence and to the wider ensemble of *practices* within which they are activated.¹⁶ Seen thus, situated within the web of military operations that produced and sustained Cairo as a city under French occupation, this is an unstable but profoundly Orientalist inscription. Secondly, mapping Cairo, transporting it into the cognitive space of European reason, involved what an Arab writer once called *intizam al-manzar*, the organization of the view, which enabled the French to ‘see’ the paper city in a way that was impossible for them on the ground. By such means, a claim to certainty and truth was registered so that, as Mitchell puts it, ‘everything seems ordered and organized, calculated and rendered unambiguous.’ This was achieved through a novel machinery that installed a distinction between representation and reality – what Mitchell identifies as ‘the world-as-exhibition’ – whose distinctively modern ‘exhibitionary order’, as he also shows, has an intimate association with

¹⁶ See John Pickles, *A history of spaces: cartographic reason, mapping and the geocoded world*, New York: Routledge, 2004; Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge, ‘Rethinking maps’, *Progress in human geography*, 31, 2007, pp. 331-344. The latter argue that maps cannot be located outside the interpretive fields through which they are co-constituted – which is precisely why they cannot be ‘immutable mobiles’ – and they treat maps as productions that are ‘constantly in motion, always seeking to appear ontologically secure’.

colonialism and Orientalism. This apparatus turns on the production of a detachment and distance between the viewing subject and the object of the gaze – on the power ‘to separate oneself from the world and thus constitute it as a panorama’ – and, by extension, on a radical difference between the city of the occupiers and the city of the occupants that is, I think, formally equivalent to the distinction between ‘our space’ and ‘their space’ rendered by Said’s concept of an imaginative geography.¹⁷ Both cartographic reason and the exhibitionary order depended on the establishment of what Mitchell calls ‘viewing platforms’ (like mounds of rubbish or minarets) from which, ideally, ‘one could see and yet not be seen.’¹⁸

Both these ideas – mappings and exhibitionary orders – can illuminate the scopic regimes of American military adventurism in our own century. I do not of course mean to imply that nothing has changed in the intervening two hundred years. Orientalism is still abroad, and it is necessary to expose its reactivations of colonial imaginaries, dispositions and practices, but it is equally important to identify what is novel about the present constellation of neo-Orientalism and late modern war. The counterinsurgency campaigns conducted by the United States and its allies in Afghanistan and Iraq provide vivid examples of this old-new paradigm.

¹⁷ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 12-13, 24, 29; idem, ‘The world-as-exhibition’, *Comparative studies in society and history* 3, 1989, pp. 217-36; idem, ‘Orientalism and the exhibitionary order’, in Nicholas Dirks (ed.), *Colonialism and culture*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992, pp. 289-318; Said, *Orientalism*, p. 55.

¹⁸ Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, p. 24.

Orientalism and counterinsurgency

There is a long if not distinguished tradition of military Orientalism that counterposes different cultures of war, ‘Occidental’ and ‘Oriental’, but there are other versions that seek to capitalize on a wider cultural knowledge of ‘the Orient’ that can also be traced to a colonial past but which continue to haunt military operations in what Ucko calls ‘the new counterinsurgency era’.¹⁹ Counterinsurgency has a complex colonial genealogy and draws on American, British and French experience over 150 years – and, ironically, on Mao Tse-Tung – but its most recent incarnation not only treats cultural knowledge as a ‘force multiplier’ but also seeks to transform culture into a ‘weapon system’.²⁰ Most of the critical discussions of this cultural turn fasten on the revised counterinsurgency doctrine issued jointly by the US Army and Marine Corps in December 2006. There are good reasons for this, not least the orchestrated fanfare of publicity that heralded its publication, but the new canon is not limited to a single text. The field manual drew upon many previous texts, and on the improvisations of responsive commanders in theatre, and it has since been supplemented by a number of other official publications.²¹ But more than this, counterinsurgency is not a purely textual

¹⁹ Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern war through Western eyes*, London: Hurst, 2009; David Ucko, *The new counterinsurgency era: Transforming the US military for modern wars*, Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009.

²⁰ Derek Gregory, ‘The rush to the intimate: counterinsurgency and the cultural turn in late modern war’, *Radical philosophy*, 150, 2008, pp. 8-23; Rochelle Davis, “‘Culture as a weapon system’”, *Middle East Report* 255, 2010.

²¹ US Army Field Manual 3-24: *Counterinsurgency* (December 2006); a minimal list of subsequent official publications would include the *Human Terrain Handbook* (2008); AFM 3-24.2: *Tactics in Counterinsurgency* (March 2009) and Joint Publication 3.24: *Counterinsurgency operations* (October 2009). As the numbering makes clear, the original Field Manual remains the foundation stone, but other structures have been built upon it.

construction, and there are many differences, slippages and even reversals in the turbulent passages between doctrine, training and operations.

For these reasons (and others) counterinsurgency cannot be reduced to Orientalism. But one of the most direct routes across the crowded terrain from Orientalism to optics, from claims about Afghan and Iraqi culture to the scopic regimes that shape the conduct of American counterinsurgency, is through the figure of T.E. Lawrence: ‘Lawrence of Arabia’. There are few modern experts in this ‘graduate level of war’ who do not acknowledge their debt to him. The title of an influential book on counterinsurgency, *Learning to eat soup with a knife*, was taken from Lawrence’s description of ‘making war on rebellion’ in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, and I doubt it is a coincidence that the US Army’s cultural war machine, the Human Terrain System, is based on ‘seven pillars’. Its lead authors prescribed Lawrence as ‘standard reading’, and a pre-deployment Primer reprinted his famous ‘27 Articles’, field notes which Lawrence saw as ‘stalking horses for beginners in the Arab armies’ that uncovered ‘the secret of handling Arabs’. They reappear in the latest gloss on the field manual, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, which also reprints the seminal memorandum on counterinsurgency written by David Kilcullen, General Petraeus’s senior counterinsurgency adviser, which goes one better: ‘28 Articles’. Kilcullen’s own admiration for, even identification with Lawrence could not be plainer. No army will ever have ‘more than a small number of individuals’ with a gift for ‘cultural leverage’, he writes: mavericks ‘in the mould of Lawrence’.²²

²² John Nagl, *Learning to eat soup with a knife: counterinsurgency lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005; Jacob Kipp, Lester Grau, Karl Prinslow, Don Smith, ‘The Human Terrain System: a CORDS for the 21st century’,

All this is more than intellectual homage.²³ For Lawrence is a totem, a powerful symbol of a close encounter with an other who remains obdurately Other. His talismanic invocation repeats the classical Orientalist gesture of rendering ‘the Orient’ timeless: taking Lawrence as your guide to insurgency in modern Baghdad is like having Mark Twain show you round Las Vegas. Not surprisingly, both Iraq and Afghanistan are reduced to ‘tribal society’ – cartoons masquerading as anthropology²⁴ – and while the new doctrine acknowledges that ‘American ideas of what is “normal” or “rational” are not universal’ (perhaps the single most remarkable sentence in the book) it leaves no doubt about whose ideas are ‘right’.²⁵ In myriad ways the cultural turn continues the exorbitation of cultural difference that is at the heart of Orientalism. It acknowledges that there are cultural practices and values to be understood – the Other is no longer an incomprehensible threat or an

Military Review, September-October 2006, pp. 8-15; LTC William Wunderle, *Through the lens of cultural awareness: a Primer for US Armed Forces deploying to Arab and Middle Eastern Countries*, Fort Leavenworth KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2007, Appendix B p. 115; T.E. Lawrence, ‘The 27 Articles of T.E. Lawrence’, *The Arab Bulletin* vol. 60, 20 August 1917; David Kilcullen, ‘Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of company-level counterinsurgency’, *Military Review*, May-June 2006, pp. 103-8; idem, ‘Countering global insurgency’, *Journal of strategic studies*, 28, 2005, pp. 597-617: 614; idem, *Counterinsurgency*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 29-50.

²³ Lawrence was of course an insurgent, but it is his combined experience of working with Arabs and conducting guerilla war that explains his significance for American counterinsurgency: see Marilyn Young, ‘Lost in the desert: Lawrence and the theory and practice of counterinsurgency’, in David Ryan and Patrick Kiely (eds), *America and Iraq: policy-making, intervention and regional politics*, New York: Taylor and Francis, 2009, pp. 76-91. There are other past masters, notably David Gallula whose role in the French ‘pacification’ of Algeria is supposed to provide other object lessons in counterinsurgency.

²⁴ Cf. LTC Michael Eisenstadt, ‘Tribal engagement: lessons learned’, *Military Review*, September-October 2007, pp. 16-31; Roberto González, ‘Going “tribal”: pacification in the 21st century’, *Anthropology Today*, 25, 2009, pp. 15-19; Paul Meinshausen and Shaun Wheeler, ‘Tribes and Afghanistan: choosing more appropriate tools to understand the population’, *Small Wars Journal*, June 2010.

²⁵ AFM 3.24 § 1-80.

opaque signifier – but it locates these in a separate space that provides little accommodation for commonality, mutuality or transculturation. The emphasis on cultural difference – the attempt to hold the Other at a distance while claiming to cross the interpretative divide – produces a diagram in which violence has its origins in ‘their’ space, which the cultural turn endlessly partitions through its obsessive preoccupation with ethno-sectarian or tribal division, while the impulse to understand is confined to ‘our’ space, constructed as open, unitary and generous: the locus of a hermeneutic invitation that can never be reciprocated.²⁶

When the new doctrine was published its focus, naturally enough, was on ground operations in which the Army and Marine Corps would take the lead. To the anger of many Air Force officers, air operations were relegated to a supporting role outlined in the last appendix, which acknowledged the contribution of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) from ‘air-mounted collection platforms’ and (in certain circumstances) the ‘enormous value’ of ‘precision air attacks’.²⁷ This may seem a world away from Lawrence, but long before he resigned his Army commission and re-enlisted in the Royal Air Force as Aircraftsman Ross, he had been drawn to the wide open spaces of the sky as well as those of the desert. Deer suggests that in Lawrence’s personal mythology ‘air control in the Middle East offered a redemptive postscript to his role in the Arab Revolt of 1916-18’. He imagined the Arab Revolt ‘as a kind of modernist vortex,’ Deer argues, fluid and dynamic, ‘without front or back,’ and in *Seven Pillars* he recommended ‘not disclosing ourselves till we attack.’ To Lawrence, and to many others at

²⁶ Gregory, ‘The rush to the intimate’, p. 18.

²⁷ AFM 3-24 § E.5-E.11.

the time, the intimation of a nomadic future war gave air power a special significance. ‘What the Arabs did yesterday,’ he wrote, ‘the Air Forces may do tomorrow – yet more swiftly.’ As Satia has shown, this rested not only on a military Orientalism that distinguished different ways of war but also on a cultural Orientalism that represented bombing as signally *appropriate* to the people of these lands. This was, minimally, about intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. ‘According to this perverse logic’, Satia explains, ‘the RAF’s successful persecution of a village testified to their *intimacy* with the people on the ground, without which they would not have been able to strike it accurately.’ More than this, however, ‘the claim to empathy ultimately underwrote the entire air control system with its authoritative reassurances that bombardment was a tactic that would be respected and expected in this unique land.’ From this perspective, Satia continues, Arabs saw bombing as ‘pulling the strings of fate from the sky.’ They understood it ‘not as punishment,’ Lawrence informed his readers, ‘but as misfortune from heaven striking the community.’ And if women and children were killed in the process that was supposedly of little consequence to them: what mattered were the deaths of ‘the really important men.’²⁸ As far as I know, Lawrence has not been invoked by any of the contemporary advocates of airpower in counterinsurgency, but many of these formulations, translated into an ostensibly more scientific vocabulary, reappear in debates about the deployment of drones in Afghanistan. Their mission is not only to provide intelligence through their persistent presence over the war zone but

²⁸ Patrick Deer, *Culture in camouflage: war, empire and modern British literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 64-73; 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, pp. 242, 249-51, 256-8.

to capitalize on that knowledge to conduct accurate strikes; and many of those strikes, especially those conducted across the border in Pakistan by the CIA, are directed (im)precisely at killing what are described as ‘high value targets’: that is, ‘the really important men’.

If Lawrence casts a long shadow, however, it is refracted through the prism of a decidedly contemporary counterinsurgency whose techno-cultural apparatus has transformed the battle space in two ways. First, conventional warfare has traditionally been fought in territorial terms that require the detection, capture or destruction of determinate objectives like buildings, gun batteries or missile silos that are for the most part fixed, whereas counterinsurgency is fought within a multi-dimensional battle space in which the contours of the enemy are indeterminate and fluid. This has necessitated the development of visual technologies that can overlay the object-ontology of conventional warfare with an event-ontology adequate to the speed at which these hybrid, late modern wars are conducted. Second, this in its turn has involved the operationalization of a scopic regime that, from the point of view of the American military, makes the battle space fully transparent. This is about more than dispelling the ‘fog of war’. Because counterinsurgency is now as much about the population as the insurgents – because it involves anatomizing the population, tracking the movements of insurgents through the population and their interactions with the population – it becomes necessary to expose the ‘human terrain’ to view in an intimate, continuous and time-critical manner. To probe the recesses of everyday life like this needs more than ‘intelligence from three-letter agencies and satellite photographs’, as one colonel recognized, but it also involves more than Kilcullen’s ‘conflict ethnography’ whose desire to expose the ‘micro-details’

of the war zone mimics what Bickford calls ‘the panoptic conceits of early anthropology’.²⁹ At the limit it requires a techno-cultural apparatus that can secure a militarized regime of comprehensive and constant *hypervisibility*, which Gordon defines as ‘a kind of obscenity of accuracy that abolishes the distinctions between “permission and prohibition, presence and absence.”’³⁰

Securing Baghdad: counterinsurgency and the event-ful city³¹

The promulgation of the new counterinsurgency doctrine was highly visible, and Mirzoeff argues that visibility has also played a central role in its implementation. He suggests that the field manual invokes a ‘sovereign visibility’ through which the commander is endowed with the capacity to see the battlespace as a totality, while unfamiliar territory (the ‘human terrain’) is transformed into ‘a simulacrum of a video game’ that subordinates can navigate with supreme confidence.³² The first claim is broadly correct, though it is not peculiar to the Petraeus doctrine; its operationalization can be seen in the Command Post of the Future (CPOF), which was tested in Baghdad from 2004 and was specifically designed to allow commanders to see ‘anywhere in the battlespace’. But the second claim needs qualification. The military is no stranger to videogames and uses simulations in its mission

²⁹ Wunderle, ‘Cultural awareness’, p. 3; David Kilcullen, *The accidental guerrilla: Fighting small wars in the midst of a big one*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 304-6; Andrew Bickford, ‘Anthropology and HUMINT’, in Network of Concerned Anthropologists, *The Counter-counterinsurgency Manual*, Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2009, pp. 135-151: 147.

³⁰ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly matters: haunting and the sociological imagination*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, pp. 15-16.

³¹ This section is derived from Derek Gregory, ‘Seeing Red: Baghdad and the event-ful city’, *Political geography* 29, 2010, pp. 268-279.

³² Nicholas Mirzoeff, ‘War is culture: Global counterinsurgency, visibility and the Petraeus doctrine’, *PMLA* 124 (5), 2009, pp. 1737-1746: 1741.

rehearsals and training; but once in theatre troops move through a landscape where the rules of the game are constantly changing and they need to share their experiences with an immediacy that short-circuits the vertical protocols of the ‘top-down view of the world’ that characterizes what Mirzoeff calls ‘command visualization’. In this regard the exemplary visual system is the Tactical Ground Reporting Network (TIGR).



Figure 2: Command Post of the Future (courtesy US Army)

CPOF is a networked visualization and collaboration system, a sort of super Geographical Information System, which was used by the 1st Cavalry to track the real-time movement of troops and the incidence of events across the city (Figure 2). The effect was to produce Baghdad as what Croser calls the ‘battlespace multiple’ or the ‘event-ful’ city. In contrast to visualizations

derived from static databases, CPOF operates on live data so its multiple screen images ‘do not cohere but exist layered (side by side), and do not stay the same but alter moment to moment’. Within this system, Baghdad was ‘never resolved into a single, definite picture’, therefore, and the battlespace was made to appear as ‘constantly updated, fluid and always in the process of construction.’³³ While CPOF thus demanded ‘the constant attention of users through its running display of the present’ – what Croser calls its ‘present-ing’ of the battlespace – it could not specify ‘which element of the present should be addressed at any given moment.’ In order to prioritize the image stream, to navigate the digital city, users sought out events that disrupted the physical, almost physiological city, scanning the screens for markers of ‘abnormal functioning and distorted flows.’³⁴ This filtering allowed the military to assert visual and hence – at least in principle – operational control over the contingent, which is the fulcrum of late modern security practices. In Baghdad, those practices required the performance of a continuous audit that compiled reports of significant events (Significant Activity Reports or SIGACTS) and correlated the incidence of those ‘enemy actions’ with a series of civil, commercial and environmental indicators of the population. Counterinsurgency requires the simultaneous pursuit of ‘kinetic’ (offensive) and ‘non-kinetic’ (reconstruction) operations, and these multiple, overlapping lines of operation reappeared on the multiple screens of the CPOF, so that there was a close correspondence between the technical and the conceptual. In Croser’s view, therefore, ‘CPOF was in some ways

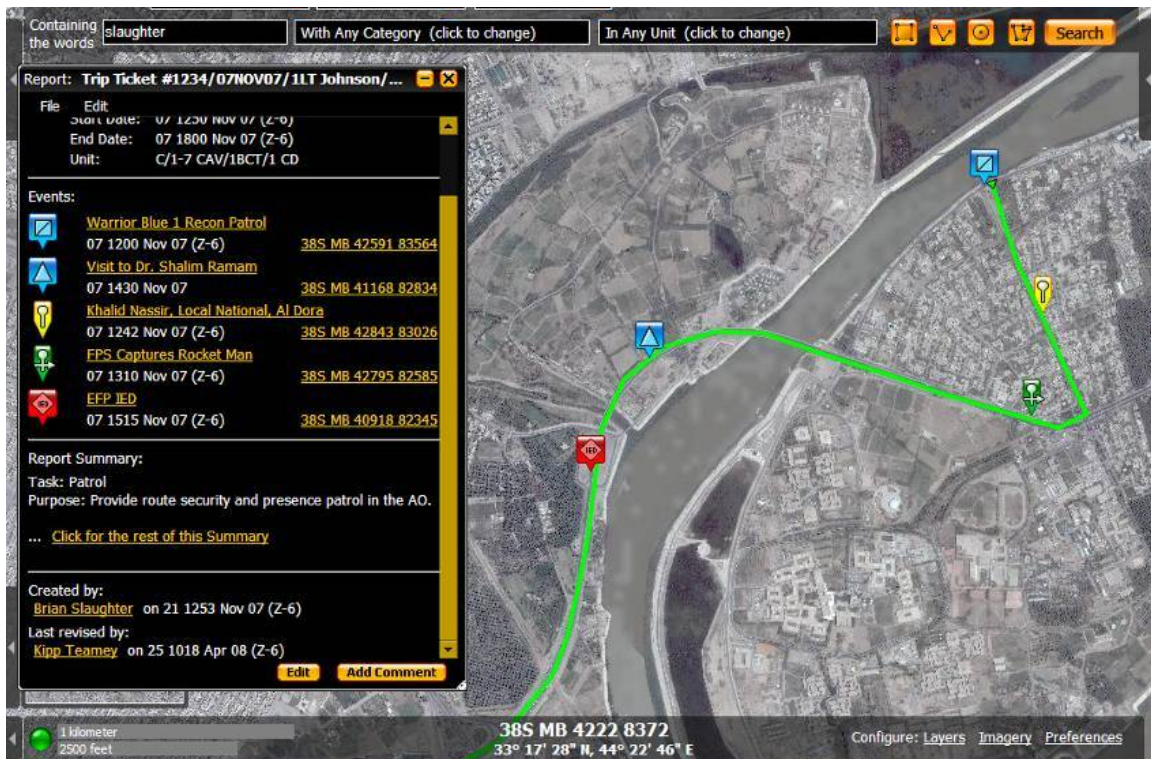
³³ Caroline Croser, ‘Networking security in the space of the city: event-ful battlespaces and the contingency of the encounter.’ *Theory and event* 10:2 (2007).

³⁴ *Idem*, *The new spatiality of security: operational uncertainty and the US military in Iraq*, London: Routledge, 2010, pp. 103, 105.

the perfect technology for [counterinsurgency] operations.’³⁵

CPOF is a command-level system, however, and counterinsurgency also requires a closely textured *local* knowledge. The 1st Cavalry established a secure intranet to share reports among its patrols, and by 2007 CAVNET had been developed into the multimedia TIGR. This is a crowd-sourced virtual notebook, a militarized combination of Google Earth and a Wiki, into which troops upload their own digital images, videos and field observations to produce a different kind of collaborative database. Like CPOF, TIGR provides a map-based interface that allows users to pull back events, people and places along a patrol route or within a district (Figure 3). Unlike CPOF, however, the system is predicated on the rapid, horizontal transmission of information rather than the hierarchical chain of command and control. The transition from a sovereign model of information to a capillary model, where the threshold of visibility is lowered towards the close-in, meshes with the intrusive intimacy of the new counterinsurgency doctrine. It also reinforces the production of Baghdad as an event-ful city by inverting the pyramid in which satellite feeds and imagery from surveillance drones and other centralized resources are analyzed at command levels and filtered down to troops on the street, and substituting a much more fluid, ‘just-in-time’ system of monitoring, analysis and decision.

³⁵ Idem, ‘Organising complexity: modes of behaviour in a networked battlespace’, Australian Army, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Working Paper 133, 2007, p. 38.



Screenshot from DARPA's TIGR (Tactical Ground Reporting) System (synthetic data). TIGR is a multimedia reporting system for soldiers at the patrol level, allowing users to collect and share information to improve situational awareness and to facilitate collaboration and information analysis among junior officers. DARPA Image.

Figure 3: Tactical Ground Reporting Network screenshot (courtesy DARPA)

Bush's Baghdad was hardly the Corsican's Cairo, and the Iraqi capital was seen as a (degraded) modern city rather than an Orientalist labyrinth. But the Americans had as much trouble reading its flickering signs as the French had had in Cairo, and the US Army was just as determined to open the occupied city to its gaze. These two visual technologies, in concert with others like the biometric scanning of the local population, provided a more intimate mapping than Napoleon's *ingénieurs-géographes* could ever have imagined: fluid rather than fixed, live rather than dead, interrogatory rather than inert. Yet when their mappings were re-presented to public audiences, their liquidity congealed into the conventional map. While the new systems

produced Baghdad as ‘messy, complex and ever-mutable’, capturing the quicksilver capacity of the insurgency, the public assertion of command – the public performance of that crucial operational competence – required the event-ful city to be staged as an ordered, coherent totality. This was achieved by exporting these mappings of the city to cartographies displayed at Press Briefings that worked to stabilize Baghdad visually, imaginatively and rhetorically.

As the violence in Baghdad intensified through 2006, it became increasingly dangerous for journalists to chase their own stories, and this gave the Press Briefings conducted by Multi-National Force – Iraq in the Green Zone an extraordinary power. Briefers constantly asserted that only the US military had the capacity for ‘top sight’ – the ability to integrate reporting chains ‘at the top’ and so see the city as a whole – and only the US military could guarantee ‘ground truth’ through its deployment of armed patrols and surveillance drones. This is the summation of ‘sovereign visuality’ whose counterpart is what Jacob calls the ‘sovereign map’.³⁶ At these briefings Baghdad was staged cartographically through two sorts of plots: fleeting traces of terrorist and insurgent activity (Figure 4) and tracks of military operations against al-Qaeda in Iraq, insurgent cells and death squads (Figure 5).

³⁶ Christian Jacob, *The sovereign map: theoretical approaches in cartography throughout history* (trans. Tom Conley), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Murders

June 14 – July 13

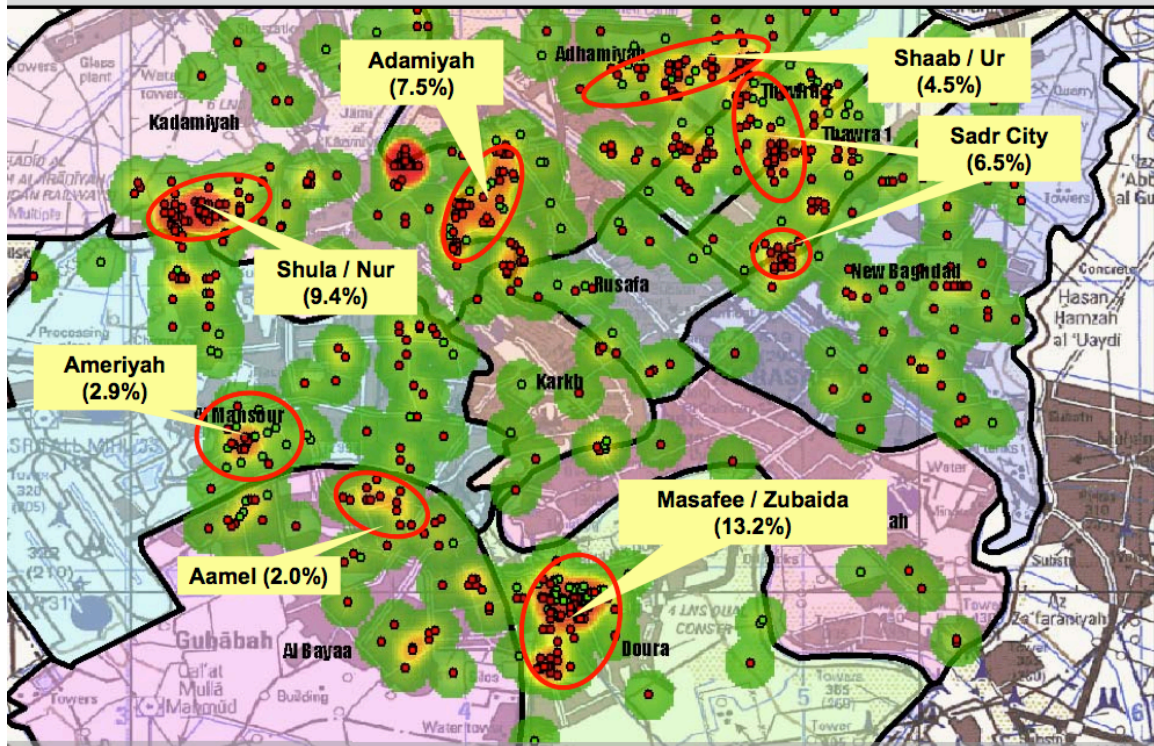


Figure 4: Murders in Baghdad, 14 June – 13 July 2006

Detained Terrorist

August 13, 2006

WHO: Iraqi Security Forces and Coalition Forces
WHAT: Detained terrorist during raid
WHERE: Doura, Baghdad
WHEN: 1 a.m., August 13, 2006

SUMMARY:

- During an early-morning raid, the ISF captured an alleged Omar Army (Al Qaeda in Iraq) member.
- The member participated in an attack at a Maghawir checkpoint near the Al-Mechanic Bridge. This killed two Iraqi Army Soldiers and injured two, as well as destroying two vehicles.
- This member is also responsible for various illegal acts, including murder and assassinations, kidnappings, illegal check points activities, and intimidation throughout Baghdad.

RESULTS:

- (1) Detained Primary Target Detained
- Various incriminating documents, cassettes and forms of identification



Figure 5: Detention of a terrorist, 13 August 2006

The connection between top sight and ground truth was established most frequently by the metaphor of ‘walking’ reporters through the maps, a trope that became so commonplace that the distinction between the battle space and its representations was virtually erased. The conflation of map and city made it possible to walk through a virtual Baghdad at a time when it was desperately dangerous to walk through the physical city. But the reality-effect operated on another level too, because the parade of maps suggested that the event-ful city was known by virtue of *being* mapped. The storyboards were carefully composed and the spaces in which events occurred were calibrated, coded and located within a hierarchically nested

grid put in place through maps and surveillance imagery (Figure 5). As Amoores notes, visualization strategies like these ‘secure the presence’ of an eternal, rational observer’ with the power – the conjunction of Reason and resources – to bring order to the disordered.³⁷ The counter-view is put most succinctly by a subaltern in William Boyd’s *Ice-Cream War* who finds himself in a war-zone for the first time: ‘Gabriel thought maps should be banned. They gave the world an order and a reasonableness which it didn’t possess.’ But that was precisely the (counter)point: the maps were offered as a visible sign of operational competence, confirming the military’s capacity to be on top of what was going down.

These mappings produced the city as a space pockmarked by and constituted through cascades of events that could be generalized into smooth surfaces that captured the intensification or diminution of the violence (Figure 6). If Baghdad was not reduced to the object-space of conventional combat, however, neither was it seen as the emergent field of practices that would have been consistent with a culturally informed analysis. Instead, within this event-ontology the framing narrative – the ‘command message’ – was one in which the actions of ‘the enemy’, exhibited on one series of maps, were confounded by the actions of the military, exhibited on another. Interpretation was confined to a stark dualism, endlessly repeated, in which the intentions of ‘the enemy’ were contrasted with the aspirations of ‘the people’, a strategy that re-positioned the US Army above the fray, watching over, making sense of but ultimately not responsible for the situation. It was as though the Orientalist project was in suspended animation: the monstrous

³⁷ Louise Amoores, ‘Vigilant visualities: the watchful politics of the ‘War on Terror’, *Security Dialogue* 38, 2007, pp. 215-232: 226

violence of the Other was captured – ‘framed’ – by the map but it could not be contained by the military; the city-as-represented was ordered but the city-as-operationalized was spiraling out of control; and the ‘abnormal functionings’ displayed on CPOF screens were fast becoming the new normal on the streets.

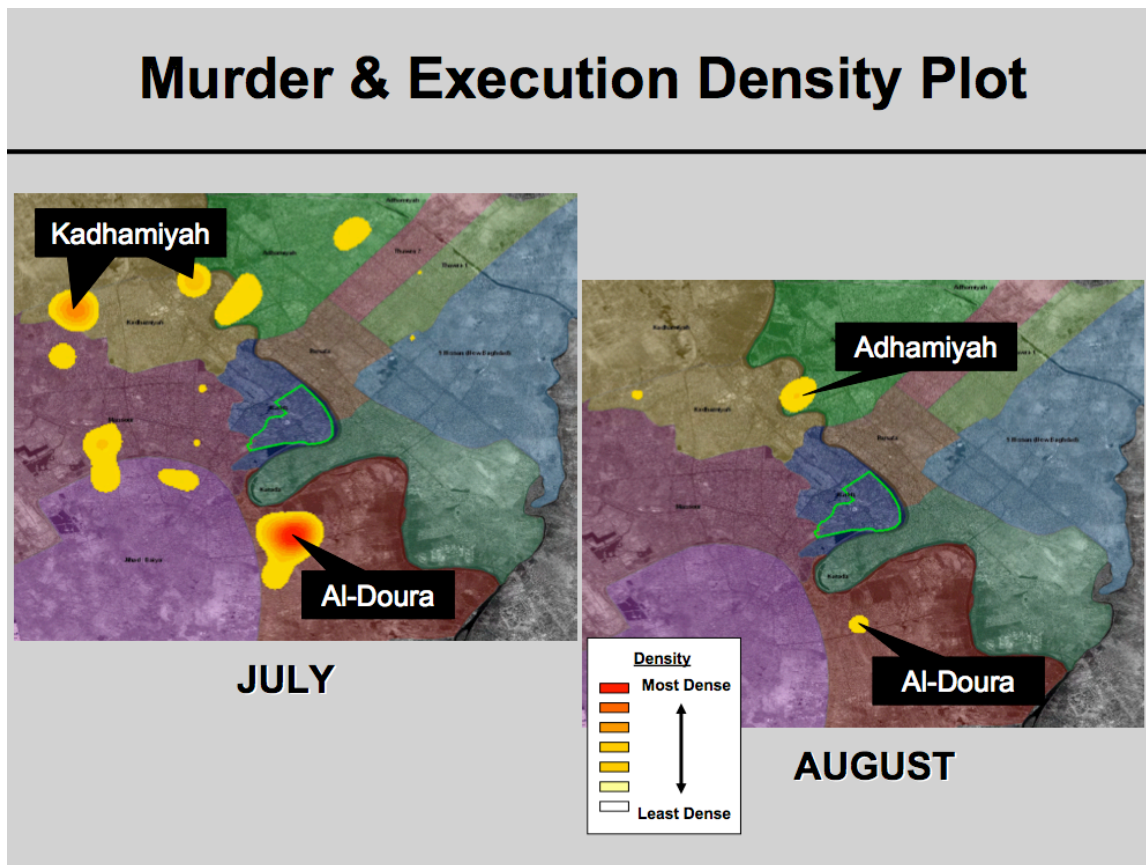


Figure 6: Murders and executions in Baghdad, July-August 2006

From a view to a kill: counterinsurgency from the air³⁸

Less than a month after 9/11, one of Britain's most prominent military historians offered an explanation of those terrible events in starkly Orientalist terms. 'Westerners fight face to face, in stand-up battle, and go on until one side or the other gives in,' Sir John Keegan declared, while 'Orientals, by contrast, shrink from pitched battle, which they often deride as a sort of game, preferring ambush, surprise, treachery and deceit as the best way to overcome an enemy.' On September 11, the 'Oriental' way of war 'returned in an absolutely traditional form. Arabs, appearing suddenly out of empty space like their desert raider ancestors, assaulted the heartlands of Western power in a terrifying surprise raid and did appalling damage.' He went on to claim that 'this war belongs within the much larger spectrum of a far older conflict between settled, creative, productive Westerners and predatory, destructive Orientals.'³⁹ With exquisite irony, on the same day that Keegan was composing his column the United States flew its first armed Predator mission over Kabul and Kandahar.

Keegan's intervention was not only absurdly racist; it conspicuously failed to recognize the predatory nature of the 'new imperialism'.⁴⁰ This was scarcely surprising for someone of Keegan's political views, but it was

³⁸ This section is confined to the drone missions flown by the USAF in Afghanistan; it is derived from Derek Gregory, 'Predatory wars', forthcoming, where I also examine the missions conducted by CIA-operated drones in Pakistan. These raise additional geo-legal issues that are beyond the scope of this essay.

³⁹ John Keegan, 'In this war of civilizations the West will prevail', *Daily Telegraph* 8 October 2001.

⁴⁰ David Harvey, *The new imperialism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). This makes Said's observation all the more prescient. 'Orientalism has been successfully accommodated to the new imperialism': Orientalism, p. 322.

strange for him to ignore the military transformations of the last thirty years. Also writing in the shadow of the attacks on the Twin Towers – and, let us not forget, the Pentagon – Bauman offered a more convincing reading when he argued that ‘globalizing wars’ conducted by advanced militaries were ‘reminiscent of the warfare strategy of nomadic tribes’ and depended on an ‘ability to descend from nowhere without notice and vanish again without warning’.⁴¹ This is the return of Lawrence with a vengeance, and Bauman saw this haunting as part of an aggressive re-enchantment of late modern war:

‘Remote as they are from their targets, scurrying over those they hit too fast to witness the devastation they cause and the blood they spill, the pilots-turned-computer-operators hardly ever have a chance of looking their victims in the face and to survey the human misery they have sowed. Military professionals of our time see no corpses and no wounds.’⁴²

This is an easy jibe to make from a desk. It was true of the high-level bombing campaign that preceded the invasion of Afghanistan, conducted by conventional aircraft and long-range missiles, which Feldman castigated as a ‘new Orientalism’.⁴³ But it was – and remains – a far cry from the brutal

⁴¹ Zygmunt Bauman, ‘Wars of the globalization era’, *European journal of social theory*, 4, 2001, pp. 11-28: 15.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 27; Christopher Coker, *The future of war: the re-enchantment of war in the twenty-first century*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004; James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network*, New York: Routledge, 2009 (second edition).

⁴³ Allen Feldman, ‘Ground Zero Point One: on the cinematics of history’, *Social analysis*, 46, 2002, pp. 110-19. Here the painstaking work of Mark Herold in recovering the record of those killed by US air strikes in Afghanistan is indispensable.

intimacy of counterinsurgency on the ground. To many critics, however, the subsequent deployment of armed drones has made that optical detachment even more complete. Although these Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) are launched from airbases in Afghanistan, most of their missions are controlled via Ku-band satellite link by operators in a Ground Control Station at Creech Air Force Base in Nevada.⁴⁴ When Robert Kaplan visited the base, he was told: ‘Inside that trailer is Iraq, inside the other, Afghanistan.’ The sense of time-space compression is exceeded only by its casual imperialism. ‘Inside those trailers,’ Kaplan explained, ‘you leave North America, which falls under Northern Command, and enter the Middle East, the domain of Central Command. So much for the tyranny of geography.’⁴⁵ But critics insist that this replaces one tyranny of geography with another. The death *of* distance enables death *from* a distance, and these remotely piloted missions not only project power without vulnerability – as the Air Force frequently asserts – but also seemingly without compunction. Distance lends re-enchantment, you might say.⁴⁶ Some see this as appallingly mundane – disparaging the pilots as ‘cubicle warriors’ or ‘commuter fighters’ – but others sense a no less terrifying Olympian power released through the UAV’s Hellfire missiles. ‘Sometimes I felt like a God hurling thunderbolts from afar’, one pilot admits, and Englehardt spells out the metaphor’s grim implications: ‘Those about whom we make life-or-death decisions, as they scurry below

⁴⁴ The 7,000 mile distance imposes a delay in control inputs that makes it impossible for them to perform take-offs and landings, which are the responsibility of forward deployed Launch and Recovery crews that use a line-of-sight data link.

⁴⁵ Robert Kaplan, ‘Hunting the Taliban in Las Vegas’, *Atlantic Monthly*, September 2006: p. 81. Now Britain’s Royal Air Force also controls its drones over Afghanistan from Creech AFB.

⁴⁶ Dave Webb, Loring Wirbel and Bill Sulzman, ‘From space no one can watch you die’, *Peace Review*, 22, 2010, pp. 31-39; Lambèr Royakkers, Rinie van Est, ‘The cubicle warrior: the marionette of digitized warfare’, *Ethics Info Tech*, 12, 2010, pp. 289-96.

or carry on as best they can, have – like any beings faced with the gods – no recourse or appeal.’⁴⁷

As the Predators and Reapers flown by the USAF have become more closely integrated into counterinsurgency, however, that picture has become more complicated. The Air Force estimates that counterinsurgency requires three to four times as much intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance as major combat operations because it involves a fluid target set that requires the much longer dwell times that only UAVs can sustain. Ground operators can be changed at the end of a shift while the aircraft remains on station and the video stream is uninterrupted. In such circumstances ISR needs to be not only persistent but also pervasive: at the limit, ‘gathering intelligence on fast, fleeting, hidden and unpredictable adversaries requires knowledge of everyone, everywhere, all the time.’⁴⁸ The multi-spectral targeting system in the Predator provides real-time full-motion video (FMV) at 30 frames per second, but its field of view is restricted and observers complain that zooming in is like looking through a soda straw. This is supposed to change with the introduction of the Gorgon Stare, which, although providing lower resolution images (five cameras each shooting two 16-megapixel frames per second), will stream 12 motion video feeds from a single Reaper in 2011 rising to 65 by 2012. The intention is to quilt the image streams in-flight into a tiled mosaic and feed them to networked users through a dedicated ground station in theatre that will control the sensors and coordinate

⁴⁷ Matt J. Martin with Charles Sasser, *Predator: The remote control air war over Iraq and Afghanistan*, Minneapolis: Zenith Press, 2010, p. 3; Tom Englehardt, ‘War of the worlds’, TomDispatch, 8 October 2009.

⁴⁸ Pat Biltgen and Robert Tomes, ‘Rebalancing ISR’, *Geospatial Intelligence Forum*, 8 (6) 2010.

operations with the flight crew in Nevada (who will still rely on the Reaper's sensor ball).⁴⁹ The move to wide area surveillance will be reinforced by the introduction of the ARGUS-IS system, which will reintroduce high-resolution images via a multi-gigapixel sensor with a refresh rate of 15 frames per second. These developments (Figure 7) are intended to allow individuals and movements to be tracked through multiple networks to establish a 'pattern of life' consistent with an emerging paradigm of 'activity-based intelligence' that is focal for counterinsurgency operations.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Preliminary tests of Gorgon Stare in October 2010 identified deficiencies sufficiently serious that the system was reported to be 'not operationally effective'. The real-time resolution level was too coarse to track 'dismounts' (people); image stitching was so poor that the ability to 'track targets across the image seams' was compromised; and software errors made geo-location 'inaccurate and inconsistent'. These problems were aggravated by a low rate of image transmission to the ground station that confounded the prosecution of dynamic targets. Although the Air Force dismissed the report as preliminary and insisted that several problems had already been fixed, critics remain sceptical and the system will not be fielded until doubts about its operational effectiveness have been resolved. Ellen Nakashima, 'Air Force's new surveillance system for aerial drones not working as hoped', *Washington Post*, 24 January 2011; David Cloud and Ken Dilanian, 'Proposed drone spy system fails testing, according to draft report', *Los Angeles Times*, 25 January 2011.

⁵⁰ Ibid; William Matthews, 'One sensor to do the work of many', *Defense News*, 1 March 2010; Richard White, 'Gorgon Stare broadens UAV surveillance', *Aviation Week*, 3 November 2010; Ellen Nakashima, Craig Whitlock, 'With Air Force's new drones, "we can see everything"', *Washington Post*, 2 January 2011. There is a trade-off: Reapers equipped with Gorgon Stare will fly unarmed and on shorter missions as a result of the increased power demands and drag on the aircraft imposed by the new sensor pods. This will presumably redouble the significance of UAVs hunting in packs, flocks or swarms, since targets identified by the Gorgon Stare will need to be attacked from other platforms.

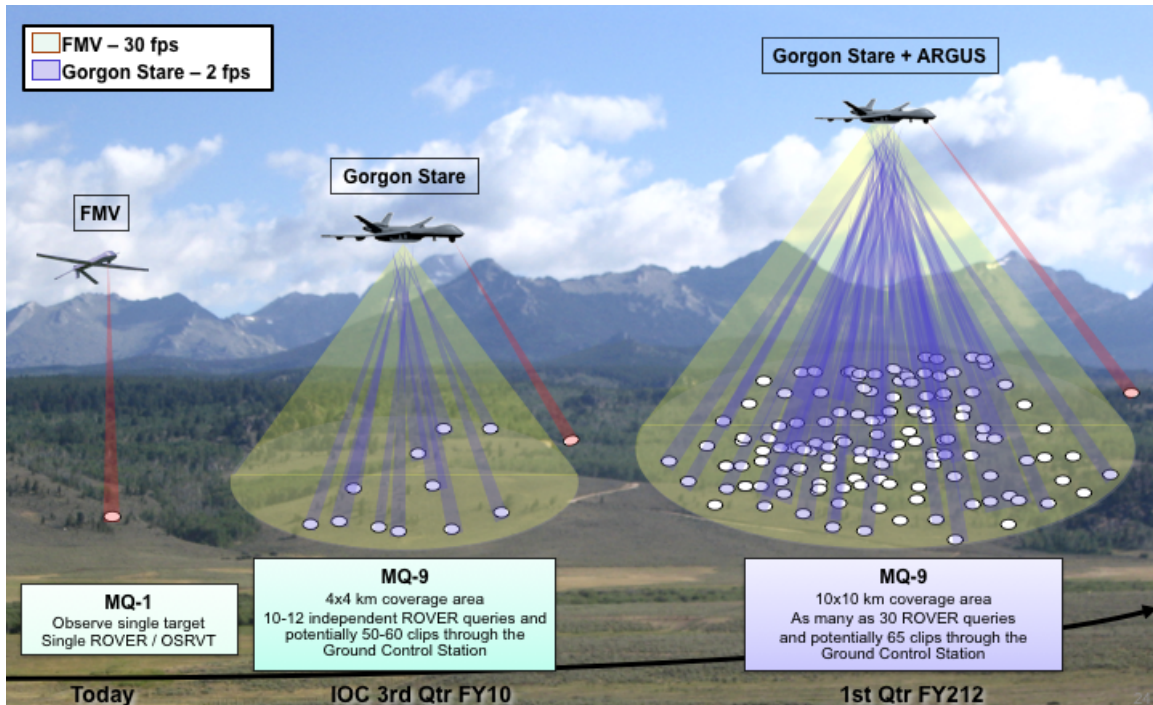


Figure 7: Wide-Area Airborne Surveillance (USAF)

Even if these systems are successful, however, the production of a macro-field of micro-vision solves one problem by creating another, and the Air Force has become keenly aware of the danger of ‘swimming in sensors and drowning in data’.⁵¹ This is the same problem as the ‘present-ing’ of the battlespace on CPOF but multiplied and magnified thousands of times: in effect, Said’s ‘panopticism’ and ‘dizzying detail’ transformed into techno-vertigo.⁵² A standard video camera collects over 100,000 image frames per hour, and the USAF has already archived 400,000 hours of video from its

⁵¹ The phrase was first used in July 2009 by Lt. Gen. David Deptula when he was the Air Force’s deputy chief of staff for ISR, and it has since become a leitmotif in discussions of ISR.

⁵² Panopticism is taken literally by at least one Air Force commander in Kandahar. ‘He knows we’re there,’ Colonel Theodore Osowski told a reporter, referring to the Taliban, ‘and when we’re not there, he thinks we might be there’: Brian Mockenhaupt, ‘We’ve seen the future and it’s unmanned’, *Esquire*, 14 October 2009.

remote platforms; the rate of accession is rapidly accelerating as ISR coverage increases. To manage this image surge, the analytical field has been expanded. UAV operators in the United States are embedded in an extended network that includes not only troops and Joint Terminal Attack Controllers on the ground in Afghanistan, but also senior commanders, mission controllers and military lawyers at CENTCOM's Combined Air and Space Operations Center at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, and data analysts and image technicians at its Distributed Common Ground System at Langley Air Force Base in the United States.⁵³ Like CPOF this network performs two vital tasks. First, archived images are scanned to filter out 'uneventful footage' and distinguish 'normal activity from abnormal activity'. Ideally this forensic monitoring – a sort of militarized rhythmanalysis – would be based on cultural knowledge, but the image bank is so vast that experiments are under way with automated software systems for 'truthing' and annotating video imagery, and new TV technologies are being explored to tag and retrieve images.⁵⁴ Second, live video streams are scanned by commanders, advisers and analysts in order to push time-critical information to UAV crews and ground forces who are responding to emergent events. These developments reinforce the rush to the intimate that characterizes counterinsurgency operations, but in this case the emphasis is as much on

⁵³ The USAF has five DCGS stations, three in the US and two in Germany and Korea, linked in a system known as Sentinel.

⁵⁴ Biltgen and Tomes, 'Rebalancing'; Julian Barnes, 'US military turns to TV for surveillance technology', *Los Angeles Times*, 7 June 2010; Eli Lake, 'Drone footage overwhelms analysts', *Washington Times*, 9 November 2010; Thom Shanker, Matt Richtel, 'In new military, data overload can be deadly', *New York Times*, 16 January 2011. On video analytics and its algorithms, see Jordan Crandall, 'The geospatialization of calculative operations: tracking, sensing and megacities', *Theory, culture and society* 27 (2010) 68-90: 72-3 (though Crandall seems to minimize the technical and operational difficulties involved).

‘the rush’ as ‘the intimate’. The hierarchies of the network are flat and fluid, its spaces complex and compound, and the missions are executed through video feeds and online chat rooms that bring a series of personnel with different skills in different locations into the same zone. Time and space are telescoped so that, as one Air Force colonel put it, ‘We’re mostly online with each other as we go’.⁵⁵

The network is more than a late modern version of Mitchell’s ‘viewing platform’, the apotheosis of the desire to see and not be seen, because it is also a weapon system. UAVs also fulfill the hunter-killer role conveyed by their hideous names.⁵⁶ The Predator carries two Hellfire missiles, and the Reaper can carry fourteen Hellfire missiles or two 500lb JDAM bombs and four Hellfire missiles. For all its emphasis on ‘culture-centric’ warfare, contemporary counterinsurgency remains warfare and is not confined to the non-kinetic. A report on joint military operations in Kandahar Province in 2008 praised the ‘deadly persistence’ of Predators and Reapers and hailed

⁵⁵ John Tirpak, ‘Beyond Reachback’, *Air Force Magazine*, March 2009; Christopher Drew, ‘Military taps into social networking skills’, *New York Times*, 7 June 2010. One (2009) estimate suggested that 168 personnel were required to support a single UAV during one Combat Air Patrol (CAP); this excluded staff at Al Udeid. The USAF plans to increase the number of daily CAPs flown by Predators and Reapers to 50 by the end of FY2011 and 65 by FY2013, but Deptula has insisted that the increase in the image stream means that ISR is not adequately measured by increases in CAPs.

⁵⁶ They are also described as MALE (Mid-Altitude Long-Endurance) drones, and since the US military is evidently fixated by its acronyms it would not be difficult to read this as a techno-cultural version of the voyeurism of the Orientalist gaze in which ‘the Orient’ reclines unsuspecting beneath their persistent, penetrating stare. Thus, for example, Martin describes his role as ‘a voyeur in the sky’ and notes that ‘the poor bastards never once considered looking up, way up, from which height Predator crews observed their every move’: Predator, p. 81. Hypervisibility then becomes a climactic voyeurism. Such a reading also draws attention to the ‘techno-masculinization’ that advances the abstract disembodiment of late modern war: Cristina Masters, ‘Bodies of technology: cyborg soldiers and militarised masculinities’, *International feminist journal of politics* 7, 2005, pp. 112-132.

lethal UAV strikes as ‘the culminating point’ of counterinsurgency.⁵⁷ On Petraeus’s watch, the air war in Afghanistan has been ratcheted up. The information liquidity facilitated by the extended network has not made Cullather’s ‘bombing at the speed of thought’ a reality – since General Dan (‘Bomber’) McNeil relinquished command in 2008, close air support has been conditioned by Rules of Engagement that have sought to minimize collateral damage and, in consequence, at least one soldier complains that ‘decisions move through the risk mitigation process like molasses’⁵⁸ – but it has dramatically compressed what the Air Force calls the ‘kill-chain’ (Figure 8).⁵⁹ This can be thought of as a dispersed and distributed apparatus, a congeries of actors, objects, practices, discourses and affects, that entrains the people who are made part of it and constitutes them as particular kinds of subjects.⁶⁰ During the Second World War and the Cold War the kill-chain was linear and sequential, directed mainly at fixed and pre-determined targets, and the time from identification to execution could extend over days

⁵⁷ Luther S., Turner, Jason T. Adair and Louis Hamel, ‘Optimizing deadly persistence in Kandahar: Armed UAV integration in the joint tactical fight’, *Colloquium* [US Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Center] 29 (2009) 1-19

⁵⁸ Jonathan Vaccaro, ‘The next surge: counterbureaucracy’, *New York Times* 8 December 2009. Many of those procedures are short-circuited for attacks that are not pre-planned, specifically in situations described as ‘troops in contact’, and it is these that are most likely to produce civilian casualties: see *Troops in Contact: airstrikes and civilian deaths in Afghanistan*, Washington DC: Human Rights Watch, 2008.

⁵⁹ Cullather, ‘Bombing’; cf. Adam Herbert, ‘Compressing the kill chain’, *Air Force Magazine*, March 2003; Julian Cheater, ‘Accelerating the kill chain via future unmanned aircraft’, Center for Strategy and Technology, Air War College, April 2007. The kill-chain from finding to engaging ‘emergent targets’ is presently 30-45 minutes; the Air Force aims to reduce this to less than two minutes, and Cheater envisages it being ‘compressed to seconds by 2025’ (p. 12).

⁶⁰ The term derives from Foucault, but Gilles Deleuze’s gloss is particularly apposite: *dispositifs* or apparatuses comprise ‘curves of visibility and curves of enunciation’, in other words, ‘they are machines which make one see and speak’: ‘What is a *dispositif*?’ *Michel Foucault Philosopher: Essays* (trans. Timothy Armstrong), New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 160.

or even weeks. Few of those involved could see the process in its entirety, which explains the commingling of what Harris calls ‘the mundane and the monstrously violent’. The apparatus through which the target was produced and passed through the links in the chain rendered the business of destruction unexceptional: ‘extreme forms of violence and normal bureaucratic practices’ were made ‘co-extensive’.⁶¹ The late modern kill-chain is increasingly directed at mobile and emergent targets, and the time-space compression that this entails has brought all those in the network much closer to the killing space. ‘Traditional bomber pilots don’t see their targets,’ explains Singer, but in contrast to Bauman’s claims of ‘pilots-turned-computer-operators’, he insists that all of those watching a UAV mission in near-real time ‘see the target up close, [they] see what happens to it during the explosion and the aftermath. You’re further away physically but you see more.’⁶² In fact a constant refrain of those working from Nevada is that they are not ‘further away’ at all but only ‘eighteen inches from the battlefield’: the distance between the eye and the screen. This sensation is partly the product of the deliberate inculcation of a ‘warrior culture’ among UAV pilots, but it is also partly a product of interpellation, of being drawn into and captured by the visual field itself.⁶³

⁶¹ Timothy Uecker, ‘Full-motion video: the new dimension of imagery’, Research Report, Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell AFB, 2005; Rebecca Grant, ‘The all-seeing Air Force’, *Air Force Magazine*, September 2008; Chad Harris, ‘The omniscient eye: satellite imagery, “battlespace awareness” and the structures of the imperial gaze’, *Surveillance and society* 4 (1/2) 2006, pp. 101-122: 102,114. Harris was describing the targeting cycle during the first Gulf War.

⁶² Peter Singer, ‘The soldiers call it war porn’, *Spiegel Online*, 12 March 2010; see also his *Wired for war: the robotics revolution and conflict in the 21st century*, New York: Penguin Press, 2009.

⁶³ That this is a *process* requires emphasis. One UAV pilot confessed that when he made his first ‘kill’, he was ‘concentrating entirely on the shot and its technical aspects’; the man in his sights was ‘only a high-tech image on a computer screen.’ But subsequent

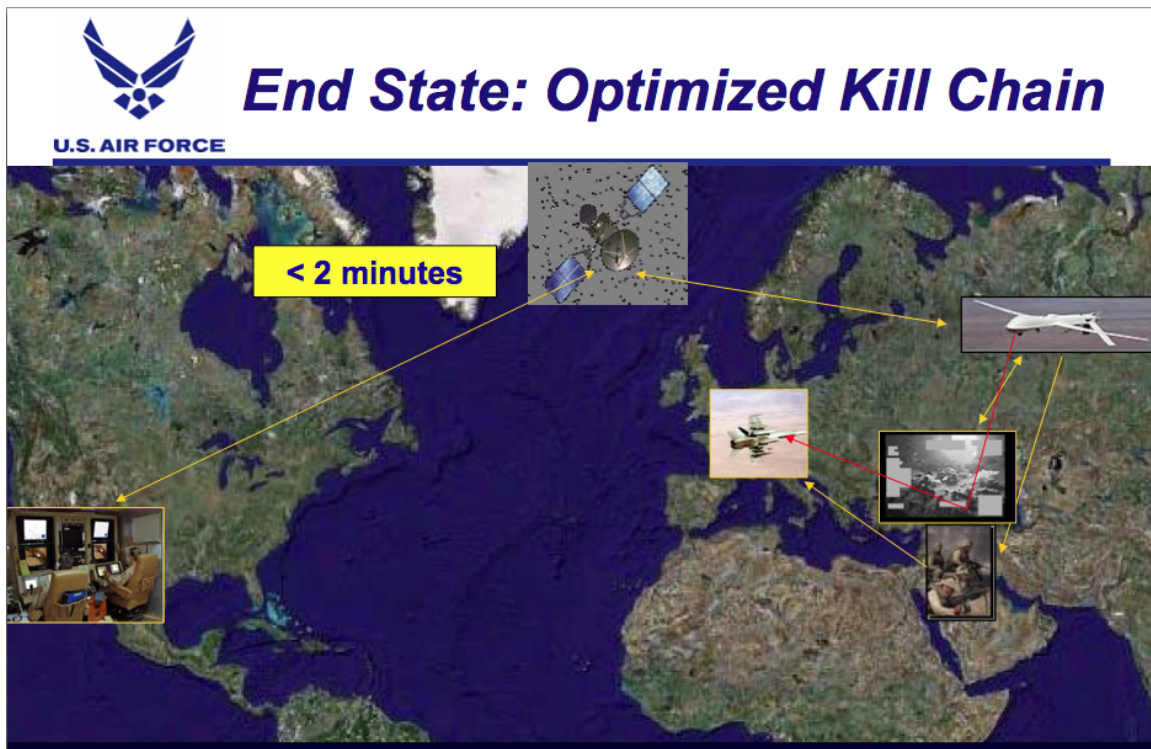


Figure 8: 'Optimized kill-chain' (USAF)

For this reason, characterizations of the drone missions as moments in a 'video war' that inculcates a 'Playstation mentality to killing' may be wide of the mark.⁶⁴ Critics often point to Grossman's study of 'learning to kill', which identified distance as a powerful means of overcoming the resistance to killing. He argued that in the Second World War 'pilots and bombardiers were protected by distance' from seeing the effects of their bombs: 'From a distance I can deny your humanity, and from a distance I cannot hear you scream.' Although Grossman was writing before UAVs were armed and so

missions gradually produced a sense not only of involvement but also of (conditional) responsibility and even, on occasion, remorse: Martin, *Predator*, pp. 43-4, 52-5, 212.

⁶⁴ Philip Alston, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Addendum: Study on targeted killings*, United Nations General Assembly, Human Rights Council, 28 May 2010: p. 25; *Convenient killing: armed drones and the 'Playstation' mentality*, Oxford: Fellowship of Reconciliation, 2010.

could not directly address the drone wars, he did point to first-person shooter video games as particularly powerful agents of conditioning through which players become ‘hardwired’ for killing, and his anatomy of killing listed not only physical distance but also emotional distance, including social, cultural, moral and, crucially, ‘mechanical’ distance: the screen that separates the gamer from the game.⁶⁵ It seems a small step to infer that the long-distance killing of late modern war would radicalize those affective protections. Yet video games do *not* stage violence as passive spectacle; on the contrary, they are profoundly immersive, drawing players in to their virtual worlds, which is in part why the US military uses them in its pre-deployment training.⁶⁶ The video streams from the UAVs seem to produce the same reality-effect. ‘You see a lot of detail,’ the commander of the Air Force’s first dedicated UAV wing notes, so ‘we feel it, maybe not to the same degree [as] if we were actually there, but it affects us.’ ‘When you let a missile go,’ he explains, ‘you know that’s real life – there’s no reset button.’ One Predator pilot insists that the horror of watching two young boys on a bicycle ride into the frame seconds before his missile struck its designated target ‘lost none of its impact’ from being viewed on a screen: ‘Death observed was still *death*’. Anecdotes cannot settle the matter, of course, but reports of drone

⁶⁵ Dave Grossman, *On killing: the psychological costs of learning to kill in war and society*, Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1995, pp. 79, 102, 188-9, 312, 323. Grossman is a former Army Ranger and Professor of Military Science. Cf. Mary Ellen O’Connell, ‘Unlawful killing with combat drones: a case study of Pakistan, 2004-2009’, Notre Dame Law School, Legal Studies Research Paper 09-43 (2009) pp. 9-10, who claims that the central factors in Grossman’s study also ‘characterize drone operations’ which in her eyes look ‘very much like a video game’. In fairness, I should note that some of the sources on which she relies for her account of the conduct of those (CIA) operations have been overtaken by events.

⁶⁶ The military also uses them for recruitment, which is much more problematic, and on its website the Air Force does stage the hunter-killer missions as video-game entertainment: see ‘Fly the MQ-9 Reaper’ at <http://www.airforce.com/games-and-extras/>

crews suffering from post-traumatic stress induced by constant exposure to high-resolution images of real-time killing and the after-action inventory of body parts should not be dismissed.⁶⁷

There are also salient differences between video games and video feeds. Commercial video games staged in simulacra of Afghanistan show stylized landscapes prowled solely by ‘insurgents’ or ‘terrorists’ whose cartoonish appearance makes them instantly recognizable; the neo-Orientalism of these renditions is a matter of dismal record.⁶⁸ But the video feeds from UAVs reveal a much more complicated, inhabited landscape in which distinctions between civilians and combatants are intensely problematic. The existence of so many eyes in that crowded sky – analysts, controllers, commanders and, significantly, military lawyers – is a (pre)caution that the presence of civilians is a constant possibility. The risk of ‘collateral damage’ has become a vital consideration throughout the kill-chain, driven by both the protocols of international law and also the prospect of international scrutiny. This marks another crucial difference from video games because, as Grossman acknowledges, killing in combat is regulated by rules and legal sanctions, and defenders of the drone missions routinely draw attention to the laws of armed conflict, the Uniform Code of Military Justice and the Rules of

⁶⁷ ‘Drones: America’s new Air Force’, CBS News 60 Minutes, 14 August 2009; David Zucchino, ‘Drone pilots have a front-row seat on war from half a world away’, *Los Angeles Times*, 21 February 2010; Martin, *Predator*, p. 212; Scott Lindlaw, ‘UAV operators suffer war stress’, Associated Press, 8 August 2008; Megan McCloskey, ‘Two worlds of a drone pilot’, *Stars & Stripes*, 27 October 2009. Others may be more blasé; the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff described jaded analysts watching archived hours of what he (and apparently they) call ‘Death TV’: Lake, ‘Drone footage’.

⁶⁸ Johan Höglund, ‘Electronic Empire: Orientalism revisited in the military shooter’, *Game Studies*, 8 (1), 2008.

Engagement that govern them.⁶⁹ One informed commentator argues that the longer dwell times and enhanced video streams from the drones have considerably enlarged the role of judge advocates who, since the late 1980s, have provided expert counsel to commanders about the ‘prosecution’ of targets.⁷⁰ The staff judge advocate at the Combined Air Operations Center claims that ‘it’s airborne ISR that gives us the ability to actually apply [laws of armed conflict] principles (with almost mathematical precision) that were originally just concepts.’⁷¹ For deliberate targeting, where targets are typically developed over 36-40 hours, judge advocates review target folders containing imagery and other intelligence, collateral damage estimates and the weaponeering solutions proposed to mitigate those effects, and monitor the continued development of the target. For dynamic targeting the procedure is compressed – a matter of minutes – because the targets are time-sensitive, but a judge advocate is still required to validate the target. In both cases judge advocates are stationed on the combat operations floor of the Combined Air Operations Center to scrutinize image streams and live communications and inform the commander of the legal parameters of any attack. The final decision rests with the commander, but the staff judge advocate boasts that his colleagues ‘explicitly guarantee extra benefits to

⁶⁹ Grossman, *Killing*, pp. 314-6. Military lawyers prefer the term ‘laws of armed conflict’ [LOAC] to the more usual ‘international humanitarian law’.

⁷⁰ Jack Beard, ‘Law and war in the virtual era’, *American Journal of International Law*, 103, 2009, pp. 409-45: 422. Beard served as Associate Deputy General Counsel (International Affairs), Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1990-2004.

⁷¹ Col. Gary Brown, cited in Charles Dunlap, ‘Come the Revolution: a legal perspective on air operations in Iraq since 2003,’ in Raoul Pedrozo (ed), *The war in Iraq: a legal analysis*, Newport RI: Naval War College, 2010, pp.139-154: 141. The ‘mathematical precision’ presumably refers to collateral damage modelling rather than the legal principles and concepts, since elsewhere Brown concedes that proportionality is ‘not a mathematical formula or anything like that’ and that the laws of armed conflict contain some ‘very wiggly concept[s]’: Transcript, Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable with Col. Gary Brown, 27 May 2009.

civilians.’⁷²

This is too glib by far, however, and Beard makes it clear that these precautions – like the laws from which they derive – are not intended to prevent all civilians from being killed during military operations. The principle of discrimination between civilians and combatants is always qualified by the principle of proportionality. This means that sometimes civilian deaths are accidental – the system is far from perfect⁷³ – but in others they are *incidental* to what is deemed to be concrete and direct military advantage, in which case they have been anticipated in collateral damage estimates and endorsed by judge advocates.⁷⁴ As this implies, the legal armature that secures the process of validation and endorsement is not above the fray but is embedded within it, and to refer to the ‘prosecution’ of the target is to concede that judge advocates are not impartial tribunes, still

⁷² I have condensed this idealised account from *Targeting*, USAF DD 2-1.9, June 2006, and *Air Force Operations and the Law*, Judge Advocate General’s School, Maxwell Air Force Base, 2009 (second edition), Ch. 16. See also Thom Shanker, ‘Civilian risks curbing strikes in Afghan war’, *New York Times*, 23 July 2008; Anna Mulrine, ‘Warheads on foreheads’, *Air Force Magazine*, October 2008; David Kurlle, ‘Lawyers provide operational advice to CAOC commanders’, USAF Central, Public Affairs, 9 March 2010. For a rare description of how the legal process works in practice, see Thom Hyland, ‘The law of instant death’, *The Age*, 21 February 2010.

⁷³ See, for example, Dexter Filkins, ‘Operators of drones are faulted in Afghan deaths’, *New York Times*, 29 May 2010. In this 21 February 2010 incident a Predator crew tracked a convoy of three vehicles for over 3 ½ hours before wrongly concluding that the occupants were insurgents preparing to attack ground forces; commanders called in an air strike that destroyed the vehicles and killed 23 civilians on board. A subsequent report claimed that the ‘underlying cause’ of the mistake was ‘information overload’: Thom Shanker, Matt Richtel, ‘In new military, data overload can be deadly’, *New York Times*, 16 January 2011.

⁷⁴ Beard, ‘Law and war’, p. 43; cf. Patricia Owens, ‘Accidents don’t just happen: the liberal politics of high-technology “humanitarian” war’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 32, 2003, pp. 595-616. Thus Col. Brown notes that ‘we can know with near certainty what collateral casualties and damage we are likely to cause’: Dunlap, p. 142.

less defence attorneys. Their incorporation into the kill-chain evidently does not diminish the privilege accorded to the military in the determination of military advantage; as Orford emphasizes, the relevant body of international law ‘immerses its addressees in a world of military calculations’ and ensures that proportionality will always be weighed on the military’s own scales.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the media makes much of the legal nexus – rendering targeting as a pseudo-judicial process⁷⁶ – and the *Wall Street Journal* is not alone in maintaining that the heightened visual-judicial scrutiny makes ‘for a more moral campaign’: ‘Never before in the history of air warfare have we been able to distinguish as well between combatants and civilians as we can with drones.’⁷⁷

And yet when Beard writes repeatedly of the unprecedented level of ‘transparency’ made possible by the new visual technologies he is referring to the new visibility of military actions – to their exposure to public view – and to the possibility of sanctions if the laws of armed conflict are breached: *not to the visibility of the battlespace*.⁷⁸ This matters because contemporary counterinsurgency is often described as ‘war amongst the people’, where it is formidably, *constitutively* difficult to distinguish between combatants and civilians. As the Pentagon’s own Defense Science Board admitted, ‘Enemy

⁷⁵ Anne Orford, ‘The passions of protection: sovereign authority and humanitarian war’, in Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi (eds), *Contemporary states of emergency: the politics of military and humanitarian interventions*, New York: Zone Books, 2010, pp. 335-356: 339

⁷⁶ Cf. Neve Gordon, ‘Rationalizing extra-judicial executions: the Israeli press and the legitimisation of abuse’, *International journal of human rights*, 8, 2004, pp. 305-24; Eyal Weizman, ‘Thanato-tactics’, in Adi Ophir, Michael Givoni and Sari Hanafi (eds), *The power of inclusive exclusion*, New York: Zone Books, 2010, pp. 543-73.

⁷⁷ ‘The drone wars’, *Wall Street Journal*, 9 January 2010; see also Michael Phillips, ‘Civilians in cross-hairs slow troops’, *Wall Street Journal*, 21 February 2010.

⁷⁸ Beard, ‘Law and war’, p. 410 and *passim*.

leaders look like everyone else; enemy combatants look like everyone else; enemy vehicles look like civilian vehicles; enemy installations look like civilian installations; enemy equipment and materials look like civilian equipment and materials...’⁷⁹ This central, existential problem would remain *even if the battlespace could be made fully transparent*. It may be mitigated by the persistent presence of UAVs and their enhanced ISR capability, and in some measure by the ‘pattern of life’ analysis this makes possible, but it cannot be erased.⁸⁰

In fact, the ‘intimacy’ of time-space compression produced by the new visual technologies is highly selective. When a journalist compared the chat-rooms of the kill-chain to Facebook and marvelled at ‘how easily the distance could melt away’, he was describing the intimacy produced through military-social networking. When officers at Creech told him that ‘the amount of time spent surveilling an area’ from a UAV creates ‘a greater sense of intimacy’ than is possible from conventional aircraft, they were describing not their familiarity with the ‘human terrain’ of Afghanistan but

⁷⁹ *Transition to and from hostilities*, Defense Science Board Summer Study, Department of Defense: Washington DC, 2004, p. 154. The report called for ‘close-in, *terrestrial* means’ of ISR.

⁸⁰ One example: a Predator operated by the CIA killed Baitullah Mehsud, the leader of the Pakistan Taliban (TTP), on 5 August 2009; but it took 16 strikes over the preceding 14 months before he was assassinated, in the course of which 200-320 other people were killed. See Jane Mayer, ‘The Predator war’, *New Yorker*, 26 October 2009. Visual imagery is clearly insufficient, and Major Jason Adair insists that ‘optimal engagement of UAVs demands a nuanced understanding of the environment gained only through interaction with the population on the ground – UAV use is not a panacea for face-to-face interaction’: ‘Personalizing an impersonal weapon: integrating armed UAVs and ground forces’, PowerPoint presentation, US Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Center, COIN Symposium, 13 May 2010. Although there are ongoing experiments in detecting voice signatures and chemical signatures (emitted by IED factories) from airborne platforms, these are clearly supplements to not substitutes for detailed ‘human intelligence’.

their identification of – and crucially *with* – American troops in the battlespace. ‘There’s no detachment,’ their commander explained. ‘Those employing the system are very involved at a personal level in combat. You hear the AK-47 going off, the intensity of the voice on the radio calling for help. You’re looking at him, 18 inches away from him, trying everything in your capability to get that person out of trouble.’ Similarly, when a Predator pilot claimed that ‘I *knew* people down there’, it was not local people he claimed to ‘know’: ‘Each day through my cameras I snooped around and came to recognize the faces and figures of our soldiers and marines.’⁸¹ The sense of identification and involvement that is induced by these new forms of time-space compression reinforces Grossman’s claim that a ‘sense of accountability’ to comrades-in-arms is a powerful means of overcoming resistance to killing, and suggests that the greater incidence of civilian casualties when close air support is provided to ‘troops in contact’ may result not only from time-critical targeting and its correspondingly ‘fewer checks to determine if there is a civilian presence’ – which is widely acknowledged – but also from the persistent presence of the UAV and its video feeds immersing its remote operators in and to some substantial degree rendering them responsible for the evolving situation on the ground.⁸² This predicament, in which proximity not distance becomes the problem, cannot be resolved by tinkering with the Rules of Engagement; high-resolution imagery is not a uniquely technical capacity but part of a techno-*cultural* system that renders ‘our’ space familiar even in ‘their’ space – which

⁸¹ Drew, ‘Social networking’; McCloskey, ‘Two worlds’; Martin, Predator, p. 121.

⁸² Grossmann, Killing, pp. 90, 149-50; cf. Troops in Contact, p. 30. One joint team reported that ‘the personal and almost daily interaction’ between ground forces and UAV operators and ‘the strong personal relationships with the pilots and sensor operators’ successfully ‘*compressed kill-chains* and produced intelligence of greater value’: Turner, Adair and Hamel, ‘Optimizing deadly persistence’, p. 9 (my emphasis).

remains obdurately Other.

Beard's point about the visibility of military actions is well taken, however, because there is another sense in which counterinsurgency is war amongst the people: the presence of the media means that the fight is conducted 'in every living room in the world as well as on the streets and fields of a conflict zone.'⁸³ Faced with the difficulty of distinguishing combatants from civilians, it is scarcely surprising that several discursive tactics should have been devised to mitigate the media impact of civilian casualties. None of them is confined to the Air Force's deployment of UAVs in Afghanistan, but their role has been reinforced by the controversy surrounding the escalating program of extra-judicial executions carried out by CIA-operated drones across the border in Pakistan.

The first is to dispute the civilian status of the casualties. This is a timeworn tactic that can be traced back at least to the Second World War, but it has been given a new lease on life (and death) in contemporary wars against non-state actors. Referring explicitly to the use of UAVs to carry out targeted killings, Etzioni proposed a distinction between 'innocent civilians' and 'abusive civilians' who 'refuse to separate themselves from the local population'; in doing so they forfeit their right to protection, he argued, and the responsibility for the deaths of the 'truly innocent' is theirs alone.⁸⁴ If it

⁸³ Rupert Smith, *The utility of force: the art of war in the modern world*, London: Penguin, 2006, p. 17. Hence the importance the US military attaches to 'strategic communications'.

⁸⁴ Amitai Etzioni, 'Unmanned Aircraft Systems: the moral and legal case', *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 57, 2010, pp. 66-71; see also Etzioni, 'Drone attacks: the "secret" matrix', *The World Today*, 66 (7), 2010. This is an astonishing essay and I don't have space to do it justice, but there is one claim that bears directly on my present discussion. Etzioni claims

is difficult to separate combatants from civilians in these conflicts, it is apparently simple to parse the civilian population. What Etzioni and others like him seek to do is to identify a grey zone between participation and non-participation in hostilities in order to exploit it: thus one former judge advocate argues that these ‘grey areas should be interpreted liberally’, which is to say ‘in favor of finding direct participation.’⁸⁵

Second, while the new air war is not quite the ‘war without witnesses’ of the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the space in which these continuing operations have been brought into public view is nevertheless strikingly limited.⁸⁶ Media coverage in North America and Europe has focused on the spaces of the extended network, particularly Creech and the CAOC, while the space of the target has been radically underexposed. The Air Force issues terse daily airpower summaries in which Predators and Reapers provide ‘armed overwatch for friendly forces’ and ‘release precision-guided munitions’ that successfully attack ‘enemy positions’, ‘targets’ and ‘vehicles’.⁸⁷ This is an artful reassertion of a conventional object-ontology in which ground truth vanishes in the ultimate ‘God-trick’,

that criticisms are ‘written by people who yearn for a nice clean war, one in which only bad people will be killed using “surgical” strikes that inflict no collateral damage.’ This is an extraordinary inversion, since it is proponents of UAVs that consistently connect them to a surgical-strike capacity.

⁸⁵ Michael Schmitt, “Direct participation in hostilities” and twenty-first century armed conflict’, in Horst Fischer, Ulrike Froissart, Wolff Heintschel von Heinegg, Christian Raap (eds.), *Krisensicherung und Humanitärer Schutz – Crisis Management and Humanitarian Protection*, Berlin: BWV, 2004, pp. 505-29: 509; idem, ‘Deconstructing direct participation in hostilities: the constitutive elements’, *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics* 42 (2010) 697-739: 738. Schmitt’s intervention is a criticism of the Interpretive Guidance proposed by the International Committee of the Red Cross in 2009.

⁸⁶ Derek Gregory, *The colonial present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004: pp. 52-3.

⁸⁷ <http://www.afcent.af.mil/news/pressreleases/index.asp>

whose vengeance depends on making its objects visible and its subjects invisible. This is compounded by the absence of the vigorous local press coverage of drone strikes found across the border in Pakistan, which ironically means that we know much more about the impact of the CIA's 'secret war' (and correspondingly less about its kill-chain).

And, as I must finally show, there is one more move, which returns us to counterinsurgency on the ground.

War, Orientalism and biopolitics

In many ways the separations of the exhibitionary order – the world as exhibition now mutated into the world as target – have been compromised by visual technologies that both propel and make possible the intimacy of contemporary counterinsurgency. But even as those separations are dissolved they are reinstated; the screen morphs into the sovereign map, 'our space' is partitioned from 'their' space, and event-ontology reverts to object-ontology. These transformations are reinforced by a metaphoric that reactivates the performances of Orientalism in concert with this new techno-cultural apparatus.

If the discourse of Orientalism produces 'the Orient' as a space of disorder, Euro-American diplomatic and geopolitical discourses have often produced the 'Middle East' as a corollary space of disease. From the middle of the nineteenth century the major powers treated the Ottoman Empire as a 'sick man', haemorrhaging territories in an epidemic of disastrous wars, and in the early twentieth century Britain and France joined forces to impose

their own ‘cure’. Sir Mark Sykes, the amateur Orientalist who negotiated the agreement with François-Georges Picot to partition the post-Ottoman Middle East between Britain and France – and evidently no stranger to the performative power of mapping – described their remedy as ‘cutting out the cancer’.⁸⁸

The metaphor has proved to be remarkably durable, and its rhetorical power has been enhanced through these new, advanced mappings that are so many performances of an intrinsically biopolitical field. Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero argue that the present incarnation of the Revolution in Military Affairs is not simply a technical transformation ‘but also a transformation in military strategic cognition throughout which biologised thinking, together with health and medical analogies, abound.’⁸⁹ Displays like Figure 6, for example, are the product of a smoothing algorithm known as quadratic kernel density estimation that converts point data into a continuous surface. The technique was used to produce the maps of ethno-sectarian violence in Baghdad displayed by Petraeus in his reports to Congress in September 2007 and April 2008. These maps closely, even deliberately resemble medical scans of the body politic, so that violence is visualized as a series of tumours, and I doubt that it is an accident that Petraeus described it as ‘a cancer that continues to spread if left unchecked.’⁹⁰ The same techniques are used to visualize insurgent attacks in Afghanistan, and the same metaphor is deployed. Lt General William Caldwell, who conducted many

⁸⁸ Sir Mark Sykes, ‘The future of the Near East’, *Daily News*, 18-19 September 1918; Renton, ‘Changing languages of Empire and the Orient’, pp. 652-6.

⁸⁹ Michael Dillon and Luis Lobo-Guerrero, ‘Biopolitics of security in the 21st century: an introduction’, *Review of International Studies*, 34, 2008, pp. 265-292: 278.

⁹⁰ Derek Gregory, ‘The biopolitics of Baghdad: Counterinsurgency and the counter-city’, *Human Geography*, 1, 2008, pp. 6-27.

of the Press Briefings in Baghdad, now serves in Kabul, and he has provided an astonishing prescription for ‘curing Afghanistan’. In his view, combat operations should no longer be described ‘in the language of war’; instead Afghanistan should be treated as ‘an ailing patient – in many ways analogous to a weakened person under attack by an aggressive infection.’ The increase in offensive operations then becomes ‘a late but powerful and much-needed dose of antibiotics’ designed ‘to allow the country’s indigenous immune system to be restored.’ Caldwell concedes that, ‘similar to a powerful antibiotic’ there are ‘side-effects’ that ‘can cause discomfort and pain’, including disruption of daily life and ‘sometimes civilian casualties.’ But commanders make every effort to minimize them, because the ‘air dominance’ guaranteed by ‘manned and unmanned aerial platforms’ permits the restrained application of combat power ‘with surgical precision’

⁹¹ Kilcullen had anticipated this bio-medical diagnosis when he described the stages of counterinsurgency as infection, contagion, intervention and rejection. ‘I use a medical analogy advisedly here,’ he explained, to render insurgency in the language of ‘immune systems’. The oncological metaphor raises the stakes much higher, of course, and licenses even more drastic measures: the Army Field Manual compares counterinsurgents to ‘surgeons cutting out cancerous tissue while keeping other vital organs intact’.⁹²

These are simple models and you might think that in these elementary forms nothing much turns on them. But they matter for two reasons. First, their techno-cultural translation into maps, screens and displays underscores

⁹¹ LTG William Caldwell, CPT Mark Hagerott, ‘Curing Afghanistan’, *Foreign Policy*, 7 April 2010.

⁹² David Kilcullen, *The accidental guerilla: fighting small wars in the midst of a big one*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 35; AFM 3-24: §1.26

the performative role of what Foucault once called the ‘nomination of the visible’. The capacity to produce a target – to detect a ‘tumour’ – by rational-scientific means becomes inseparable from a series of truth-claims about the danger posed by the target-tumour. The lexicon has mutated – danger into risk, prevention into pre-emption, detection into destruction – and the tumour has metastasized: by November 2009 President Obama was warning that ‘the cancer is in Pakistan.’ The aggressive propensity of biopolitics has been aggravated throughout these transformations – the second reason these tropes matter – because they make military violence appear to be intrinsically therapeutic. As the oncological metaphor depoliticizes and pathologizes insurgency, so it turns counterinsurgency’s kinetic operations on the ground or in the air into chemotherapy – Caldwell’s ‘side-effects’ that can cause ‘discomfort and pain’: killing insurgent cells and sometimes innocent bodies to save the body politic.⁹³ Martial biopolitics and military Orientalism march in lockstep through spaces of constructed visibility that are also always spaces of constructed invisibility.

⁹³ Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, *The liberal way of war: killing to make life live*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009.