

## Drones: A History from the British Middle East

During the presidency of George W. Bush, Defense Secretary Robert Gates launched a secret program that put hundreds of unmanned surveillance and attack aircraft into the skies over Iraq, Afghanistan, and later Pakistan. After Barack Obama came into office, drone use increased dramatically. He and Gates grew convinced that constant, ubiquitous drone surveillance coupled with airstrikes triggered remotely would solve U.S. tactical problems in these regions. The U.S. government has refused to share even the most basic information about drone use and attacks, but estimated figures for CIA-run strikes in Pakistan alone are about three hundred since Obama came into office, killing roughly three thousand individuals, including several hundred civilians.<sup>1</sup>

The fascination with technology that dominates most historical accounts of drones does not leave us any wiser about the uses to which they are being put or their likelihood of success in achieving their goals, for political and cultural factors have had a critical influence on the invention of and response to policing by drones.<sup>2</sup> I offer here a history of the tactical imagination behind drone surveillance, which at once illuminates the politics of their reception in the places in which they have been most heavily and controversially employed: Iraq and the region familiarly known as “AfPak.”

Many critics of unmanned aerial vehicles, or UAVs, focus on remote piloting as their most controversial quality, but as others, too, have pointed out, distancing technologies have long been central to the history of warfare, invariably prompting fears of the ways in which they casualize violence.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, drones remove aggressors entirely out of harm’s way, to an unprecedented distance, raising all kinds of questions about the place of martial values in American warfare. But, as we will see, close-up surveillance on detailed screens also allows a new kind of intimacy. From this historian’s point of view, the technological innovations of drone warfare distract from critical continuities with earlier uses of air power. By minding those continuities, we gain crucial insight into why drones are doomed to fail in their current objective. The crux of the matter is not so much that drones are unmanned but that they promise panoptic aerial surveillance of a region understood as otherwise essentially unknowable. For this has happened before: although drones are used all over the world for a range of purposes, their initial deployment over Iraq and AfPak was shaped by historical factors dating from the early twentieth century, when the British first came to control these regions with airpower. That initial experiment failed, which in itself does not bode well for today’s analog. Furthermore, memory of that first experiment ensures that today’s stands even less chance of success.

Aerial policing was invented in British Iraq after World War I. The key features in favor of an aerial regime were that (1) it was cheap; (2) it promised omniscience in a land of mystery; (3) it was discreet; (4) it was romantic; and (5) it signaled cultural respect. Today's drone surveillance and policing are intended to offer similar advantages, indeed, to more perfectly fulfill the ideal of panoptic surveillance. They are inspired by an aggressively propagated myth about the success of the British air control regime in those parts of the world, a myth so powerful that it almost singlehandedly secured the survival of the newly created Royal Air Force (RAF) after World War I. Today, too, it remains profitable to many vested interests (the Pentagon, drone manufacturers, the CIA, and so on). To understand the continuity between the past and the seemingly revolutionary present, we need to first understand how and why aerial control became the British panacea for an intractable situation in the heart of the Middle East.

### **Cheap and (Theoretically) Omniscient: The Practical Advantages**

The British occupied the three provinces of the Ottoman Empire that make up present-day Iraq during World War I. Having framed the campaign as a liberation of the Arabs from Turkish misrule, they built an imposing colonial administration of their own. The postwar decision to indefinitely postpone Iraqi freedom for the duration of British "mandatory rule" under the auspices of the new League of Nations was even more galling to Iraqis. They rebelled in the summer of 1920, while the British also faced mass nationalist resistance in Egypt, India, Ireland, and elsewhere. The militarily and financially overstretched empire fumbled for creative solutions to counterinsurgency, opting in 1921 for aerial control. Rather than rely on expensive and unpopular troop deployments, the British employed the fledgling RAF to patrol the country, coordinating information from intelligence agents on the ground to bombard subversive villages and tribes. This was to be a new kind of covert colonial control in which real administrative power lay in the hands of the air service and spy agencies.

Low costs were critical to the decision for an aerial strategy, much like today.<sup>4</sup> But cost and efficiency were not the only factors, for they would have applied equally elsewhere. Although other colonies saw aerial bombardment after the war, Iraq was the only place in which surveillance and punishment from above were intended as a permanent, everyday method of colonial administration.<sup>5</sup> Why there? And why, from there, were modified versions of air control exported to areas that the British understood as governed by similar political, cultural, and geographical forces, namely, the North West Frontier of British India (today's "AfPak") in 1924 and Aden (present-day Yemen) in 1928?<sup>6</sup> Chief of the Air Staff Hugh Trenchard explained the expansion of aerial control to Waziristan by pointing to the "the psychology, social organization and mode of life of the tribesmen and the nature of the country they inhabit."<sup>7</sup>

To understand how such cultural understandings of the region guided the invention and application of this unprecedented scheme, we must first get a sense of how the British framed the intelligence problem posed by Iraq and the Middle East more generally. Intense British surveillance of the interior of the Ottoman Empire began at the start of the century in the context of intensifying rivalries with Germany and expanding nationalist movements within Ottoman territory. It was profoundly

shaped by an orientalist perspective. Britain's agents in the region complained continually of the difficulty of gathering intelligence in a proverbially inscrutable land, "peopled," as one put it, "mainly by the spirits of the Arabian Nights, where little surprise would be occasioned in . . . seeing a genie floating . . . out of a magic bottle." Another felt "suddenly transplanted to the . . . moon."<sup>8</sup> Mapping this "blank spot" posed an insurmountable challenge, given the apparent lack of distinguishable features, the continually shifting sands, the illusions perpetrated by mirage, and the dreamy and distracted outlook of Edwardian agents, who often found it difficult simply to determine where they were and concluded that the region was "very much the same everywhere."<sup>9</sup> Moreover, "in keeping with the country," the local population was so prone to exaggeration that, as the agent Gerard Leachman put it, "one cannot believe a word . . . one hears."<sup>10</sup>

This cultural outlook has long conditioned Western understandings of the region.<sup>11</sup> Media and cultural representations of the Middle East (broadly construed) continue to portray a site of unique sensory experience centered on the desert sublime and urban inscrutability. From the outset in American-occupied Iraq, American officials stepping out of the Green Zone of Baghdad confronted "an epistemological problem," as one of Paul Bremer's senior advisers put it. "You wonder, 'What's going on out there?' You sniff, and then once you're out you overanalyze."<sup>12</sup>

In a situation like this, those who assert a confident grasp of the place acquire special influence—think of Rory Stewart, British governor in southern Iraq in Bremer's time, who harkens back to a type that first emerged in the era of the Great War, when the difficulties encountered in everyday intelligence-gathering in the Middle East endowed a few agents who seemed to possess an uncanny ability to understand the region with the mantle of genius. Individuals like T. E. Lawrence, Gertrude Bell, H. St. John Philby, Mark Sykes, and others claimed an intuitive grasp of a place that seemed to defy empirical inquiry. These gifted few understood their patriotic travels in the region as cover for a more personal, spiritual struggle in a time of deep existential doubt. This was also the land of the Bible and the Odyssey, where such struggles took on an epic significance. Scientific developments had unleashed new spiritual doubts, fueling a mystical revival and deep interest in occultism's ancient roots in the Middle East. British agents sought return to a biblical homeland to find the "perfection of mental content" that Arabs "alone, even among Asiatics" seemed to possess. In the inscrutable desert, faith, if not facts or visual data, seemed a reasonably practical objective.<sup>13</sup> If Arabia numbed the senses, it did allow one to "'see, hear, feel, *outside the senses.*"<sup>14</sup> In short, this was a generation willing to experiment with unconventional, even anti-empirical theories of perception and knowledge-gathering. The intuitive methods that members of this generation came to rely on at once solved their intelligence-gathering difficulties and satisfied their spiritual cravings. Arabia was *the* place for miraculous conviction: as Sykes put it, "the desert is of God and in the desert no man may deny Him."<sup>15</sup> To think intuitively was merely to mimic the Arab, who knew how to reflect on an idea endlessly until it became "part of the fibre of his mind."<sup>16</sup> Lengthy immersion in the region, members of this generation thought, endowed them with the same ability to acquire real knowledge through intuition. They determined to "merge . . . in the Oriental as far as possible, [to]

absorb his ideas, *see with his eyes, and hear with his ears*, to the fullest extent possible to one bred in British traditions.” “Book knowledge” mattered little; these heroes “‘sensed’ the essence of a matter.”<sup>17</sup>

Those who seemed to have mastered the trick of thinking like an Arab acquired an immense influence over policy in the Middle East during the war, especially the use of airpower. They pointed to the way aircraft offered vision beyond the mirages, sandstorms, and absence of horizon that bedeviled two-dimensional observation, enhancing their intuitive understanding.<sup>18</sup> Aircraft were deemed essential to “obtaining quick and accurate information” in Iraq, where, a general explained, “little can be trusted that is seen.”<sup>19</sup> Aircraft seemed to annihilate the distances that prohibited efficient communication and surveillance; there was no more fear of being lost, and forbidden sites like the holy cities became accessible. The alleged flatness of the terrain suggested that it was destined for control from the air: aircraft promised to prevent the enemy from moving without discovery, since “there are no woods or buildings in which to hide.”<sup>20</sup> The agents helped the RAF develop aerial photography as part of its effort to improve geographical knowledge of a still unmapped region.<sup>21</sup> In short, airpower impinged on intelligence work in the Middle East in a way that it never did on the Western Front.<sup>22</sup> It seemed capable of solving the peculiar information problems the intelligence community associated with Iraq—mirage, haze, and lying natives. It was equally useful in the “political” work that many agents were beginning to undertake. When the Iraqi tribes the British liberated got “out of hand and require[d] a lesson,” agents encouraged the use of an “aerial raid with bombs and machine guns.” Many came to regard aircraft “as a panacea for all the ills to which tribal situations give rise.”<sup>23</sup> As we will see, there were real limits to using aircraft in the desert, but the agents’ ideas about the region helped make aircraft central to a range of practices during the war. Thus it was in the Middle East that, the Air Staff noted, “the war proved that the air has capabilities of its own.”<sup>24</sup>

Under the influence of these wartime notions, the postwar imperial state invented an aerial control regime, especially for Iraq. Lawrence, who was closely involved in the scheme’s formulation, insisted at the outset that it was “*not* capable of universal application.”<sup>25</sup> (By the 1930s, when aerial control had been exported to other colonies, the contention that “some peculiar quality about the country . . . has enabled aircraft to achieve in Iraq what they could not achieve anywhere else” was disparaged as “absurd.”<sup>26</sup>) British paranoia about Islamic, Bolshevik, and other conspiracies in the region fueled the resort to a technology that promised panoptical surveillance. To the Arabist intelligence community, the infrastructural austerity of air control was particularly suited to a theoretically horizonless desert that allowed power to “radiate” untrammelled “in every part of the protectorate.” (Today, too, one of the animating ideas behind drone surveillance is that deserts are most easily watched from the sky.) The region’s actual topographical diversity—its mountains, labyrinthine marshes, and varied deserts—when it was acknowledged, was held up as yet further proof of Iraq’s suitability as a training ground for the RAF, which sought to justify its existence as an independent military service.<sup>27</sup>

Likewise, today observers are struck by the extent to which the landscape around Creech Air Force Base in Nevada resembles the desert and mountains of Afghanistan.

Although at times the military lauds Nevada's desert terrain as "an ideal training facility for . . . deployments to similar desert terrain in places like Afghanistan," I learned during a tour of air bases that the uninhabited, semi-mountainous landscape is considered ideal for training to fight in *any* terrain—this despite the fact that the premier training programs of the U.S. Air Force (USAF) were developed during the Vietnam War with its jungle terrain.<sup>28</sup> The desert provides the ideal space for abstracting war from politics and repackaging it as a technical affair: the fictional enemies against whom USAF aircraft personnel practice are called "bandits" in these training programs, rogues without politics.

In the 1920s, this rationalizing about Iraq's unique suitability could not transform the air control regime into the panacea its designers had envisioned. Iraqis found cover in watercourses, hillocks, and other features of the allegedly "featureless" landscape.<sup>29</sup> Pilot disorientation, visibility problems, and instances "of quite inexplicable failures to identify . . . whole sections of bedouin tribes on the move" likewise prohibited panoptic surveillance.<sup>30</sup> It was not unusual for aircraft to bomb the wrong town.<sup>31</sup> But the British understanding of Iraq as an essentially deceptive place made such errors tolerable and acceptable. The civil commissioner and head of political intelligence Arnold Wilson explained that complaints about RAF observation failures were, like all information, necessarily exaggerated; after all, mirage prevented fair judgment of pilots from the ground. There was also little point worrying about casualties, since assessing the effect of bombing operations was "a matter of guesswork."<sup>32</sup> Thus the air control experiment was pronounced entirely successful in "this kind of turbulent country."<sup>33</sup> In its Iraqi cocoon, the RAF was safe from criticism of its inaccuracy.

The notion that unreliable tribal observers make casualty counts futile endures today. Even critics of drones argue that unreliable local reports corrupt casualty counts: journalists rely on the "hearsay of tribal villagers from remote areas," explains Aliya Deri. "Eyewitnesses may be unable to give exact accounts of casualties, or may even have a vested interest in exaggerating them."<sup>34</sup> That "vested interest" is a historical legacy, a sense of long frustration with perpetual foreign imposition. Thus do cultural representations eventually obtain a purchase on practical reality. It makes political sense for local people to report events as self-serving as possible, if they want to put an end to the American presence.

In the British era, the Air Ministry dealt with criticism of air control's inaccuracy by devising a new theory of how the regime worked. "Terror," one ministry official explained, rather than just punishment of guilty parties, was the regime's real tactical principle. Aircraft were meant to be everywhere at once, "conveying a silent warning."<sup>35</sup> And their ability to terrorize depended on Arabian deceptions: where there was one plane, Arabs would spread news of dozens; a few casualties would instill fear of hundreds.<sup>36</sup> Air control would work regardless of accuracy because "from the ground every inhabitant of a village is under the impression that the occupant of an aeroplane is actually looking at *him* . . . establishing the impression that all their movements are being watched and reported."<sup>37</sup> If pilots could not be sure whether they were looking at "warlike" or "ordinary" tribes, Bedouin could not discriminate "between bombing and reconnaissance expeditions."<sup>38</sup> Air control would exercise a disciplinary effect in the manner of the classical Benthamite Panopticon. Best of all,

terror guaranteed humanity: constant surveillance would simply awe tribes into submission without loss of life. Or interference with daily life, through destruction of homes, villages, fuel, crops, and livestock, would produce the desired result.<sup>39</sup> Of course, the idea that terror could be produced bloodlessly was entirely theoretical. Early RAF statements acknowledged that eliciting the “moral effect” depended on demonstrations of exemplary violence, which could hardly be accomplished without loss of life. Here is a report from 1924 by Arthur Harris, head of Bomber Command in World War II, reporting on air action in Iraq, where he commanded Squadron 45 (he also served on the North West Frontier):

The Arab and Kurd . . . now know what real bombing means, in casualties and damage; they now know that within 45 minutes a full sized village . . . can be practically wiped out and a third of its inhabitants killed or injured by four or five machines which offer them no real target, no opportunity for glory as warriors, no effective means of escape.<sup>40</sup>

A hundred casualties were not unusual in a single operation, not to mention those lost to starvation and the burning of villages. Whether for attacking British communications, refusing to pay taxes at crushing rates, or harboring rebels, many tribes and villages were bombed into submission.<sup>41</sup> In 1921 the Air Staff had determined to evade allegations of “barbarity” by avoiding “emphasizing the truth that aerial warfare has made [distinctions between military and non-military targets] obsolete and impossible. It may be some time until another war occurs and meanwhile the public may become educated as to the meaning of air power.”<sup>42</sup> Iraq offered a means of selling the new warfare by exhibiting it in a famously romantic and chivalric place where, everyone knew, the bourgeois values lately exposed by the war as utterly bankrupt did not apply anyway.

In the 1920s, air control thus served two related purposes: disciplinary surveillance and disciplinary punishment. Likewise, aerial control today is designed to fulfill intelligence and strike missions, the former working at once both to minimize the need for and facilitate the latter. Today, too, conspiracy-thinking fuels the dream of perfect knowledge and vision—although today the conspiracies are real, the wages of earlier generations of Western intervention. And today, too, the hope for omniscience has been frustrated. The objects of aerial surveillance have learned to evade detection, at times merely by hiding beneath wool blankets. In the North West Frontier, people have developed new forms of camouflage and new ways of traveling, sleeping, and communicating.<sup>43</sup> While military experts worry about how to usefully analyze the enormous amount of data that drones collect, some objects of their curiosity have proven adept at using cheap software to hack into the video feeds from the drones.<sup>44</sup> The difficulty of distinguishing friend from foe continues to produce epic tragedy.<sup>45</sup> But, again, none of this matters to supporters of drone use, because generalized terror, rather than precise strikes against insurgents, remains the unspoken tactical foundation of aerial policing. Enthusiasts praise not only the data but the uneasiness produced by the hunter-killer machines’ “persistent stare capability.” Oddly, they believe this imprisoning gaze will help win hearts and minds. The USAF explains that planes often fly low to make a “show of force” intended to forestall foolish behavior by

Afghanis, citing this as an improvement from a few years ago when strikes (“kinetics,” in USAF lingo) were more common. The British simply called this “terror,” a word we have become less comfortable with, for obvious reasons. News reports and scholarly studies testify to Iraqi and Pakistani civilians’ fear of drones. *Living under Drones*, a study by scholars at Stanford’s and NYU’s law schools, shows that strikes harm civilians not only through death and injury but by damaging property, causing economic hardship, creating sustained fear and stress, interrupting education, and causing widespread devastation. The report documents “anxiety and psychological trauma” among Pakistani villagers. Children scream in terror when they hear the sound of a drone.<sup>46</sup> We may distinguish between intelligence and kinetic missions, but from the ground, both are presumed to have the same disciplinary end.

### **Discretion: The Political Advantage**

Low cost and omniscience were merely the least of air control’s several perceived advantages. Proponents pointed with equal enthusiasm to its discretion, which was crucial given Iraqi objections to British rule. Air control, with its wireless communications and minimal infrastructure, seemed an ideal means of avoiding awkward questions about whether Iraq was free or a British colony. It enabled dominance of a region in which more overt colonial rule was a political impossibility, since, as the Air Ministry theorized, “in countries of this sort . . . the impersonal drone of an aeroplane . . . is not so obtrusive as . . . soldiers.”<sup>47</sup> But discretion was for the sake of another constituency, too: the British public. The scheme’s cheapness was not only a practical advantage; it was explicitly intended to elude the democratic check of taxpayers.<sup>48</sup> Air control allowed covert pursuit of empire in an increasingly anti-imperial and democratic world; the secrecy surrounding the regime guaranteed the indifference of the British public at a time when it was demanding democratic control of foreign affairs, with Iraq quickly becoming the subject of which the press made most “effective use to injure the Government.”<sup>49</sup>

In our time as well, hope has been pinned on drones’ discretion, on the idea that they permit a kind of policing otherwise impossible in countries with strong anti-American sentiments. They offer a means of surmounting the awkward problem of engaging in military action over an ostensibly sovereign country. A senior official with intimate knowledge of the program explains that drones are exceedingly helpful in places like Pakistan where there is intense resistance to any *overt* American presence. The United States did not require any Pakistani help to run strikes, and missions carried with them no “political cost” in the United States.<sup>50</sup> As in 1920s Britain, the reign of drones has appeased American public opinion about involvement in the Middle East. Drone surveillance enabled the troop withdrawals that implied an end to the war in Iraq. The plan was to relocate the “withdrawn” forces to forward operating bases where they could discreetly hunker down in expensive, built-to-last facilities. President Obama made it clear that “departure” would not mean withdrawal of advisers, special forces, drones, and helicopters. Withdrawal would work the same way as the 1932 British grant of independence, which was confessedly nominal; the Air Staff made it clear that the change would be “more apparent than real,” since Iraq was “an oriental country where intrigue is rife.”<sup>51</sup> Making it just that themselves, they

privately conceded, “we really have no defence.”<sup>52</sup> In the event, Obama did not succeed as well as he had hoped in maintaining a rump American force on the ground, due to Iraqi concerns about sovereignty—history had taught Iraqis a bitter lesson. Hence Iraqi airspace has provided a corridor between Iran and Syria and Israel.<sup>53</sup>

The American public knows little of the debacle of negotiations surrounding these endgame details, just as it was told little about the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis killed during the eight-year war there. If discreet postimperial aerial control proved impossible in Iraq, it remains the American *modus operandi* elsewhere in the war on terrorism. Besides discretion, today’s drone policing depends on active secrecy, to stifle whatever trickle of critical opinion continues to emanate from the press at home, as much as abroad. Hence the CIA’s dominance over so much of the activity. As in the British case, the program is the central piece of a more general expansion of state secrecy (including the NSA’s secret surveillance of Americans, a crackdown on whistleblowers, and the classification of unprecedented numbers of government documents) intended to keep questions about foreign policy in the hands of cloistered experts. As one national security expert put it, “We are seeing the reversal of the proper flow of information between the government and the governed. It is probably the fundamental civil liberties issue of our time.” The relative lack of media coverage until recently of the expansion of state secrecy testifies to its success. Critics of this “constitutional crisis” echo those of the 1920s who called the covert British aerial action in Iraq the gravest departure from parliamentary oversight “since the days of the Stuart Kings,” a revival of the old “Crown vs. Parliament” conflict in the guise of the “executive vs. the nation.”<sup>54</sup>

### **Romance and Respect: The Cultural Advantages**

In the 1920s, the discretion of aerial control succeeded in stifling demands for “bag and baggage” departure from Iraq. It was not enough, however, when word of the regime’s violence leaked out. The air secretary acknowledged that in Iraq things happened “which, if they had happened before the world war, would have been undoubtedly acts of war.”<sup>55</sup> Critical voices emerged in the press, Parliament, and Whitehall. The war secretary wrote witheringly, “If the Arab population realize that the peaceful control of Mesopotamia depends on our intention of bombing women and children, I am very doubtful if we shall gain that acquiescence of the fathers and husbands of Mesopotamia as a whole to which the Secretary of State for the Colonies looks forward.”<sup>56</sup>

Official secrecy helped the Air Ministry muffle this critique: travel to the region was severely restricted, press reports censored, and RAF servicemen never decorated for their work there.<sup>57</sup> But the Air Ministry also promoted a romantic and heroic image of the Air Force. They issued white papers explaining that there was no cause for outrage, for “all war is not only brutal but indiscriminate in its brutality,” pointing to the effects on civilians of naval bombardment, shelling, blockading, trampling by invading armies, and so on; at least the lives of attackers were safer in air operations.<sup>58</sup> (They did not address the notion that aerial bombardment, in its all-seeing omnipotence, might be more lethal and terrible than these older tactics.<sup>59</sup>) All this spin helped to convince some at least “of the great humanity of bombing”: however “appalling”

and “ghastly,” proponents urged, it lowered even enemy casualties by forcing them to give up sooner in the face of “continual unending interference with their normal lives.”<sup>60</sup> The Great War had certainly shifted notions about humanity and warfare. To many military thinkers, the moral imperative was to minimize casualties as a whole rather than civilian deaths in particular, since modern combatants were merely civilians in uniform.<sup>61</sup> Despite some Radical MPs’ persistent calls for “particulars of where and why these bombardments have taken place . . . [and] whether inhabitants have been killed,” enough people were convinced for the regime to remain viable well beyond Iraq’s formal independence in 1932; the country was reoccupied during World War II, and the RAF remained in place until the revolution of 1958.<sup>62</sup>

Why did the Air Ministry’s public relations effort succeed so well? Besides the practical and political benefits—political, economic, and security advantages—it appealed to a sense of the cultural appropriateness of air control in the Middle East, which Britons saw as an essentially romantic place. Whatever its geographical inscrutability, “Arabia” seemed to possess virtues that were vanishing from an increasingly decadent and bourgeois Britain. Many agents sought work there simply for the chance to experience an antique land, where “one may step straight from this modern age of bustle and chicanery into an era of elemental conditions . . . back into the pages of history to mediaeval times.”<sup>63</sup> They saw the desert as a haven for individuals who prized “boundless liberty.”<sup>64</sup> One of the few places the Royal Geographical Society ranked “Still Unknown,” Arabia offered the chance to revive the heroic pioneer spirit of Victorian exploration.<sup>65</sup> Aircraft fit easily into this romance. To make the skeptical British public more “air-minded,” the Air Ministry produced the glamorous image of the warrior-airman. There was the much-touted “natural fellow-feeling between . . . nomad arabs and the Air Force . . . both . . . in conflict with the vast elemental forces of nature.”<sup>66</sup> Magnifying “both defeat and victory,” aircraft impressed Bedouin with British power. They inflated the British effort in Arabia to the epic proportions in which agents conceived it; they were *ennobling*. Aircraft, despite and perhaps because of their lethal power, were the technological counterparts, “knights of the air.”<sup>67</sup> Lawrence frequently invoked a line from Coleridge to describe man’s conquest of the air, “as lords that are expected.”<sup>68</sup> It was because the intelligence community viewed Arabia as not only inscrutable but also delightful and romantic that aircraft were used in these ways, at this time, in this region.

The British romance of desert flight did important ethicopolitical work in rationalizing the violence of the aerial regime. A determined critic might have noted that the naval bombardment, blockades, and other actions to which the Air Ministry likened aerial control were wartime measures, and air control a peacetime policing technique. But he would come up against the popular notion that what was permissible only in wartime elsewhere was always permissible in the land of chivalry. The RAF intelligence officer John Glubb insisted, “Life in the desert is a continuous guerilla warfare,” in which striking hard and fast was of the essence.<sup>69</sup> To the Bedouin, war was a “romantic excitement” whose production of “tragedies, bereavements, widows and orphans” was a “normal way of life,” “natural and inevitable.” Their appetite for war was the source of their belief that they were “elites of the human race.” In this view, it would almost be a cultural offense not to bomb them.<sup>70</sup> Arnold Wilson confirmed for the Air

Ministry that the problem was one of public perception, that Iraqis expected justice to be meted out harshly, cared little for sentimental distinctions between combatants and noncombatants, and viewed air action as entirely “legitimate and proper.” The Bedouin, Glubb said, possessed “depths of hatred, reckless bloodshed . . . lust of plunder of which our lukewarm natures seem no longer capable . . . deeds of generosity worthy of fairy-tales and acts of treachery of extraordinary baseness.” Their “love of dramatic actions” outweighed “the dictates of reason or the material needs,” and even, the General Staff affirmed, overcame the “inherent dislike of getting killed.”<sup>71</sup> In this last bastion of authentic experience beyond worldly morality, “the natives of a lot of these tribes love fighting for fighting’s sake,” the former chief of Air Staff Hugh Trenchard assured Parliament in 1930. “They have no objection to being killed.”<sup>72</sup> This was one place where Britons could rest assured that victims of bombardment retained their dignity and required no pity. As the military theorist J. M. Spaight pointed out, chivalry was an influence quite distinct from “the humanitarian one,” which regarded with compassion “those whom chivalry despised.”<sup>73</sup> Iraqi women and children need not trouble the conscience, a British commander observed, for “[sheikhs] . . . do not seem to resent . . . that women and children are accidentally killed by bombs.” To them, Lawrence elaborated, women and children were “negligible” casualties compared to those of “really important men,” conceding that this was “too oriental a mood for us to feel very clearly.”<sup>74</sup> This was a population at once so orientally backward and admirably manly and phlegmatic that, to a postwar imperium increasingly in thrall to culturally relativistic notions, all principles of *ius in bello* were irrelevant.

In short, there were no civilians in Arabia. In 1932, the high commissioner, head of the British colonial administration in Iraq, warned against clipping the “claws” of the RAF because “the term ‘civilian population’ has a very different meaning in Iraq from what it has in Europe . . . the whole of its male population are potential fighters as the tribes are heavily armed.”<sup>75</sup> This idea still has enormous purchase in official circles and public debate in the United States. In the very first year of the Iraq war, an American captain defended harsh security measures in Iraq with the following: “You have to understand the Arab mind . . . The only thing they understand is force—force, pride and saving face.”<sup>76</sup> Today the Obama administration deals with complaints about civilian deaths in AfPak by simply counting “all military-age males in a strike zone as combatants.” The logic behind this is that people in an area of known terrorist activity or in the vicinity of a top Qaeda operative are probably up to no good.<sup>77</sup> As Glenn Greenwald puts it, the implication is that a “militant” is “any human being whose life is extinguished when an American missile or bomb detonates.” Thus the term was used with reference to Anwar Awlaki’s sixteen-year-old American son, Abdulrahman, who was killed by a drone in Yemen two weeks after a drone killed his father, even though nobody claims he was anything but an innocent teenager.<sup>78</sup> One scholar notes the difficulty of differentiating militants from civilians, even “after the people in question are already dead.” Besides so-called precision targeting of such “militants,” there are also “signature strikes,” in which those leading a “suspicious pattern of life” (the suspiciousness ranging from travel in or out of a known al-Qaeda compound to a gathering of men of military age) are targeted after

days or weeks of surveillance.<sup>79</sup> Casualty figures for civilians are thus rendered irrelevant, as in the British era; the absence of civilians in the Western representation of the Middle East underwrites the program's lack of accountability. Certainly, today's air strategy is framed around precision targeting in a manner that was not technically feasible in the British era; however, the reality of collateral damage, however precise the targeting, means that today, as earlier, defenders of the regime must rely on similar rhetorical acrobatics to make its results palatable. Today, too, we spin drone violence in positive ways: defenders of an aerial strategy tout its relative humanity and its minimization of collateral damage, while also reminding us that collateral damage is an inevitable part of modern conflict, especially after 9/11.<sup>80</sup>

"Culture" remains the currency in which military personnel trade understandings of the ethics of U.S. action. I spoke with active-duty military personnel who describe Afghani insurgents' indifference to the death of women and children as a mark of cultural difference (but callous behavior toward women and children in America, of which there is no shortage of examples, they consider the mark of individual or social pathologies rather than culture). They see "culture" at play in the apparently greater Afghani outrage over the American burning of Qurans than over an American soldier's killing of sixteen civilians, rather than the effects of a complex, volatile, and much-manipulated political context. The scandal of disproportionate Afghani outrage overshadows, for them, the scandal of these American actions. They forget that Americans have been scandalously silent about civilian casualties too; the spurious new counting techniques aside, a major press organ like the *Washington Post* made an editorial decision to eliminate the figures relating to civilian casualties in its reporting on drone strikes.<sup>81</sup> We too have tolerated the deaths of children. As one opinion in the *Guardian* asked, if al-Qaeda's targeting of women and children has hurt its image in the region, why do we not grasp that the same logic applies to views of the United States?<sup>82</sup> Different levels of anxiety about drone surveillance are also put down to cultural differences between the Pathan and the Arab. It would seem more worthwhile to consider whether Arabs or Pathans think of torture, illegal invasions, strikes on funeral parties, and so on as reflections of American "culture" or how, in their minds, such scandals might justify their own actions. But if USAF briefings routinely begin with invocations of Clausewitz's tag about war as the continuation of a political dispute by other means, for the rest politics is summarily overwritten by culture and technology.

If this region of the world lacks civilians (to the Western mind), it is rich in fatalists, and that notion, too, has made an aerial regime there tolerable. In 1932, when air control was under attack at the world disarmament conference in Geneva, the British high commissioner in Iraq argued that, unlike the outrages inevitably committed by ground troops, "bombing from the air is regarded almost as an act of God to which there is no effective reply but immediate submission."<sup>83</sup> Lawrence similarly insisted that for Arabs, bombing was "impersonally fateful," "not punishment, but a misfortune from heaven striking the community."<sup>84</sup> To the British, Arabia was a biblical place, where periodic calamity was the norm and bombardment might be accommodated as another kind of visitation. Air control played on the presumed fatalism of its population, their faith in the incontrovertible "will of God." Such people could bear random acts of violence in a way that Europeans, coddled by secular

notions of justice and human rights, could not. Long-circulating ideas of Arabia as a place somehow exempt from the this-worldliness that constrained human activity in other parts of the world made air control sit more easily in the British official mind. As Derek Gregory notes, today those who pilot UAVs experience a similar feeling of excessive power, a godlike feeling quite unlike the mundane pleasure of a video game; there is a recognition that those on the ground have no recourse or place to appeal, that they are in a sense facing the verdict of God.<sup>85</sup> The disturbingly christened “Reaper” dropping its “Hellfire” missiles reprises this understanding of air strikes as a dispensing of fate.

Romantic notions exculpated the British aerial regime and even packaged it as culturally appropriate to the region, not least thanks to the authoritative stamp of the intelligence staff maintained on the ground. Remote as the new technology was, it depended, its proponents explained, on intimate knowledge of the land and people, gathered by “men who are specially gifted, who have got the feeling of the Middle East in their blood.”<sup>86</sup> Air patrolling was so new, the infrastructure of landing grounds so inchoate, and pilots so inexperienced in deciphering the terrain that the Lawrentian type remained indispensable.<sup>87</sup> Ground agents took on political work, such as feeling out the intentions of local Arabs and ascertaining when the desired “moral effect” had been achieved, in order to avoid unduly prolonging operations.<sup>88</sup> The RAF’s Special Service officers absorbed the methods of regular political officers, deeming intuitive ability and canny knowledge of local custom essential to acquiring the information required for bombardment, not least since tribesmen “deemed it a duty to receive and to welcome a guest, although he was mapping their villages with a view to bombing them and told them so.”<sup>89</sup> These agents ensured that the RAF could “[pick] out the right villages . . . to hit . . . when trouble comes.”<sup>90</sup> The RAF’s successful persecution of a village thus testified to its *intimacy* with people on the ground, without which its aircraft would not have been able to strike accurately. Ground agents continued to claim empathy as the source of their genius; immersion enabled them to perform the nearly impossible task of understanding another race, allowing them to “interpret . . . [the Arabs’] mind.”<sup>91</sup> The RAF trusted Special Service officers to “sense impending events” (if not to “dig down to the facts”).<sup>92</sup> All of this helped the Air Ministry portray the new scheme as very much in the vein of traditional Victorian imperial administrative techniques.<sup>93</sup> John Sifton considers the drone’s ability to hover in the search for precision the mark of its uniqueness; drones introduced an everyday use of an alienating form of violence.<sup>94</sup> But even in the 1920s, when precision was a technical impossibility, hovering was essential to aerial warfare, albeit performed by men on the ground. Air control was intended as an everyday form of violence that worked through daily terrorization as much as bombardment, both depending on the claim to intimate knowledge.

Of course, from the time of its Edwardian invention as an intelligence epistemology, the agents’ cultivation of empathy was built on sand. It signaled not the recognition of a common humanity but an effort to transform the self to cope in what they understood as a radically different physical and moral universe. After the war, aspiring agents, inspired partly by the legends surrounding their predecessors, continued to venture to biblical, enchanted Arabia to escape the bonds of too much

civilization, to recover a noble, free spirit lost to “utilitarian” England. To enter Arabia was still to exit the customary world, since, as Glubb put it, “the desert is a world in itself.”<sup>95</sup> Indeed, the “extraordinary and romantic” world of the RAF in Iraq only compounded this feeling of being in a world apart. Its tenuous links to “civilisation” through a miraculous wireless infrastructure, and rumors of Lawrence’s presence in the ranks, only fed the Arabian mystique. If flight over the austere biblical terrain reached new heights of sublimity, it also produced “quite a bad effect upon one’s nerves,” a feeling that “the end of the world had really come,” according to an RAF official. For new pilots, this “sense of being lost at sea” was a crucial “mental factor.” Pilots could identify “that air of quiet weariness which comes to those who have been in the desert too long,” and they fell prey to a “nameless terror” that made them mad over time.<sup>96</sup> This was not a place for empathy, but for total psychic breakdown; without some kind of bracing, Britons risked losing their minds. Emulation of Arabs was intended to enable their survival in this extraterrestrial space, but it did not produce true compassion for the Arab victims of the surreal world of bombardment actually created by pulling the strings of fate from the sky.

Today’s drone program might seem to represent a drastic departure from the older prioritization of local knowledge and intimate relations with local people. The most frequent criticism of drones is that the pilot’s distance turns war into a video game, enabling the pilot to impersonally annihilate victims with the push of a button. It wreaks havoc with ordinary moral compunction, transforming the act of killing into a coldly technological affair (revealingly, the slang among drone personnel for the grainy-green video image of a man killed by a strike is “bug splat”). Drone pilots report experiencing an adrenaline rush during strikes and a delayed sense of the reality—and horror—of their actions.<sup>97</sup> But in fact, as Sifton’s argument shows, claims to intimacy are critical to the drone program. The USAF emphasizes that drones depend on the involvement of people; far from robot-killers, they require intensely coordinated human action. Hence the USAF’s insistence on the term “remotely piloted vehicles” (RPVs) rather than “drones.” As in the 1920s, today’s drone pilot depends upon a wider team, with nearly two hundred individuals supporting a single Predator or Reaper patrol, either deployed on the ground for launch and recovery, or based at Creech, or taking part in processing, exploiting, and disseminating data. While critics object to pilots’ remoteness, defenders point to the intimacy guaranteed by constant, close-up surveillance. In a visit, I felt this was the primary message the USAF wanted to put out. They were at pains to prove that drone pilots do not feel as though they are playing video games, and that they experience significant psychological trauma because of the peculiarities of their daily life: reuniting with their own families each day at times painfully conscious of having broken a family in Afghanistan, after weeks of intimate study of a target’s “patterns of life.” Certainly, all of this helps to humanize them, but it also makes the whole enterprise sinister in the way British claims about intimacy did in the 1920s. This “intimacy” is not the result of productive social communication but of one-way surveillance; its purpose is not empathy (which would render killing an ethical impossibility) but greater confidence in the target’s presumptive otherness. Other kinds of intimacies are at work, too. Unlike conventional pilots, drone pilots see their targets

up-close, and they see the aftermath of the strike. Distance helped numb the reality of bombing for pilots in British Iraq and other modern conflicts, but today's drone pilots must confront it on their "profoundly immersive" screens; hence the reports of post-traumatic stress. But at the end of the day, their vision is mediated by cultural framings, as in the British era. They are determined like their colleagues on the spot to find militants, and so, on their screens, people morph into militants, children into adolescents, and objects into arms.<sup>98</sup> Creech's motto is "Home of the Hunters" (and the first hunter-killer drone, already mentioned, is called the "Predator"). Surely, any good hunter must know his prey's habits well, but we would never claim that that intimate knowledge implied empathy. Indeed, to perform a simulated "kill" of a fictional person in Kabul on the simulators that drone pilots use in their training, I found myself struggling to shake off a sense of personal connection to a geography with which I, like many Punjabis, have always felt historically and culturally bound.

Besides the apparent intimacy of the zoom, there is the accompanying effort to further American troops' cultural knowledge of the areas they police, whether through updated field manuals and training or through the deployment of anthropologists and area experts through the Human Terrain System since 2005. These initiatives accompanied the shift toward drone warfare and surveillance. The idea is that intimacy will sweeten the bitter pill of imperialism and enable the counterterrorism campaign to kill better, much as intimacy supported targeting in the British era.<sup>99</sup> These initiatives together strive to arrive at a culturally appropriate and politically palatable solution to counterterrorism and counterinsurgency in these parts of the world. They also help distract from the reality of continued occupation and violence.<sup>100</sup> So too does the actively cultivated technological romance around drones—the wizardry, the futuristic coolness of remotely piloted aircraft.<sup>101</sup> In an age that worships high-tech gadgetry across the board, drones are an easy sell. In my tours of air bases, I was astonished at my own easy awe of the technical prowess of the F-15s, F-16s, F-22s, the anticipated F-35s, the acrobatics and daring of the USAF Thunderbirds, the genius of the Red Flag training exercise, *and* the sheer wonder of the MQ-1 and -9—the Predator and Reaper drones.

### **A Myth Passed Down**

The five features that made an aerial solution so attractive to post-World War I British officials faced with the task of fighting insurgency in Iraq, Waziristan, and other parts of the Middle East have retained their appeal in our time: aerial control, whether manned or unmanned, is cheap, discreet, romantic, culturally appropriate, and creates the illusion of omniscience. That these features made it successful was a notion the Air Ministry carefully cultivated in the contemporary media. It has been passed down for posterity and found its way into the institutional memory of American military and intelligence circles. In 1957, just a year before the British were finally booted from Iraq, RAF marshal Sir John Slessor defended the aerial regime by pointing to the fact that Special Service officers, who knew the place best and "became so attached to their tribesmen that they sometimes almost 'went native,'" were rarely critical of air control. Well into the 1980s, Glubb insisted, "The basis of our desert control was not force but persuasion and love." In 1989, a military historian vindicated the regime by citing

Glubb, since “no European was ever closer and more sympathetic to the Arabs than [he].”<sup>102</sup> Military historians citing the orientalist experts who created the aerial regime have confirmed their view of the region and have in turn been cited by USAF academics in their studies of airpower in counterinsurgency.<sup>103</sup> Even historians critical of aerial bombardment have proven susceptible to the notion that aerial control actually worked against the desert’s “clearly defined, completely visible targets.”<sup>104</sup>

That American use of drones today is based on so many of the tactical and theoretical principles that guided British aerial control nearly a century ago is thus no coincidence. Besides absorbing the lessons passed on by Glubb, Slessor, and a slew of military historians, American military and intelligence institutions actively learned from British experience. In the 1930s, while trying to establish a foothold in Saudi Arabia, they began to depend on such legendary but by then outcast British Arabists as H. St. John Philby, who named his more famous son “Kim” after the Kipling novel that inspired his own efforts to make his life into an espionage adventure in the East. World War II and the Cold War, when the United States took over as the instigators of covert imperialism in the Middle East, were also periods of intensive collaboration with British intelligence and military services. The CIA’s Middle East section came to depend heavily on the American “Kim,” Kermit Roosevelt Jr., son of a veteran of the British campaign in Mesopotamia (and grandson of Theodore Roosevelt), who masterminded the British-American Operation Ajax against the Iranian prime minister Mohammed Mossadegh in 1953. The Iraqi attempt in 1958 to assert a more substantive sovereignty than the British had ever allowed proved decidedly ephemeral, for the CIA took over where British intelligence left off, attempting in 1960 to assassinate the head of the new Iraqi republic, ultimately bringing him down in 1963 by assisting a Baathist coup. We habitually forget this long history of U.S. interventions in the Middle East. Lawrence’s work remains a standard part of the training of American special forces, the consummate insurgent guiding the American approach to counterinsurgency.<sup>105</sup> He remains the model of effective, culturally conscious leadership in counterinsurgency.<sup>106</sup> It was under the influence of this institutional learning and these actively perpetuated myths about British air control that the Pentagon began dreaming in 2003 of replacing troops in Iraq with airpower that could “strike everywhere—and at once.”<sup>107</sup>

In the very same period, historians have learned that the tale of British air control’s success was a myth. Air control caused unknown but high casualties and produced entirely justified paranoia about Western dominance, leading to revolution in Iraq in 1958. We know too that the alleged advantages of air control were based on misguided notions about the Middle East. And we know that the British claim to empathy was built on foundations as shaky as are those of such claims today.

Certainly, historians are not the only ones complaining about the mistaken faith in drone warfare. The UN Human Rights Council has condemned the U.S. failure to count and disclose, much less prevent, civilian casualties from drones. The ACLU has filed a lawsuit over the CIA’s refusal to confirm or deny the existence of the targeted killing program in Pakistan. Rights groups in general are incensed by civilian killings and the secrecy that precludes compilation of even remotely accurate casualty figures.<sup>108</sup> Critics demand full disclosure and normalization of the program, but

fulfillment of such demands would be totally incompatible with the program; the whole purpose of air control is to provide a means of accomplishing unpopular tasks abroad in a time of mass democracy and anti-imperialism. Meanwhile, the American state has done exactly what the British state did when it found itself pressured to disclose details about aerial control: it has launched a public-relations campaign (including tours for scholars) that does not satisfy critics but that has successfully popularized the drone program as, on the whole, a very good thing, despite the damage it may do to democracy, relations with the Middle East, or the souls of the president and those who sit on the secret panel that devises the “kill list.”<sup>109</sup> There is clear bipartisan consensus on the program, despite the countless legal objections to targeted assassinations and to the extension of the AUMF as the legal basis for today’s drone strikes.<sup>110</sup>

### **History vs. Myth**

Here is where the history that I have related matters: drone warfare won’t work, no matter how secret the American state succeeds in making it and no matter how distinct its missions might seem compared to British air control. The scheme will fail for all the same political reasons that British aerial control never stifled insurgency and ended with a revolution that overthrew the Iraqi government that had tolerated the British presence. But history also works through memory: this chapter of aerial control stands even less chance of success because its victims recall too well lessons from the past, and they are working with a much more accurate version of history than our myth-consuming institutions have been. Societies, like Pakistan and Iraq, that experienced covert empire from the sky only a generation or two ago are wise enough to recognize the spuriousness of talk about their sovereignty and will continue to push back against even the subtlest hint of foreign intervention, thus making the security that is the alleged objective of the drone program a pipe dream. Coverage of drones in Iraq has always been rare, but for one brief moment late in January 2012 the press noted Iraqi anger at the continued presence of surveillance drones in the country, after the date of formal U.S. withdrawal. These drones are officially present to protect the American embassy, consulates, and personnel in the country. However, senior Iraqi officials consider them an affront to Iraqi sovereignty, as they do the outsized embassy itself, intended to house 16,000 American staff at \$6 billion annually until Iraqi protests raised the possibility that it might be halved (which in turn stoked speculation that a more discreet presence might give the United States even more leverage).<sup>111</sup> Being discreet is not very helpful in places that know what discretion tries to cover. Long familiarity with the covert-style imperial presence that the British developed in the twentieth century in these very places means that a discreet American presence today merely fuels fears of total American control. Iraqis know too well from experience that official declarations about the modest aims and capacities of a drone fleet or embassy are meaningless: an Internet cafe owner in Mosul told the press that it was immaterial whether the American drones were there for surveillance or strikes: “We hear from time to time that drone aircraft have killed half a village in Pakistan and Afghanistan under the pretext of pursuing terrorists . . . Our fear is that will happen in Iraq under a different pretext.” It is hard to argue with such logic, given the reality of the past in

Iraq and the present in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. People who live in these countries are cynical (and wise) enough to assume from past experience that the secrecy covers up something truly horrible.

Discretion is particularly useless because the occasional scandal is unavoidable and its damage irreversible. The first strike in Yemen, on December 17, 2009, killed many innocents, including children; no matter what care has been taken since then, or what further secrecy the program is enshrouded in, that scandal will continue to frame Yemenis' best guess about what is actually going on. David Bell argues in the *New Republic* that the drone program intends to minimize civilian casualties precisely because everyone is so aware of how politically costly they can be.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, in my conversations with military officers, it is clear how strongly the USAF wishes to distinguish its use of drones from "other agencies'" use of them, even while acknowledging that tactics are shared. The USAF's drone strikes in Afghanistan are transparent; a JAG (judge advocate) assesses the proportionality of the action and the likelihood of collateral damage; official casualty figures line up well with independent counts. However, all of this hardly matters politically, given the older and more recent history of aerial counterinsurgency in these regions. Casualty counts are so tainted by the secrecy surrounding the USAF's early use of drones and the ongoing secrecy surrounding the CIA's and Joint Special Operations Command's use of them in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia that both the skeptical U.S. left and plenty of people abroad will remain mistrustful of official figures, not least given the ease with which definitional adjustments (e.g., counting all military-age males in a strike zone as combatants) make all claims about civilian deaths dubious. The USAF may have adopted "tactical patience" as its mantra since 2009, when General Stanley McChrystal began to reduce strikes in the name of winning hearts and minds (from 2009 to the end of 2012, 1,160 drone strike missions were flown in Afghanistan), but the scandalous mistakes of the previous seven years cannot so easily be erased from public memory.<sup>113</sup> If the British bombing of Waziristan seems ancient history, more recent episodes may drive the point home: the first drone strike in Afghanistan was run by the CIA in 2002 in the very spot, Zhawar Kili, where Bill Clinton had ordered strikes in 1998 after the African embassy bombings, followed by more from late 2001.<sup>114</sup> The 2002 strike hit impoverished innocents scavenging for saleable metal fragments from the earlier bombardments. This place is a palimpsest of bombardment; there is too long a history at work for recent improvements or even substantive differences in mission to dent those memories. More recent mistakes, like the collateral killing of the anti-al-Qaeda cleric Salem Ahmed bin Ali Jaber in Yemen in August 2012 or the killing of the sixteen-year-old son of Anwar al-Awlaki, continue to fuel skepticism toward claims about fewer casualties and frame popular opinion about the entire strategy. Indeed, some might reasonably assume that we are merely doing a better job covering up our mistakes and that all the protesting about avoiding collateral damage is simply protesting-too-much. John Brennan, the counterinsurgency wizard whose confirmation as CIA director in February 2013 ignited a brief national conversation about the drone program he helped create, claims that strikes in Yemen have become more accurate, but critics note that he communicates only with the Yemeni security apparatus, which has a vested interest in the current strategy,

while the man on the street sees his government as collaborators in an American war against Yemenis. Moreover, the American-trained elite Yemeni counterterrorism unit feels that it can and should be going after al-Qaeda members on the ground.<sup>115</sup>

In any case, casualties are not the only liability here. As history shows, terror and resentment of constant surveillance also prevent aerial counterinsurgency from succeeding, in-so-far as counterinsurgency is about winning hearts and minds. It hardly matters, from a political point of view, whether some agencies successfully avoid civilian casualties; the secrecy around important aspects of drone use, the historical memory of these societies, and the impossibility of clearly identifying “bad guys” together mean that the program will continue to misfire. Disturbing as the CIA’s role is, it is not, as Sifton also argues, the primary cause for alarm; the legal identity of drone pilots, CIA or USAF, matters little to victims of a Hellfire strike.<sup>116</sup> Rather than feeling misunderstood and asserting the distinctness of their practices from the CIA’s, the USAF should abstain from air strikes (both conventional and remotely piloted) as an unwise tactic in this region. As for the CIA, one is asked to simply trust; but, as Jameel Jaffer, deputy legal director of the ACLU, warns, the laws and policies that this administration is inaugurating—the prerogative to assassinate without judicial review—will be available for future administrations too.<sup>117</sup> In general, official secrecy fuels rumors of the worst, and periodic scandals prove that often the worst is true. This is how state secrecy about aerial operations works and has worked historically: the secret is out, as it was to the British public in the 1920s, but without confirmation of details, the public is and was left to let its imagination run wild. Moreover, enduring belief in the unreliability of “tribal informants” and the inconsistent quality of drone video feeds together cripple the claim that drone strikes are always precise; how can they be if they rely on inaccurate intelligence?<sup>118</sup>

If the American left has become ever more mistrustful of its government, as British liberals of the 1920s were of theirs, for Iraqis the wages of fear are even greater. Loss of Iraqi trust in the United States may seem a small price to pay for the profits of surveillance, but Iraqis’ mistrust of their own government would seem to bankrupt the entire enterprise, if a stable Iraq is the genuine American goal. “Iraqi politicians will accept [drone use in any form the United States wants],” an Iraqi teacher reckons, “because they are weak.” After all, the fleet’s presence was supposed to have been sanctioned by Iraqi officials, but all deny ever having been consulted.<sup>119</sup> Simply put, the Iraqi government looks feeble, corrupt, and ineffectual, and the country’s claims to sovereignty laughable, when the sky is full of American drones and no sign of an Iraqi air force. Many of the drones that were withdrawn from Iraq along with the troops were shifted to Turkey, from where they have continued to fly over northern Iraq (these with permission) as part of a joint American-Turkish effort to keep an eye on PKK fighters in the region.<sup>120</sup> In Pakistan, too, the popular assumption is that America rules the entire country, whatever the actual extent of the area under drone policing.

That American drones radically compromise the governments of “host” countries, making them entirely counterproductive, is a criticism that officials and scholars all over have expressed. Indeed, the Pakistani government has launched a public-relations offensive through the United Nations and other diplomatic venues to air its conviction

that drone strikes weaken both the government and forces of stability in the country while stoking the anger that fuels terrorist movements.<sup>121</sup> Sage officials in the United States have expressed similar worries. The former CIA station chief in Islamabad and head of the CIA counterterrorism agency until 2006 Robert Grenier recently warned that drone attacks create terrorist safe havens. He made this statement to the *Guardian*, the very paper which was at the vanguard of the critique of state secrecy about Iraq in the 1920s and which has been consistently wary of the American drone program, more persistently than any mainstream American media outlet. “We have gone a long way down the road of creating a situation where we are creating more enemies than we are removing from the battlefield. We are already there with regards [*sic*] to Pakistan and Afghanistan,” says Grenier. In Yemen, indiscriminately striking militants in areas where other young men are present risks “creating a terrific amount of popular anger,” enough to result in the creation of a “larger terrorist safe haven” there.<sup>122</sup> Other former top military and intelligence officials—including McChrystal, the retired general who led the Joint Special Operations Command that runs many of the drone strikes, and former CIA director Michael Hayden—have said that drone wars in Pakistan and Yemen are increasingly targeting low-level militants who pose no direct threat to the United States and are fueling anti-American sentiment.<sup>123</sup> Scholars, too, caution that drone “success” in AfPak is radicalizing and destabilizing Pakistani society and boosting recruitment to extremist organizations.<sup>124</sup> It was the British, in 1950s Malaya, who coined the notion that counterinsurgency depended on winning hearts and minds. Drones have undermined our grasp of this wisdom, engaging the United States in the futile task of beheading a hydra. Drones have replaced Guantanamo as the primary goad for recruitment to militant organizations and have made Guantanamo unnecessary with their take-no-prisoners approach.<sup>125</sup> They make an exit strategy irrelevant. Indeed, if the thinness of the intruding presence stokes Iraqi and Pakistani suspicions of more substantive American control, it also leaves American officials and drone operators more susceptible to paranoid groupthink about movements and politics on the ground, making real and total withdrawal a permanent impossibility.

That drones enable prolongation of the conflict formerly known as the Global War on Terrorism is not lost on some elements of the public, much in the way that the radical back-benchers in the 1920s British Parliament and the editors of the *Guardian* knew that their government used airpower to engage in secret military activity in the Middle East whenever it liked.<sup>126</sup> Drones today, like conventional aircraft then, make the decision to go to war easier. Critics have grasped that “Drones Mean the Iraq War Is Never Over,” as one blogger puts it: wonderful as it was to get human beings out of Iraq, the fact is that war today no longer needs human beings; just as ordinary Iraqis see no reason to accept at face value official declarations about the limits of U.S. drone activity in their country, Americans also see no reason to doubt the agency will stay aloft in Iraq as well. After all, Iraq’s future is too self-evidently shaky for the CIA to let it go, and drones were meant for law enforcement in precisely such situations. These are by no means views from beyond the fringe. “So how will we ever know when we continue attacks inside Iraq?” asks the same blogger, who quotes a defense think tank expert to answer, “We won’t—except ‘the people

who get blown up. And even they won't know what happened.'"<sup>127</sup> Drones fundamentally alter a democracy's relationship to war; their purpose, like air control in the 1920s, is to make war virtually costless to Americans and thus to avoid public condemnation of the conflict itself. Despite the major legal, philosophical, and constitutional issues they raise, drone use in Pakistan or Iraq has never been debated in Congress or voted on.<sup>128</sup> In Pakistan, on the other hand, drones are a central subject of popular debate.

### **Our Flawed Conversation**

On the heels of the announcement of a UN investigation into civilian deaths resulting from drone strikes, Brennan's confirmation as CIA head triggered an ephemeral conversation in the United States. But the central concern was not civilian deaths, the politics of counterinsurgency, the transformation of warfare, or the prospect of a new drone base in Africa; it was the domestic fear expressed on the cover of *Time*: "Rise of the Drones: They are America's global fighting machines. What happens when they're unleashed at home?" Similarly, members of the Senate Intelligence Committee focused on the right of every American "to know when their government believes it's allowed to kill them." The leak of a Justice Department white paper on the legal basis for targeting American al-Qaeda operatives fueled this debate.<sup>129</sup> The filibuster by Rand Paul and other libertarians was likewise prompted by concern about the possible targeting of Americans.<sup>130</sup> The problem for these critics is the frenetic pace of technological change, a conclusion that makes sense only if we write the history of drones as the history of remote control and robotics rather than the history of aerial counterinsurgency and surveillance.<sup>131</sup> Certainly, drones represent a new way of exercising human agency that raises pressing questions, just as small arms did centuries ago, but by fetishizing that new agency, and its implications for business, surveillance, safety, policing, and privacy, we have become distracted from the more obvious conclusion about the likelihood of their effectiveness in counterinsurgency and counterterrorism.<sup>132</sup> If the seeming costlessness of drones in terms of American money and life tempts us to use them, our awareness of their certain failure should provide an antidote to naive temptation. The bipartisan consensus and polls showing 83 percent public approval of drones are misleading.<sup>133</sup> In fact, while most American opinion approves of drone strikes for eliminating high-level terrorist targets, it disapproves of that recourse where there is the possibility of killing innocents—in short, most would disapprove of the current use of drones, if it were ever properly aired.<sup>134</sup>

We may never know how many civilians have been killed in today's drone wars. A London-based organization, the Bureau for Investigative Journalism (BIJ), has attempted to produce reliable figures to counter the absurd official claim by the Obama administration that no civilians have been killed in Pakistan since August 2010.<sup>135</sup> It is ironic but not coincidental that persistent criticism emerges from the UK, namely, from the BIJ and the *Guardian*. The risks that empire poses to democracy have long been an urgent issue there, and the view of the outsider wise from experience is a sharp one. On the other hand, Britain is also among the few countries, along with the United States and Israel, to have used weaponized drones, and the British government's new program for summarily stripping individuals with

alleged links to militant or terrorist groups of their British citizenship abets American targeting of such individuals.<sup>136</sup> Both these track records motivate the world's largest anti-drone activist coalition, Britain's Drone Campaign Network.<sup>137</sup>

By folding the earlier British experience with aerial control in the Middle East into a history of drone warfare today, we can better assess the new program's likely failure than if we were to focus solely on its technical evolution and to fetishize the unmanned nature of today's aircraft over yesterday's.<sup>138</sup> That is not the feature that will determine their effectiveness. It is the feature that makes good on the old objectives of discretion and costlessness without changing much else about the romance of perfect knowledge from above. After all, in Afghanistan, drone operations are fully integrated with the conventional aircraft program.<sup>139</sup> Similar complaints that conventional aerial strikes inject a video-game quality into war were articulated during the Vietnam War. Unmanned aerial warfare was an objective of aerial warfare from the start; it is not a departure from the main lines of aerial warfare's technical evolution, which included rocket warfare and the cruise missiles of the Cold War. The whole point of aerial warfare has always been to minimize one's own casualties and to fight discreetly. As Derek Gregory argues, despite the many technical changes since the 1940s, the central dynamic remains the same: what Colonel David Kilcullen, a counterinsurgency expert and former adviser to General David Petraeus, and Andrew McDonald Exum describe as a "frightened population" living under constant threat from "a faceless enemy that wages war from afar." The change in today's context of permanent terror is that terrorized populations are given no warning and can seek little refuge from a bomber hunkered down in Nevada, more than seven thousand miles away.<sup>140</sup>

Despite the many continuities with older forms of aerial bombardment, most attempts at historicizing drones trace their origins to the Vietnam War, or if they reach further back are distracted by the unmanned qualities into connecting dots between Civil War use of hot-air balloons to kite surveillance experiences, Nazi use of radio-controlled missiles, and so on.<sup>141</sup> These narratives miss the important aerial history that transpired in the very region where drones have found their most robust immediate justification, and thus they fail to attend to how memory might be shaping the use of and response to drones. Killcullen was spot-on when he publicly attested that people in Iraq and AfPak see the drones as "neo-colonial."<sup>142</sup>

As Gregory notes, our understanding of bombing has been in general dominated by military historians preoccupied with strategy or social historians uncovering the experiences of those on the ground. But we need as much to grasp the cultural history of bombardment, and the politics it produces.<sup>143</sup> As we ponder the coldness of the drone pilot, it is worth recalling the powerful passions that put a joystick into those young hands: the orientalist, racist, imperialist, and profoundly insecure cultural notions that shaped the practical organization of surveillance in the Middle East and its violent excesses. In the process of reinventing chivalry for a modern age, air power seems poised to purge every trace of honor from American warfare. Honor is not an outdated value in most parts of the world, and the inhabitants of the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderland cannot but feel that they must militantly resist attacks on their land and children—their honor.<sup>144</sup>

The original British experiment failed miserably. Anger at civilian deaths and continual foreign surveillance provoked frequent insurgency, mistrust of local governments, and the anxiety about Western imperialism that has led to our present discontents. There is no reason to think that today's experiment will meet with any better fate. Certainly drones have succeeded wildly where the British Air Ministry failed, in making possible the truly discreet pursuit of war and empire abroad. Concerning as the pilot's new remoteness is, more worrying still is the near-total remoteness of the American public that it underwrites. It is time to awaken that public to the real ethical issues raised by drones. Lord Bingham, a retired senior British judge, compares hunter-killer drones to cluster bombs and land mines, weapons that have been deemed too cruel for use. Kilcullen has called their hit rate immoral. There is an increasing sense of frustration with lawmakers' refusal to exercise oversight of the CIA.<sup>145</sup> Without distinguishing between drones that protect our troops and those that drop bombs on an occupied people, influential media like the *Economist* assert that, "like them or not, drones are here to stay."<sup>146</sup> However, genies can be and have been put back into bottles (e.g., land mines, or our halved nuclear arsenal); decisions can be made about appropriate and inappropriate uses, not least since today's drone warfare is not considered the blueprint for what future aerial warfare will look like. The USAF does not presume that in future conflicts it will have the clear air superiority that has made drone warfare possible in the war on terror; rather, it is preparing for war in "contested, degraded, and operationally limited" combat zones. While we have yet to even begin our conversation about drone warfare, the USAF is moving on. We can have laws and rules, and we will want them in short order when China and Iran and the rest of the world turn drones loose, upsetting the simplistic norm of white-on-Middle Eastern use of drones. The administration's acknowledgment of the secret program in 2012 and the CIA's efforts to lower casualties, or at least count them in creative ways, show that even a secret agency can be responsive to public pressure. (As this essay goes to press, officials have announced the likely transfer of the CIA drone program to the Pentagon—although, as I noted earlier, CIA involvement is only part of a more deeply historical problem.) Only intense public pressure can force lawmakers to have a conversation about what drones should be used for, as has been true of the limits we want to impose on other technologies, from computers to land mines. It is time for an argument, and history is on our side.

#### NOTES

I would like to thank the editors of *Humanity* and the anonymous reviewers of this essay. I would also like to thank Lynn Eden and other colleagues at the Freeman Spogli Institute at Stanford for their comments and for putting me in touch with some whose views I have described. My views on drones should not be understood to reflect any of theirs. Rishi Satia and Aprajit Mahajan helped with research. I want to acknowledge also Juan Cole's tireless efforts to keep us on top of this issue through his blog *Informed Comment*.

1. See the data gathered by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, available at <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/category/projects/drone-data> (accessed August 3, 2013).

2. See, for instance, Nick Turse and Tom Engelhardt, *Terminator Planet: The First History of*

*Drone Warfare, 2001–2050* (Seattle: CreateSpace, 2012); Peter Singer, *Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century* (New York: Penguin, 2009).

3. See, for instance, David Bell, “In Defense of Drones: A Historical Argument,” *New Republic*, January 27, 2012. On distance and the dehumanization of victims, see Randall Collins, *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009).

4. The global market for UAVs, some \$6 billion a year, has also made for a bright spot in the American economy. See, e.g., Michael Hastings, “The Rise of the Killer Drones: How America Goes to War in Secret,” *Rolling Stone*, April 16, 2012; “Future Is Assured for Death-Dealing, Life-Saving Drones,” *Guardian*, August 3, 2012. See also Medea Benjamin, *Drone Warfare: Killing by Remote Control* (New York: OR Books, 2012), chap. 2.

5. In 1919, airpower was used to put down unrest in Egypt, Punjab, Somaliland, Afghanistan, and the North West Frontier. It was also used against the Red Army in South Russia. These were “spasmodic, almost casual affairs.” John Laffin, *Swifter than Eagles: The Biography of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Maitland Salmond* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1964), 192.

6. Squadrons based in Iraq, Palestine, and Transjordan came under the Middle East Command at Cairo. In 1928, the RAF took over the Sudan, while striving to maintain Ibn Saud’s dependence on their assistance. RAF squadrons were also in Malta and Singapore. They eventually began to “substitute” for traditional forces elsewhere. See David Killingray, “‘A Swift Agent of Government’: Air Power in British Colonial Africa, 1916–1939,” *Journal of African History* 25, no. 4 (1984): 429–44; David Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 39–59; Charles Townshend, *Britain’s Civil Wars: Counterinsurgency in the Twentieth Century* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 99–113.

7. “Employment of Aircraft on the North-West Frontier of India,” March 1, 1924, cited in Graham Chandler, “The Bombing of Waziristan,” *Air & Space* (July 2011): <http://www.airspace-mag.com/military-aviation/The-Bombing-of-Waziristan.html> (accessed August 3, 2013).

8. Douglas Carruthers, *Arabian Adventure: To the Great Nafud in Quest of the Oryx* (London: Witherby, 1935), 68; F. R. Maunsell, “The Hejaz Railway,” *Geographical Journal* 32, no. 6 (1908): 570.

9. David Hogarth, comment on S. S. Butler, “Baghdad to Damascus via El Jauf, Northern Arabia,” *Geographical Journal* 33, no. 5 (1909): 533; 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), chap. 3. Meredith Townsend recognized that most Englishmen, “filled . . . with the ‘idea’ of Arabia,” tended to exaggerate the region’s aridity. Townsend, *Asia and Europe: Studies Presenting the Conclusions Formed by the Author in a Long Life Devoted to the Subject of the Relations between Asia and Europe*, 2nd ed. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1904), 161.

10. Cited in N. N. E. Bray, *A Paladin of Arabia: The Biography of Brevet Lieut.-Colonel G. E. Leachman, C.I.E., D.S.O., of the Royal Sussex Regiment* (London: Unicorn Press, 1936), 171.

11. See, for instance, the work of Derek Gregory, cited throughout; and Caren Kaplan, “Mobility and War: The Cosmic View of U.S. ‘Air Power,’” *Environment and Planning A* 38, no. 2 (2006): 395–407.

12. George Packer, “War after the War,” *New Yorker*, November 24, 2003.

13. Townsend, *Asia and Europe*, 305–6. Bell (1928) cited in *Gertrude Bell: The Arabian Diaries, 1913–1914*, ed. Rosemary O’Brien (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 9–10.

14. Louisa Jebb, *By Desert Ways to Baghdad* (London: Unwin, 1909), 264–65 (emphasis added).

15. Mark Sykes, *The Caliph's Last Heritage: A Short History of the Turkish Empire* (London: Macmillan, 1915), 57. These travelers did not seek the sensual indulgence in the Orient of earlier European travelers but escape from what they saw as the moral decadence of their own society. See also Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 120–22, 230–31.
16. Townsend, *Asia and Europe*, 167.
17. Frederic Lees, introduction to Philip Baldensperger, *The Immovable East: Studies of the People and Customs of Palestine* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1913), vii; N. N. E. Bray, *Shifting Sands* (London: Unicorn Press, 1934), 14 (emphasis added).
18. See, for instance, MEC, H. R. P. Dickson Papers, Dickson to Gwenlian Greene, February 7, 1915, 1st booklet; MEC, Philby Papers, H. St. John B. Philby, “Mesopotage,” chap. 7, MS [1930s].
19. PRO, AIR 1/140/15/40/306, General, Force “D” to WO, February 5, 1916; AIR 2/940, Tennant, Resume of operations, March 30, 1917; A. G. Wauchope, chap. 7, in anonymous, *With a Highland Regiment in Mesopotamia: 1916–1917*, 70 [originally in *Blackwood's*, August 1917].
20. J. E. Tennant, *In the Clouds above Baghdad: Being the Records of an Air Commander* (London: Palmer, 1920), 38–39, 60–61.
21. See Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 159.
22. PRO, AIR 1/2399/280/1, Squadron Leader L. G. S. Payne, “The Use of Aircraft in connection with Espionage,” November 7, 1924.
23. National Army Museum, London, Papers of William Leith-Ross, “The Tactical Side of I(a),” n.d., 8–9.
24. PRO, AIR 1/426/15/260/3, Air Staff, “On the Power of the Air Force and the Application of that Power to Hold and Police Mesopotamia,” March 1920; Payne, “Use of Aircraft.”
25. Lawrence to Liddell Hart, 1933, in *The Letters of T. E. Lawrence*, ed. David Garnett (London: Cape, 1938), 323 (emphasis original).
26. Wing Commander R. H. Peck, “Aircraft in Small Wars,” *Journal of the Royal United Services* 73, no. 491 (1928): 545.
27. See, for instance, PRO, AIR 20/526, Memorandum on the scheme for the employment of the forces of the crown in Mesopotamia, n.d., and other documents cited in Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 241 n. 4. On British conspiracy-thinking, see *Spies in Arabia*, chap. 6. On the echoes of such perceptions today, see David Pegg, “Analysis: After Eight Years in Iraq’s Skies Where Now for U.S. Drones?” *Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, December 14, 2011, <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/12/14/analysis-where-us-drones-are-going-after-iraq> (accessed August 3, 2013).
28. “Seven U.S. Marines Killed in Nevada Training Accident,” *Guardian*, March 19, 2013.
29. Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 245 n. 10.
30. PRO, AIR 5/202, Major General T. Fraser, Commanding British Forces in Iraq, to WO, August 3, 1922. See Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, chap. 7.
31. See, for instance, PRO, AIR 1/432/15/260/23 (A-B), 18th Division, Intelligence report, June 15, 1921; W. A. Wigram, “Problems of Northern Iraq,” *Journal of the Central Asian Society* 15, no. 3 (1928): 331.
32. PRO, CO 730/20, E. A. S., minute, March 30, 1922, on a phone conversation with Wilson. See also PRO, CO 730/20, 14464, Reader Bullard, minute, March 29, 1922, on Cox to S/S CO, March 25, 1922.

33. PRO, AIR 5/1253, Salmond, Air Ministry, Iraq Command Report for October 1922 to April 1924, November 1924.
34. Aliya Robin Deri, “‘Costless’ War: American and Pakistani Reactions to the U.S. Drone War,” *Intersect* 5 (2012): 1–16.
35. PRO, AIR 5/476, A. T. Wilson, Note on Use of Air Force in Mesopotamia, February 26, 1921; PRO, AIR 20/521, Office of no. 30 Squadron, RAF, MEF, Baghdad, Report on RAF operations in South Persia, to GOC, April 8, 1919.
36. PRO, AIR 9/12, “Old notes on ‘substitution’ (dictated as a basis for a talk to the Parliamentary Army and Air Committees on the 21st June, 1932).”
37. Air Staff, “On the Power of the Air Force” (emphasis original).
38. PRO, FO 882/XXI, Philby, Note on the Khurma dispute, ca. July 1919, IS/19/37.
39. See, e.g., Air Staff, “On the Power of the Air Force”; PRO, AIR 5/476, CAS, Memo on Air Force Scheme of Control in Mesopotamia, August 5, 1921.
40. Cited in Omissi, *Air Power*, 154. The draft of the Air Staff’s “Notes on the Method of Employment of the Air Arm in Iraq,” presented to Parliament in August 1924, carried this sentence almost verbatim. Later drafts omitted it and stressed air control’s humaneness.
41. See, for instance, PRO, AIR 1/432/15/260/23 (A-B), Commanding Officer of 17th Division, report, June 26, 1921; PRO, FO 371/5230, Thomas, Memorandum, to PO Muntafik, July 13, 1920; PRO, CO 730/2, [Hall?], minute, August 11, 1921, on Cox to CO, June 30, 1921. For a description of an exemplary episode, see, for instance, Peter Sluglett, *The British in Iraq, 1914–1932* (London: Ithaca Press, 1976), 262–70.
42. Cited in Charles Townshend, “‘Civilization and ‘Frightfulness’: Air Control in the Middle East between the Wars,” in *Warfare, Diplomacy and Politics: Essays in Honour of A. J. P. Taylor*, ed. Chris Wrigley (London: Hamilton, 1986), 159.
43. Tyler Wall and Torin Monahan, “Surveillance and Violence from Afar: The Politics of Drones and Liminal Security-Scapes,” *Theoretical Criminology* 15, no. 3 (2011): 247–48.
44. “Insurgents Hack U.S. Drones,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 17, 2009.
45. See, for instance, David Cloud, “Anatomy of an Afghan War Tragedy,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 2011.
46. International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic, Stanford Law School, and Global Justice Clinic, NYU School of Law, *Living under Drones: Death, Injury, and Trauma to Civilians from U.S. Drone Practices in Pakistan* (September 2012).
47. PRO, AIR 2/830, Air Policy with Regard to Iraq, n.d. [October–November 1929]; AIR 2/830, Air Staff, Note on the Status of the RAF in Iraq when that country becomes a member of the League of Nations, September 7, 1929.
48. This was explicitly stated in Salmond, Report on Command.
49. Churchill to Lloyd George, August 31, 1920. See Priya Satia, “Inter-War Agnotology: Empire, Democracy and the Production of Ignorance,” in *Brave New World: Imperial and Democratic Nation-Building in Britain between the Wars*, ed. Laura Beers and Geraint Thomas (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2011), 209–26.
50. Cited in Hastings, “Rise of the Killer Drones.”
51. Air Policy with Regard to Iraq; Note on the Status of the RAF in Iraq.
52. PRO, FO 371/16041, Draft memo based on Flood’s draft letter for Cabinet discussion, October 7, 1932; PRO, AIR 2/1196, Ludlow-Hewitt to Air Ministry, May 22, 1931; PRO, AIR

2/1196, Air Ministry to G. W. Rendel, FO, December 4, 1933; PRO, FO 371/16925, Barnes, minute to Rendel, December 1, 1933.

53. Michael R. Gordon, "In U.S. Exit from Iraq, Failed Efforts and Challenges," *New York Times*, September 22, 2012.

54. Jesslyn Radack cited in "Drone Wars and State Secrecy: How Barack Obama Became a Hardliner," *Guardian*, June 2, 2012; J. M. Kenworthy, letter to the editor of the *Times*, February 4, 1921, 6; "Parliament and the Mandates," editorial, *Times*, March 22, 1921, 11.

55. Lord Thomson (S/S Air), "My Impressions of a Tour in Iraq," *Journal of the Central Asian Society* 12, no. 3 (1925): 211; PRO, AIR 5/1298; an officer in Iraq, cited in "With the RAF in Iraq," *Basrah Times*, May 3, 1924.

56. Worthington-Evans, cited in Townshend, "Civilization and 'Frightfulness,'" 147. On these criticisms, see also Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, chap. 9.

57. Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 292–93.

58. PRO, CO 730/18, Air Staff, Memorandum, in Air Ministry to CID, November 26, 1921.

59. Some historians find the Air Ministry argument compelling. See Omissi, *Air Power*, 169; Philip Meilinger, "Trenchard and 'Morale Bombing': The Evolution of Royal Air Force Doctrine before World War II," *Journal of Military History* 60, no. 2 (1996): 259; James S. Corum and Wray R. Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 59.

60. Chairman [Lord Peel?], comment on Thomson, "My Impressions of a Tour," 211.

61. See, for instance, Basil Liddell Hart, *Paris: Or, the Future of War* (New York: Dutton, 1925), 44.

62. Commons debate, paraphrased, July 3, 1924, in *Times*, July 4, 1924, 8. See also Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 303.

63. G. Wyman Bury [Abdullah Mansur, pseud.], *The Land of Uz* (London: Macmillan, 1911), xxi. Aubrey Herbert was unanimously described as a "knight"; Bray titled his biography of Leachman *A Paladin of Arabia*. Lawrence was famously obsessed with medieval warfare; his first steps in the region were taken to research his thesis on the influence of the Crusades on European military architecture.

64. Sykes, *Caliph's Last Heritage*, 5, 118.

65. D. G. Hogarth, "Problems in Exploration I: Western Asia," *Geographical Journal* 32, no. 6 (1908): 549–50. See also Ali Behdad, *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), 93; Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 199.

66. Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College (LHCMA), Brooke-Popham Papers, Robert Brooke-Popham, "Aeroplanes in Tropical Countries," lecture, in "Proceedings: First Meeting, 57th Session [Royal Aeronautical Society, October 6, 1921]," *Aeronautical Journal* 25 (November 1921): 563–80.

67. PRO, FO 371/2781, 201201, Bray, November 8, 1916, in Arabian Report no. 18, n.d.

68. See, for instance, Lawrence to Charlotte Shaw, December 9, 1933, cited in Wilson, *Lawrence*, 911–12. On the perceived chivalry of aircraft, also see David Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane: An Essay on a Militant and Technological Nation* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 43–58.

69. Glubb Papers, Box I, File: Iraq S. Desert (I), 1927–1928, Glubb, Note on the Southern Desert Force [ca. 1930s].

70. John Glubb, *The Story of the Arab Legion* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1948), 149;

*Arabian Adventures: Ten Years of Joyful Service* (London: Cassell, 1978), 148. The tribal principle of communal responsibility was also held to recommend indiscriminate punishment as a mark of cultural respect.

71. Glubb, *Arabian Adventures*, 148; *Story of the Arab Legion*, 149, 159, 161; Genstaff, “Notes on Modern Arab Warfare Based in the Fighting round Rumaithah and Diwaniyah, July–August 1920,” Appendix IX in Aylmer Haldane, *The Insurrection in Mesopotamia, 1920* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1922), 333.

72. PRO, CO 730/18, Wilson to the Chief of the General Staff, Mesopotamia, March 4, 1920, in Air Staff, Memo, n.d.; Trenchard, maiden speech to the House of Lords, April 9, 1930, reported in *Times*, April 10, 1930, 8.

73. J. M. Spaight, *Air Power and War Rights* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1924), 23–24, 102–3, 105–6.

74. Haldane to Churchill, November 26, 1921, in Randolph Churchill and Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, companion vol. 4, pt. 3, ed. Gilbert (London: Heinemann, 1977), 1676; Lawrence to Liddell Hart, June 1930, cited in John Mack, *A Prince of Our Disorder: The Life of T. E. Lawrence* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1976), 385. On Lawrence’s confusing views of violence and blood in Arabia, see Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 163.

75. PRO, AIR 8/94, F. H. Humphreys to Sir John Simon, December 15, 1932.

76. Cited in Dexter Filkins, “Tough New Tactics by U.S. Tighten Grip on Iraq Towns,” *New York Times*, December 7, 2003.

77. “Secret ‘Kill List’ Proves a Test of Obama’s Principles and Will,” *New York Times*, May 29, 2012.

78. Glenn Greenwald, “‘Militants’: Media Propaganda,” *Salon*, May 28, 2012, [http://www.salon.com/2012/05/29/militants\\_media\\_propaganda/singleton](http://www.salon.com/2012/05/29/militants_media_propaganda/singleton) (accessed August 3, 2013).

79. “Secret ‘Kill List.’” See also Cora Currier, “How the U.S. Decides [to] Drone-kill People When It Doesn’t Know Who They Are,” *Informed Comment*, March 2, 2013, <http://www.juancole.com/2013/03/decides-doesnt-currier.html> (accessed August 3, 2013).

80. See Deri, “‘Costless’ War.”

81. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism was so concerned about this excision of arguably the most important information about strikes that it refused permission for the *Post* to use its data in such reporting. Chris Woods, “Analysis: How *Washington Post* Strips Casualties from Covert Drone Data,” *Informed Comment*, November 2, 2012, <http://www.juancole.com/2012/11/analysis-how-washington-post-strips-casualties-from-covert-drone-data-woods.html> (accessed August 3, 2013). In July 2012 the *Atlantic* and other media also criticized CNN for claiming zero civilian casualties in Pakistan that year.

82. During the first three years of Obama’s time in office, his 259 strikes killed at least 64 children. George Monbiot, “In the U.S., Mass Child Killings Are Tragedies: In Pakistan, Mere Bug Splats,” *Guardian*, December 17, 2012.

83. Humphreys to Simon, December 15, 1932.

84. [Lawrence, June 1930], cited in Basil Liddell Hart, *The British Way in Warfare* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), 159.

85. Derek Gregory, “From a View to a Kill: Drones and Late Modern War,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 28, no. 7/8 (2011): 192.

86. Capt. Hon. W. Ormsby Gore, MP, “The Organization of British Responsibilities in the Middle East,” *Journal of the Central Asian Society* 7, no. 2/3 (1920): 95–96.

87. Leith-Ross, "Tactical Side," 3, 7, 8.
88. See Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, chap. 7.
89. Glubb, *Arabian Adventures*, 125.
90. PRO, AIR 9/12, CAS to Sir R. Maconachie, January 10, 1933.
91. BL, IOR, L/PS/10/755, E. B. Howell, Deputy Civil Commissioner of Mesopotamia, personal letter re: Arab amir for Iraq, December 4, 1918, Baghdad.
92. PRO, AIR 2/1196, [Flight Lieut., AI5], Future Intelligence Organisation in Iraq, July 21, 1930, and [document on air intelligence in Iraq], n.d.
93. PRO, CO 730/5, Bullard and Meinertzhagen, minutes, September 1921, on Cox, telegram, September 24, 1921.
94. John Sifton, "A Brief History of Drones," *Nation*, February 27, 2012.
95. PRO, AIR AIR 23/9, Glubb, Report on the defensive operations against the Akhwan, Winter 1924–25, April 16, 1925.
96. Brooke-Popham, "Aeroplanes in Tropical Countries"; Glubb, "Monotony of the Desert," in Glubb, Report on the defensive operations against the Akhwan; Keith, April 30, 1929, Mosul, in *Flying Years*, 240–41; Prudence Hill, *To Know the Sky: The Life of Air Chief Marshal Sir Roderic Hill* (London: Kimber, 1962), 96–97.
97. Hastings, "Rise of the Killer Drones." See also Derek Gregory, "The Rush to the Intimate: Counterinsurgency and the Cultural Turn in Late Modern War," *Radical Philosophy* 150 (2008): 8–23.
98. Gregory, "From a View to a Kill," 198, 203. On the stresses on drone pilots, see also Benjamin, *Drone Warfare*, chap. 4.
99. See also Gregory, "Rush to the Intimate," 1–5. Journalistic and military experts from George Packer to John Nagl have consistently pushed the idea that greater cultural knowledge would cure our counterinsurgency strategy.
100. Gregory, "Rush to the Intimate," 35–40, 43–44.
101. For just one example, see "Flight of the Drones," *Economist*, October 8, 2011.
102. John Slessor, *The Central Blue: The Autobiography of Sir John Slessor, Marshal of the RAF* (New York: Praeger, 1957), 57; John Glubb, *The Changing Scenes of Life: An Autobiography* (London: Quartet Books, 1983), 105; Philip Anthony Towle, *Pilots and Rebels: The Use of Aircraft in Unconventional Warfare, 1918–1988* (London: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1989), 54. Towle is cited repeatedly in this secondary literature, as well as in Capt. David Willard Parsons, USAF, "British Air Control: A Model for the Application of Air Power in Low-Intensity Conflict?" *Airpower Journal* 8, no. 2 (1994): 28–39, which extends the ideas of Iraq's peculiar suitability to air operations up to the Persian Gulf War. See Corum, "Myth of Air Control," 62 n. 2, 73 n. 76, 73 n. 79, 73 n. 84, for other recent American works looking to the RAF in Iraq as a model.
103. See note 102 above and Lt. Col. David J. Dean, USAF, "Air Power in Small Wars: The British Air Control Experience," in *The Air Force Role in Low-Intensity Conflict* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: Air University Press, 1986); Peter Dye, "Royal Air Force Operations in South-West Arabia, 1917–1967," in *Air Power, Insurgency and the "War on Terror"*, ed. Joel Hayward (Lincolnshire: Royal Air Force Centre for Air Power Studies, 2009), 45, 54, 60. Dye swallows the notion that air control was peaceable and mainly targeted property. See also Andrew Roe, *Waging War in Waziristan: The British Struggle in the Land of Bin Laden, 1849–1947* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), chap. 6.

104. Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, trans. Linda Rugg, new ed. (New York: New Press, 2003), 68; Malcolm Smith, *British Air Strategy between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 29.
105. Peter Maass, "Professor Nagl's War," *New York Times Magazine*, January 11, 2004, 23–31, 38, 49, 56, 62; interview with Dr. Duncan Anderson, May 19, 2005, BBC Radio 4; Oliver Poole, *Daily Telegraph*, July 6, 2005; Ryan Dille, "Lessons from Lawrence of Arabia," BBC News Online Magazine, April 9, 2004, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/magazine/3605261.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/3605261.stm) (accessed August 3, 2013).
106. James Corum, "Air Power and Counter-Insurgency: Back to the Basics," in Hayward, ed., *Air Power*, 210.
107. Consultant cited in Seymour Hersh, "Up in the Air: Where Is the Iraq War Headed Next?" *New Yorker*, December 5, 2005.
108. Glenn Greenwald, "How the Obama Administration is Making the U.S. Media Its Mouthpiece," *Guardian*, June 8, 2012. On other notable protests, see Benjamin, *Drone Warfare*, chap. 9.
109. Greenwald, "Obama Administration." See, for instance, "America's New Air Force," *60 Minutes*, August 16, 2009, available at <http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=5245555n> (accessed August 3, 2013); "Rise of the Drones," *NOVA*, January 23, 2013, available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/military/rise-of-the-drones.html> (accessed August 3, 2013). See also Creech's website, at <http://www.creech.af.mil> (accessed August 3, 2013).
110. Glenn Greenwald, "Obama the Warrior," *Salon*, May 29, 2012, [http://www.salon.com/2012/05/29/obama\\_the\\_warrior](http://www.salon.com/2012/05/29/obama_the_warrior) (accessed August 3, 2013). On the latter, see Cora Currier, "Drone Strikes Test Legal Grounds for War on Terror," *ProPublica*, February 6, 2013, <http://www.propublica.org/article/drone-strikes-test-legal-grounds-for-war-on-terror> (accessed August 3, 2013).
111. "U.S. Drones Patrolling Its Skies Provoke Outrage in Iraq," *New York Times*, January 29, 2012; "U.S. Planning to Slash Iraq Embassy Staff by as Much as Half," *New York Times*, February 7, 2012.
112. Bell, "In Defense of Drones."
113. David Wood, "American Drones Ignite New Arms Race from Gaza to Iran to China," *Huffington Post*, November 27, 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/27/american-drones\\_n\\_2199193.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/27/american-drones_n_2199193.html) (accessed August 3, 2013).
114. Sifton, "Brief History of Drones." On Clinton's rationale for the 1998 strikes, see Joshua Bennett, "Exploring the Legal and Moral Bases for Conducting Targeted Strikes outside of the Defined Combat Zone," *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics and Public Policy* 26, no. 2 (2012): 557.
115. Robert Worth et al., "Drone Strikes' Risks to Get Rare Moment in the Public Eye," *New York Times*, February 5, 2013.
116. Sifton, "Brief History of Drones."
117. Interview on *Democracy Now!* February 5, 2013, [http://www.democracynow.org/2013/2/5/kill\\_list\\_exposed\\_leaked\\_obama\\_memo](http://www.democracynow.org/2013/2/5/kill_list_exposed_leaked_obama_memo) (accessed August 4, 2013).
118. Deri, "'Costless' War."
119. "U.S. Drones Patrolling Its Skies."
120. "U.S. Drones Allowed in Iraqi Skies," *Washington Post*, December 16, 2011; "After Eight Years in Iraq's Skies."
121. "Drone Strikes Threaten 50 Years of International Law, Says UN Rapporteur," *Guardian*, June 21, 2012; "CIA Drone Strikes Violate Pakistan's Sovereignty, Says Senior Diplomat," *Guardian*, August 2, 2012.

122. "In Yemen, U.S. Airstrikes Breed Anger, and Sympathy for Al-Qaeda," *Washington Post*, May 29, 2012. See also David Kilcullen and Andrew McDonald Exum, "Death from Above, Outrage Down Below," *New York Times*, May 16, 2009.
123. Worth et al., "Drone Strikes' Risks."
124. See my own publications, e.g., "The Shadow of History Passes over Pakistan," *Financial Times*, May 29, 2009; "Attack of the Drones," *Nation*, November 9, 2009. See also the work of Derek Gregory; Deri, "'Costless' War"; Jeffrey Sluka, "Death from Above: UAVs and Losing Hearts and Minds," *Military Review* 91, no. 3: 70–76; Wall and Monahan, "Surveillance and Violence from Afar"; Michael Boyle, "Obama's Drone Wars and the Normalisation of Extra-judicial Murder," *Guardian*, June 11, 2012; Jane Mayer, "The Predator War," *New Yorker*, October 26, 2009.
125. "Secret 'Kill List.'"
126. Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 294–95, 301–3.
127. Sam Biddle, "Drones Mean the Iraq War Is Never Over," Gizmodo, October 21, 2011, <http://gizmodo.com/5852228/drones-mean-the-iraq-war-is-never-over> (accessed August 4, 2013).
128. See also Deri, "'Costless' War"; Peter Singer, "Do Drones Undermine Democracy?" *New York Times*, January 21, 2012.
129. Senator Ron Wyden, cited in "CIA Controversies Scrutinized at Brennan Confirmation Hearing," *Los Angeles Times*, February 7, 2013; Steven Aftergood, "Leak of White Paper Boosts Intelligence Oversight," FAS.org, February 11, 2013, [https://www.fas.org/blog/secretcy/2013/02/leak\\_boosts.html](https://www.fas.org/blog/secretcy/2013/02/leak_boosts.html) (accessed August 4, 2013).
130. Juan Cole, "Obama & Brennan Brought GOP Filibuster on Themselves by Extreme Secrecy on Drones," *Informed Comment*, March 8, 2013, <http://www.juancole.com/2013/03/brennan-filibuster-themselves.html> (accessed August 4, 2013).
131. Lev Grossman, "Rise of the Drones: They Are America's Global Fighting Machines. What Happens When They Are Unleashed at Home?" *Time*, February 11, 2013, cover and 30.
132. See my forthcoming book, *Guns: The British Imperial State and the Industrial Revolution*.
133. Chris Woods, "Drones: Barack Obama's Secret War," *New Statesman*, June 13, 2012.
134. Emily Swanson, "Opinion on Drones Depends on Who's Being Killed: Poll," *Huffington Post*, February 15, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/15/drones-opinion\\_n\\_2689813.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/15/drones-opinion_n_2689813.html) (accessed August 4, 2013).
135. For Pakistan in 2012, see "Obama 2012 Pakistan Strikes," *Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/01/11/obama-2012-strikes> (accessed August 4, 2013); "U.S. Claims of 'No Civilian Deaths' Are Untrue," *Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, July 18, 2011, <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/07/18/washingtons-untrue-e-claims-no-civilian-deaths-in-pakistan-drone-strikes> (accessed August 4, 2013). The Bureau is also attempting to name the dead.
136. Chris Woods and Alice K. Ross, "Former British Citizens Killed by Drone Strikes after Passports Revoked," February 27, 2013, *Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2013/02/27/former-british-citizens-killed-by-drone-strikes-after-passports-revoked> (accessed August 4, 2013).
137. Benjamin, *Drone Warfare*, 188–89.
138. On the major technical innovations, see Derek Gregory, "Lines of Descent," in *From Above: The Politics and Practice of the View from the Skies*, ed. Peter Adey et al. (London: Hurst, forthcoming).

139. Derek Gregory, "Drones and Military Violence: Readings and Screenings," *Geographical Imaginations*, August 1, 2012, <http://geographicalimaginations.com/2012/08/page/3> (accessed August 4, 2013).

140. Sifton, "Brief History of Drones"; Gregory, "Lines of Descent."

141. See, for instance, Hastings, "Rise of the Killer Drones"; Deri, "'Costless' War." On the development of remotely piloted aircraft, see Christina J. M. Goulter, "The Development of UAVs andUCAVs: The Early Years," in *Air Power UAVs: The Wider Context*, ed. Owen Barnes (London: Ministry of Defence, 2009), 11–25. This is also rehearsed in Grossman, "Rise of the Drones," 29, and in at least some historical narratives in the RPA community, in which Marilyn Monroe's wartime stint at Radioplane makes for instantly glamorizing and normalizing trivia.

142. Cited in "U.S. Considers Halting Drone Attacks on Pakistan," *Daily Telegraph*, May 5, 2009.

143. Gregory, "Lines of Descent."

144. Deri, "'Costless' War."

145. See, for instance, Robert Naiman, "Could We Move Dianne Feinstein on CIA Oversight?" *Huffington Post*, February 19, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-naiman/could-we-move-dianne-fein\\_b\\_2707958.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-naiman/could-we-move-dianne-fein_b_2707958.html) (accessed August 4, 2013).

146. "Flight of the Drones."