

Dis/Ordering the Orient: scopic regimes and modern war *

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‘Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings.’

Edward Said, *Culture and imperialism*.

‘There is no way to separate, under present historical conditions, the material reality of war from those representational regimes through which it operates and which rationalize its own operation.’

Judith Butler, *Frames of war: when is life grievable?*

Orientalism and order

When Edward Said elected to describe Orientalism as a discourse he was calling attention to its performative power: to its capacity to produce the effect it names (‘the Orient’). That capacity was – and remains – contingent. It depends on the constellations, conjunctures and circumstances in which Orientalism is activated. For that reason, Said focused on its imbrications with British, French and American modalities of power and their production of a particular ‘Orient’ – the ‘Middle East’ – whose designation was itself a

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profoundly colonial locution/location ('middle' of what? 'east' of where?).¹ There were other modalities and other 'Orient' – Orientalism is not a synonym for colonial discourse – but in this particular case Said identified two closely connected cultural-political performances. First, 'the Orient' was summoned as an exotic and bizarre space, and at the limit a pathological and even monstrous space: 'a living tableau of queerness.' Second, 'the Orient' was constructed as a space that had to be domesticated, disciplined and normalized through a forceful projection of the order it was presumed to lack: 'framed by the classroom, the criminal court, the prison, the illustrated manual.'²

These performances wrought considerably more than epistemological violence. The Orientalist projection of order was more than conceptual or cognitive, for the process of ordering also conveyed the sense of command and conquest. Said's writings have been an important source for the wider field of post-colonialism, but in most of its European and American forms this has emphasized the cultural (which is not to say, as some of its critics do, that it collapses into a sort of 'culturalism'). In any case, it needs to be remembered that war not only impacts culture but, as Michael Dillon and Julian Reid emphasize, that 'it is itself a complex cultural phenomenon

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

² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1978) pp. 41, 103. I have phrased Said's argument thus to draw out the Foucauldian tenor of *Orientalism*. Said's attitude to Foucault's work was a resolutely critical one, of course, and he constantly despaired at Foucault's preoccupation with metropolitan France and his apparent unwillingness to explore its colonial formations of power-knowledge in any depth or detail, but the relation was more complex (and, I think, more constructive) than the usual caricatured contrast between Said's 'humanism' and Foucault's avowed 'anti-humanism': see Derek Gregory, 'Imaginative geographies', *Progress in human geography* 19 (1995) 447-85.

deeply sutured into modern institutions and practices, indeed into the very modern political and economic imaginary.’³ Said knew this very well, of course, not least through his involvement with the Palestinian cause, and in fact his critique of Orientalism was framed by three wars. The book opens with the civil war in Lebanon, a place that had a special significance for Said and where his ashes would be buried twenty-five years later; it was a belated response to his puzzlement at the jubilation he encountered on the streets of New York at the Israeli victory in the 1967 war and its occupation of Gaza and the West Bank; and he identified the origins of a distinctively modern Orientalism in Napoleon’s ill-fated military expedition to Egypt between 1798 and 1801.⁴

And yet, even as he fastened on the importance of the French invasion and occupation, Said’s focus was unwaveringly on the textual appropriation of ‘ancient Egypt’ by the *savants* – the engineers, scientists and artists – who accompanied the French army. Their collective work was enshrined in the monumental *Description de l’Égypte*, which Said described as a project ‘to render [Egypt] completely open, to make it totally accessible to European scrutiny’, and so to usher the Orient from what he called ‘the realms of silent

³ Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, *The liberal way of war: killing to make life live* (London: Routledge, 2009) p. 9.

⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 87. More recently Juan Cole has endorsed a parallel claim. In invading Egypt, he argues, ‘Bonaparte was inventing what we now call “the modern Middle East”’, and ‘the similarities of the Corsican general’s rhetoric and tactics to those of later North Atlantic incursions into the region tell us much about the persistent pathologies of Enlightenment republics’: *Napoleon’s Egypt: invading the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan) p. 247. So they do, but the ‘Middle East’ has its origins in European and eventually American discourses of diplomacy, geopolitics and security, whereas ‘the Orient’ has a more diffuse cultural inflection. The conjunction of the two in the French occupation of Egypt is of crucial importance, and the same can be said of the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

obscurity' into 'the clarity of modern European science.'⁵ The phrasing is instructive: visibility is a leitmotif of *Orientalism* and Orientalism. Said repeatedly notes that under its sign 'the Orient is watched', that the Orient was always more than *tableau vivant* or theatrical spectacle (though it was both those things), that the Orientalist technology of power-knowledge was, above all, about 'making visible', about the construction 'of a sort of Benthamite panopticon' from whose watch-towers 'the Orientalist surveys the Orient from above, with the aim of getting hold of the whole sprawling panorama before him' in every 'dizzying detail'.⁶

This is not the place to debate Said's argument about 'the defeat of narrative by vision', nor even the unremarked ways in which this visual metaphoric makes a series of masculinized claims to 'know' the Orient. For Napoleon's military campaign was about more than annexing Egypt as what Said calls 'a department of French learning', and its execution inflicted more than cultural violence. Its capacity to do both these things was indeed visually mediated – though, strangely, there is not a single illustration in *Orientalism* – but so too was the conduct of the war itself. And in this, as I must now show, Napoleon was not alone.

⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 85-6. See Yves Laissus, *L'Égypte, une aventure savante 1798-1801* (Paris: Fayard, 1998); Robert Solé, *Les savants de Bonaparte* (Paris: Ed. Du Seuil, 1998); on the scientific legacy, see Donald Reid, *Whose pharaohs? Archaeology, museums and Egyptian national identity from Napoleon to World War I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 103, 127, 158, 239.

Cultures of war and visual fields

Wars have always been shaped by (and have in turn shaped) visual fields, each of which, so Nick Cullather argues, provided ‘a distinct optic which set the set the limits of leaders’ sights and determined what strategy and victory would look like.’⁷ The repeated visual images in Cullather’s sentence are not accidental, and they are all moving targets. In his recovery of what he calls ‘the culture of time and space’ between 1880 and 1918, Stephen Kern invokes a description of post-Napoleonic warfare written by the chief of Germany’s Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Alfred von Schlieffen, in 1909:

‘The modern commander-in-chief is no Napoleon who stands with his brilliant [retinue] on a hill. Even with the best binoculars he would be unlikely to see much, and his white horse would be an easy target for innumerable batteries. The commander is farther to the rear in a house with [spacious] offices, where telegraph and wireless, telephone and signalling instruments are at hand, while a fleet of automobiles and motorcycles, ready for the longest trips, wait for orders. Here, in a comfortable chair before a large table, the modern Alexander overlooks the whole battlefield on a map. From here he telephones inspiring words, and here he receives the reports from army corps commanders and from balloons and dirigibles

⁷ Nick Cullather, ‘Bombing at the speed of thought: intelligence in the coming age of cyberwar’, *Intelligence and National Security* 18 (2003) 141-154: 141.

which observe the enemy's movements and detect his positions.' ⁸

Within a few years, however, the First World War had undone the ordered world-view conveyed by von Schlieffen's image of the commander-in-chief 'overlooking the whole battlefield on a map'. Kern, drawing attention to the irregular geometries of that war, to 'the multiplicity of different events, observed from numerous different perspectives' that characterized both the Western and the Eastern Fronts, describes it as the Cubist War. Yet if the regularity of the composition – and the capacity to take it in at a single glance – had been shattered by the labyrinthine lines of the trenches, war soon escaped the confines of a defined battlefield altogether. There were two major developments, which will spiral through my own discussion too.

In the First World War the balloons and dirigibles were joined by aeroplanes, and the development of war from the air – whose laboratories were the fissures of empires in North Africa, the Levant, Iraq and India's North West Frontier – dramatically re-wrote the geographies of military violence. This was why Giulio Douhet's prophetic vision of war from the air, published in 1921, caused such consternation in Europe and North America:

'By virtue of this new weapon, the repercussions of war are no longer limited by the farthest artillery range of guns, but can be felt directly for hundreds and hundreds of miles... The

⁸ Stephen Kern, *The culture of time and space 1880-1918* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983) p. 300.

battlefield will be limited only by the boundaries of the nations at war, and all of their citizens will become combatants, since all of them will be exposed to the aerial offensives of the enemy. There will be no distinction any longer between soldiers and civilians.’⁹

That this was a Euro-American anxiety bears emphasis. In the inter-war years colonial counterinsurgency campaigns involved so-called ‘air policing’ or ‘air control’, and while there were serious criticisms of its effectiveness there were few legal or ethical concerns about its use. In 1932, the British High Commissioner in Iraq insisted that ‘the term “civilian population” has a very different meaning in Iraq from what it has in Europe’ so that European sensibilities about civilian casualties there were literally misplaced: ‘The whole of its male population are potential fighters,’ he explained, ‘as the tribes are heavily armed.’¹⁰ The same arguments have been repeated with depressing frequency ever since. The appeal to tribal or warrior cultures is still used to excuse the deaths of Arabs and Afghans because they ‘do not

⁹ Giulio Douhet, *Il domino dell'aria*, trans. as *The command of the air* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1942). There had been British and German air raids on cities during the First World War, but it was the scale of the assault envisioned by Douhet that sounded the alarm on both sides of the Atlantic.

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion, see Priya Satia, ‘The defense of inhumanity: Air control and the British idea of Arabia’, *American Historical Review* (2006) 16-51. One of the most perceptive criticisms of the doctrine’s effectiveness was Colonel F.S. Keen’s complaint that on the Northwest Frontier such methods, ‘by driving the inhabitants of the bombarded area from their homes in a state of exasperation, dispersing them among neighbouring clans and tribes with hatred in their hearts at what they consider “unfair” methods of warfare, bring about the exact political results which it is so important in our own interests to avoid, viz., the permanent embitterment and alienation of the frontier tribes.’ He wrote this in 1923; Andrew Exxum and David Kilcullen made exactly the same argument against the US deployment of drones in Afghanistan/Pakistan in 2009: ‘Death from above, outrage from below’, *New York Times* 17 May 2009. See also Satia, ‘From colonial air attacks to drones in Pakistan’, *New perspectives quarterly* 26 (3) (2009) 34-7.

value life' as we do and so their deaths are not grievable in the same way as the deaths of Europeans or Americans, while the claim that it is virtually impossible to separate insurgents from the civilian population in the global borderlands now threatens the very idea of the civilian (or, more accurately, of 'their' civilians).¹¹

These developments have all been mediated by visual fields, through what John Rajchman has called spaces of constructed visibility that are also always spaces of constructed invisibility: enclosures that separate what can be seen from what cannot (or must not) be seen.¹² Cinema came of age during the First World War; it was not the first war to be recorded on film, but it was the first in which the combatant states took a direct interest in the power of cinema to shape popular perceptions of the conflict. The focus was on the ground war, however, whereas the rise of bombing during the Second World War made new technical demands but also offered new opportunities. New visual technologies were invented to navigate bombers to their targets and to plot their interception by fighter aircraft, while newsreels and films were shown to mass audiences in Europe and North America to bring home the courage of their own 'boys' battling it out in the skies and to confirm the inhumanity of an enemy that attacked from the air. It was this new power of witnessing, of publics to 'see for themselves', that was the second decisive intervention. Claims for the directness and transparency of the moving image were illusions, of course, what Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously called

¹¹ Derek Gregory, 'The death of the civilian', *Environment and Planning D: Society & Space* 24 (2006) 633-638; Gregory, "'In another time zone, the bombs fall unsafely': Targets, civilians and late modern war', *Arab World Geographer* 9 (2) 88-111.

¹² John Rajchman, 'Foucault's art of seeing', *October* 44 (1988) 88-117.

the imposture of immediacy. For all their vaunted realism, the contrast between the shots of ‘our boys’ and the scenes of death and destruction brought by the ‘terror-fliers’ shows that publics were performatively produced by the ways in which these images were framed and selected. There was nothing axiomatic about it, to be sure, but once the public eye could traverse war zones the interpenetrations of military and civilian spaces became ever more intimate. Vietnam was the first war to be televised. Michael Arlen called it the ‘living room war’ – though he meant it ironically – and Marshall McLuhan insisted that this new ‘television war’ had finally collapsed ‘the dichotomy between civilian and military’ because, in his view, ‘the public is now participant in every phase of the war, and the main actions of the war are now being fought in the American home itself.’¹³ This is an intellectual conceit and, in its way, an objectionable one. Martha Rosler’s photo-montage series, ‘Bringing the war home: House beautiful’ (1967-72, transposed images of war to the American domestic interior and provided a much more visceral sense of what such a phrase might mean than McLuhan’s glib formulations.¹⁴ Others have since acknowledged that the implications of global spectatorship are contentious – familiarity does not necessarily issue in engagement or empathy¹⁵ – but the mediatization of war has undoubtedly accelerated and deepened the transformation of battlefields into complex and multi-dimensional battle spaces. When Rupert Smith argued that in today’s wars ‘we fight amongst the people’ he emphasized

¹³ Michael Arlen, *Living room war* (New York: Viking Press, 1969); Marshall McLuhan, *War and peace in the global village* (New York: Bantam, 1968) p. 134; I am necessarily simplifying a complex relationship: for a critical examination see Michael Mandelbaum, ‘Vietnam: the television war’, *Daedalus* 111 (4) (1982) 157-69.

¹⁴ She has returned to the theme in her ‘Great Power’ sequence (2004-8), which does the same for the American war in Iraq. Her work compels us to see that what she makes seem so shocking in ‘our’ space has become all too terrifyingly normal in ‘theirs’.

¹⁵ See Lilie Chouliaraki, *The spectatorship of suffering* (London: Sage, 2006).

that this new situation is ‘amplified literally and figuratively by the central role of the media: we fight in every living room in the world as well as on the streets and fields of a conflict zone.’¹⁶ Digital technologies have pushed this double process of intimacy and extension still further, and they have been exploited by advanced militaries, their adversaries and their critics. We now inhabit a world in which digital photographs of the abuse, degradation and torture of Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib – where the act of photography was itself part of their humiliation – go viral; a world in which videos of US Army firefights and IED counter-attacks are routinely posted on the Internet; and a world in which live video feeds from American drones over Afghanistan are beamed by satellite to pilots 7,000 miles away in Nevada, transmitted to air controllers, senior officers, intelligence analysts and legal advisers in US Central Command, intercepted by insurgents on the ground, and find global audiences on YouTube.

I realize that this is a cartoon history, but it does at least outline the increasingly close connections between modern war and what I am calling ‘scopic regimes’. The term was introduced by Christian Metz to distinguish the cinematic from the theatrical way of staging and seeing the world, but it has since been uncoupled from any specific forms, displays and technologies to denote a mode of visual apprehension that is culturally constructed and prescriptive, socially structured and shared.¹⁷ Like its companion term, *visuality* (which denotes culturally or techno-culturally mediated ways of

¹⁶ Rupert Smith, *The utility of force: the art of war in the modern world* (London: Penguin, 2006) p. 17.

¹⁷ Christian Metz, *The imaginary signifier: psychoanalysis and the signifier* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) p. 61; see also Martin Jay, ‘Scopic regimes of modernity’, in Hal Foster (ed), *Vision and visuality* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988) pp. 3-23; Antonio Somaini, ‘On the scopic regime’, *Leitmotiv* 5 (2005-6) 25-38.

seeing), the concept is intended as a critical supplement to the idea of vision as a purely biological-neurological capacity (I say ‘supplement’ because the embodiment of vision remains of more than incidental importance). Scopic regimes are historically variable, and different regimes co-exist within a single cultural and social formation, but the closest attention has been paid to the ligatures between visuality and modernity. Apart from a handful of studies, however, of which Paul Virilio’s *War and cinema* is probably the best known, little systematic attention has been given to the ways in which the conduct of modern wars is mediated by scopic regimes.¹⁸

This blindspot has become ever more acute, because many of the wars fought by the United States and its allies since the Second World War took place in the ‘Far East’ – Korea, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia – and since 9/11 they have all taken place within the orbit of US Central Command, which has as its focus a greater ‘Middle East’ (excluding Israel which falls within US European Command). Indeed, observers inside and outside the Pentagon have taken the military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq as models for a ‘new American way of war’. For all this, there has been little examination of the ways in which these modern wars have been inflected by

¹⁸ Paul Virilio, *War and cinema: the logistics of perception* (trans. Patrick Camiller) (London: Verso: 1989; originally published in French in 1984). As the title suggests, for Virilio as for Metz, the cinema is of central importance. At the turn of the last century, he argues, ‘cinema and aviation seemed to form a single moment’ and the conjunction of the war machine and what he calls ‘the sight machine’ ensured that in the course of the twentieth century ‘the target area had become a cinema “location”’ (p. 11). But there has been considerably more interest in the ways in which film, television, video and other visual media inflect the presentation of war than in the ways in which these visualities also enter into the *production* of military violence. There are signs that this is starting to change: see, for example, Jose Vasquez, ‘Seeing green: visual technology, virtual reality and the experience of war’, *Social analysis* 52 (2008) 87-105; Stephen Graham, *Cities under siege: the new military urbanism* (London: Verso, 2010).

the visual codes and conventions of Orientalism, so that the interrogation of these wars has been doubly blind. For these reasons we need to establish how changing scopic regimes have mediated the triangulations of modernity, Orientalism and war that frame our own, still profoundly colonial present. To fashion a preliminary answer to this question, I spool back to Napoleon and the French invasion of Egypt at the end of the eighteenth century, and then fast-forward to counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan and Iraq at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Modernity, Orientalism and War

Although Said says remarkably little about it, the occupation of Cairo and the subsequent rampage through the Levant were hideously bloody affairs. In fact, David Bell claims that the Napoleonic wars wrought such an ‘extraordinary transformation in the scope and intensity of warfare’ that they constituted ‘the first total war’ of the modern period.¹⁹ This probably needs qualification, but the proximity of modern Orientalism to modern warfare is reinforced in other ways too. Said notes more or less in passing that what most impressed the first Arab chronicler of the occupation, Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, ‘was Napoleon’s use of scholars to manage his contacts with the

¹⁹ David Bell, *The first total war: Napoleon’s Europe and the birth of warfare as we know it* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007); for a careful critique, see Michael Broers, ‘The concept of “Total War” in the Revolutionary-Napoleonic period’, *War in history* 15 (2008) 247-68. Broers is sceptical about a number of Bell’s claims about the destructive force of the wars, and he emphasizes instead the technical restrictions on ‘total war’ during this period: it was, he insists, ‘in the mind, on the drawing board, but not yet on the battlefield.’ He does accept that Bell is on much firmer ground in seeing here the (modern) transformation of adversaries into enemies, Schmitt’s ‘absolute enmity’: ‘Once intense hatreds got loose, “absolute enmity” took on a life of its own.’

natives.’²⁰ This was expediency more than cultural sensibility; the *savants* grumbled that they were required to provide all sorts of practical information for the army on a more or less daily basis and to produce what was, in effect, military intelligence. Neither they nor the troops were prepared for their first contact with a non-European city – ‘the shape of Cairo is like a great intestine filled with houses stacked on top of one another,’ complained one senior officer, ‘*without order, without regularity, without method*’ (my emphasis) – and so it was necessary to transform its multiple opacities into a singular transparency. As I said at the start, this is a characteristically Orientalist gesture – ordering what was assumed (incorrectly, as it happens) to be the disordered – and in this particular case Cairo was to be opened to the French military gaze: transformed into a spatialised object of knowledge that would make possible the surveillance, regulation and exaction of the city and its population.

This required a rapid but detailed mapping of the city and its environs. It was not difficult to establish a series of points from which to construct a *plan géométrique* – the first were fixed on the mounds of rubbish that ringed Cairo from which an expanding series of triangles was folded out into the city using the minarets of the mosques as markers – but as the surveyors moved inside the city so their task became formidably difficult because the intricacy of the streets and the numerous dead-ends made it impossible to take the long sightings that would have expedited levelling.²¹ When the map was finished it fell to one of the *savants*, Edme Jomard, to provide its

²⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 82.

²¹ Pierre Jacotin, ‘Mémoire sur la construction de la carte de l’Égypte’, in *Description de l’Égypte* vol. 17 (Paris: Panckoucke, 1824) pp. 546-7. Jacotin was the colonel in charge of the topographic section of the *ingénieurs-géographes militaires*.

key. Working with an interpreter, he spent two months annotating the plan and gathering information. He identified the names of quarters and streets in both French and Arabic, numbering them and keying them to the map, and he wrote a series of memoranda that were eventually systematized into a general essay for the *Description* that was keyed to illustrations prepared by other *savants*. The overall objective was to transport Cairo into a space of European reason, geometricized and systematized, for, as Jomard himself explained,

‘The internal plan of the city is nothing like European cities: not only are its streets and squares highly irregular but – with the exception of a few major streets – the city is almost entirely made up of very narrow streets and zig-zag branches that debouch into countless dead-ends. Each one of these districts is closed by a gate, which the inhabitants open as they please: *with the result that the interior of Cairo is very difficult to know as a whole. This could not be done until the French were masters of the city.*’²²

Jomard paid some attention to culture but his primary focus was on the topography and economy of Cairo, an emphasis that was, in part, a matter of military imperative. The army initiated a registration of private property, classifying houses by height and ‘touring the neighbourhoods to draw up lists and set down in writing with great accuracy the names of the owners’. Jabarti explained that this grid was then used to impose a system of punitive

²² Edme Jomard, ‘Description de la ville et de la citadelle du Kaire’, *Description*, vol. 18, pp. 115-6.

taxation intended to defray the escalating costs of the occupation.²³ Robert Solé concludes that the *ingénieurs-géographes* thus succeeded in untangling the ‘*capitale-labyrinthe*’ that was Cairo and ‘forcing it to give up its secrets.’

²⁴ This was true in the most physical of senses. Napoleon ordered the heavy wooden gates to each neighbourhood or *hara* to be removed and destroyed, an exercise that was redoubled after the first insurrection in October 1798, and which caused widespread public alarm both times.²⁵ Such a project was counter to the visual codes of Islam, and opening the residential quarters of the city to the gaze of outsiders, especially French men, violated the intricate performances of private, semi-private and public space that were intrinsic to the conduct of everyday life in Cairo. It is scarcely surprising that, during the first insurrection, one of the targets of the crowd should have been the lodgings of ‘the inspector for fortifications and trenches’, where ‘many strange mechanical and optical devices’ used by the surveyors were smashed or carried off. ‘They searched long for these instruments,’ Jabarti recorded, ‘and gave those who returned them huge rewards.’²⁶ The inhabitants evidently understood that mapping was a weapon of war.

²³ *Napoleon in Egypt: Al Jabarti's Chronicle of the French occupation, 1798* (Princeton NJ: Markus Wiener, 1993) p. 61, 69, 71 [this was Jabarti's first version of events and covered the first six months of the occupation]; Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, *Journal d'un notable du Caire durant l'expédition française 1798-1801* (trans. Joseph Cucocq) (Paris: Albin Michel, 1979) pp. 67-8, 75, 80-1. Jabarti provided three different accounts of the occupation; for a summary discussion and a careful delineation of Jabarti's own position(s), see André Raymond, *Égyptiens et français au Caire, 1798-1801* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1998) pp. 3-5.

²⁴ Solé, *Savants*, p. 163.

²⁵ Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, *History of Egypt* (ed. Thomas Philipp and Moshe Perlmann) (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1994) Vol. III, p. 21; Jabarti, *Chronicle*, pp. 46, 101.

²⁶ Jabarti, *History*, p. 49.



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

I have rehearsed the production of this map – Figure 1 is the reduced (1:100,000) version that appears in the *Description*: the original was produced at a scale of 1:200 to capture as much detail as possible – for two reasons. First, you might protest that there is nothing intrinsically Orientalist about a modern (nominally ‘scientific’) map, even this one, and perfectly properly insist that cartography has never been an exclusively European or even colonial project. But this is to treat the map as an object – as what Bruno Latour calls an ‘immutable mobile’ – whereas a contrary, and I think more powerful analysis views the map as an *event* and directs attention to the *mappings* through which it flickers into momentary presence and to the

wider ensemble of *practices* within which they are activated.²⁷ Seen thus, situated within the web of military operations that produced and sustained Cairo as a city under French occupation, this is an unstable but profoundly Orientalist inscription. Secondly, mapping Cairo, transporting it into the cognitive space of European reason, involved what an Arab writer once called *intizam al-manzar*, the organization of the view, which enabled the French to ‘see’ the paper city in a way that was impossible for them on the ground. By such means, a claim to certainty and truth was registered so that, as Timothy Mitchell puts it, ‘everything seems ordered and organized, calculated and rendered unambiguous.’ This was achieved through a novel machinery that installed a distinction between representation and reality – what Mitchell identifies as ‘the world-as-exhibition’ – whose distinctively modern ‘exhibitionary order’, as he also shows, has an intimate association with colonialism and Orientalism. This apparatus turns on the production of a detachment and distance between the viewing subject and the object of the gaze – on the power ‘to separate oneself from the world and thus constitute it as a panorama’ – and, by extension, on a radical difference between the city of the occupiers and the city of the occupants that is, I think, formally equivalent to the distinction between ‘our space’ and ‘their space’ rendered by Said’s concept of an imaginative geography.²⁸ Both the cartographic

²⁷ I don’t have the space to elaborate this argument here, though I try to exemplify it below; but on what is, in effect, the performativity of cartographic reason, see John Pickles, *A history of spaces: cartographic reason, mapping and the geo-coded world* (New York: Routledge, 2004), and Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge, ‘Rethinking maps’, *Progress in human geography* 31 (2007) 331-344. The latter argue that maps cannot be located outside the interpretive fields through which they are co-constituted – which is precisely why they cannot be ‘immutable mobiles’ – and they treat maps as productions that are ‘constantly in motion, always seeking to appear ontologically secure’.

²⁸ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) pp. 12-13, 24, 29; for variations and developments of Mitchell’s argument, see Mitchell,

order and the exhibitionary order depended on the establishment of what Mitchell calls ‘viewing platforms’ (like mounds of rubbish or minarets) from which, ideally, ‘one could see and yet not be seen.’²⁹

Both these ideas – mappings and exhibitionary orders – can illuminate the scopic regimes of American military adventurism in our own century. There are parallels between the French invasion of Egypt and the American invasion of Afghanistan two hundred years later, but the closest comparison is with the American invasion of Iraq. Talleyrand assured the new French government that the expedition would pay for itself (France would incur ‘only moderate expenses, for which the Republic will soon receive full remuneration’) and that the troops would be warmly welcomed (‘the people will look upon us with transports of joy’); Napoleon described the mission as a project of liberation, and declared himself a friend of Islam who had come to free the people of Egypt from tyrannical oppression; the expedition was a hastily-arranged, ill-informed and poorly-equipped affair; the spectacular Battle of the Pyramids outside Cairo terrified the population (‘To the people it appeared as if the earth were shaking and the sky falling on it’ and they ‘were all in a state of extreme fear, terror and anticipation of perdition’); the French superimposed their own *ville française* over the capital, projecting their power from four bases, one of which – Napoleon’s *Quartier-Général* – was located in the grandest palace in the city; the French

‘The world-as-exhibition’, *Comparative studies in society and history* 31 (1989) 217-36; Mitchell, ‘Orientalism and the exhibitionary order’, in Nicholas Dirks (ed.), *Colonialism and culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992) pp. 289-318. For critical discussions, see Sami Zubaida, ‘Exhibitions of power’, *Economy and society* 19 (1990) 359-75; Charles Hirschkind, “‘Egypt at the exhibition’: reflections on the optics of colonialism”, *Critique of anthropology* 11 (1991) 279-98. I also discuss this apparatus in *Geographical imaginations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

²⁹ Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, p. 24.

military administration established a parallel civilian administration, the Administrative Commission, and ruled through Arab intermediaries; the occupation was challenged by two major insurrections that resulted in great loss of life; and it ended with the withdrawal of the French army and, eventually, the emergence of a new authoritarian ruler.

In saying all this I don't mean to imply that the one was a template for the other, or that nothing has changed in the intervening two hundred years. Orientalism is still abroad, and it is necessary to expose its reactivations of colonial imaginaries, dispositions and practices. But it is also important to identify what is new about the constellations established by neo-Orientalism and late modern war, and the counterinsurgency campaigns conducted by the United States and its allies in Afghanistan and Iraq provide vivid examples of this old-new paradigm.

Orientalism and counterinsurgency

There is a long if not distinguished tradition of military Orientalism that counterposes different cultures of war, 'Occidental' and 'Oriental', but there are other versions of martial Orientalism that seek to capitalize on cultural knowledge of 'the Orient' that can also be traced back to a colonial past but which continue to haunt military operations in what David Ucko calls 'the new counterinsurgency era'.³⁰ Counterinsurgency has a complex colonial genealogy and draws on American, British and French experience over 150 years, but in its most recent incarnation it not only treats cultural knowledge

³⁰ Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern war through Western eyes* (London: Hurst, 2009); David Ucko, *The new counterinsurgency era: Transforming the US military for modern wars* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009).

as a ‘force multiplier’ but also seeks to transform culture into a ‘weapon system’.³¹ Most of the critical discussions of this cultural turn focus on the revised counterinsurgency doctrine issued jointly by the US Army and US Marine Corps in December 2006. There are good reasons for this – not least the orchestrated fanfare of publicity that heralded its publication – but the new canon is not limited to a single text. Army Field Manual 3-24: *Counterinsurgency* was preceded by (and often drew upon) a number of other texts, many of them based on improvisations and experiments by responsive commanders in the field who were dissatisfied with the prevailing orthodoxy, and it has since been supplemented by a series of other official publications.³² But more than this, counterinsurgency is not a purely textual construction – although it is easy to forget this when reading some of the critiques from the academy – and there are many differences, slippages and even reversals in the turbulent passages between doctrine, training and operations.

For all these reasons (and others) it is a mistake to reduce counterinsurgency to Orientalism. But one of the most direct routes across this crowded terrain from Orientalism to optics, from claims about Afghan and Iraqi culture to the scopic regimes that shape the conduct of American

³¹ Cf. Rochelle Davis, “‘Culture as a weapon system’”, *Middle East Report* 255 (2010); I provided a detailed discussion of the contemporary cultural turn in Derek Gregory, ‘The rush to the intimate: counterinsurgency and the cultural turn in late modern war’, *Radical philosophy* 150 (2008) 8-23.

³² US Army Field Manual 3-24: *Counterinsurgency* (December 2006); a minimal list of subsequent official publications would include the *Human Terrain Handbook* (2008); AFM 3-24.2: *Tactics in Counterinsurgency* (March 2009) and Joint Publication 3.24: *Counterinsurgency operations* (October 2009). As the numbering makes clear, the original Field Manual remains the foundation stone, but other structures have been built upon it.

counterinsurgency, is through the figure of T.E. Lawrence: ‘Lawrence of Arabia’. There are few modern experts in this self-styled ‘graduate level of war’ who do not acknowledge their debt to him. The title of John Nagl’s influential book on counterinsurgency lessons from Malaya to Vietnam, *Learning to eat soup with a knife*, was taken from Lawrence’s description of ‘making war on rebellion’ in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, and I doubt that it is a coincidence that the US Army’s Human Terrain System was based on ‘seven pillars’. Its lead authors identified Lawrence’s writings as ‘standard reading for those searching for answers to the current insurgencies’, and an early pre-deployment Primer reprinted Lawrence’s ‘27 Articles’ as an appendix. So too does the latest gloss on AFM 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, which also reprints the seminal memorandum on counterinsurgency written by David Kilcullen, General David Petraeus’s senior counterinsurgency adviser, which was entitled ‘28 Articles’. This first circulated as an e-mail among US Army officers, and Kilcullen subsequently expanded it in his own album of ‘snapshots of wartime thinking’ called *Counterinsurgency*. His admiration for (even identification with) Lawrence could not be plainer. No army will ever have ‘more than a small number of individuals’ with a gift for ‘cultural leverage’, he writes, mavericks ‘in the mould of Lawrence’. ³³

³³ John Nagl, *Learning to eat soup with a knife: counterinsurgency lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) (Lawrence wrote that making ‘war upon rebellion was messy and slow, like eating soup with a knife’); Jacob Kipp, Lester Grau, Karl Prinslow, Don Smith, ‘The Human Terrain System: a CORDS for the 21st century’, *Military Review*, September-October 2006: 8-15; LTC William Wunderle, *Through the lens of cultural awareness: a Primer for US Armed Forces deploying to Arab and Middle Eastern Countries* (Fort Leavenworth KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2007) Appendix B p. 115; T.E. Lawrence, ‘The 27 Articles of T.E. Lawrence’, *The Arab Bulletin* vol. 60, 20 August 1917; David Kilcullen, ‘Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of company-level counterinsurgency’, *Military Review*, May-June 2006: 103-8; Kilcullen, ‘Countering global insurgency’, *Journal of strategic studies* 28 (2005) 597-617: 614; Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

This is more than intellectual homage, a ritual obeisance to a past master.³⁴ For Lawrence is a totem, a powerful representation of a close encounter with an other who remains obdurately Other. His talismanic invocation repeats the classical Orientalist gesture of rendering ‘the Orient’ timeless: taking Lawrence as your guide to insurgency in Baghdad is like having Mark Twain show you round Las Vegas. Not surprisingly, both Iraq and Afghanistan are reduced to ‘tribal society’ – cartoons masquerading as anthropology³⁵ – and while the new doctrine acknowledges that ‘American ideas of what is “normal” or “rational” are not universal’ (perhaps the single most remarkable sentence in the book) it leaves no doubt about whose ideas are ‘right’.³⁶ In myriad ways the cultural turn continues the exorbitation of cultural difference that is at the heart of Orientalism. It acknowledges that there are cultural practices and values to be understood – the Other is no longer a mute threat or an opaque signifier – but it locates these in a separate space that provides little accommodation for commonality, mutuality or transculturation. The emphasis on cultural difference – the attempt to hold the Other at a distance while claiming to cross the interpretative divide – produces a diagram in which violence has its origins in ‘their’ space, which

³⁴ See also Marilyn Young, ‘Lost in the desert: Lawrence and the theory and practice of counterinsurgency’, in David Ryan and Patrick Kiely (eds), *America and Iraq: policy-making, intervention and regional politics* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2009) pp. 76-91. There are of course others, notably David Gallula whose role in the French ‘pacification’ of Algeria is also supposed to provide object lessons in counterinsurgency.

³⁵ Others have sharpened this point from their military experience. See, for example, LTC Michael Eisenstadt, ‘Tribal engagement: lessons learned’, *Military Review*, September-October 2007: 16-31 (on Iraq); Paul Meinshausen and Shaun Wheeler, ‘Tribes and Afghanistan: choosing more appropriate tools to understand the population’, *Small Wars Journal* (June 2010). See also Keith Stanski, “So these folks are aggressive”: an Orientalist reading of “Afghan warlords”, *Security dialogue* 40 (2009) 73-94.

³⁶ AFM 3.24 § 1-80.

the cultural turn endlessly partitions through its obsessive preoccupation with ethno-sectarian or tribal division, while the impulse to understand is confined to ‘our’ space, which is constructed as open, unitary and generous: the locus of a hermeneutic invitation that can never be reciprocated.³⁷

When the new doctrine was published its unwavering focus – naturally enough, given its origins – was on ground operations in which the US Army and Marine Corps would take the lead. To the anger of many officers in the US Air Force, air operations were relegated to a supporting role outlined in the very last appendix, which acknowledged the importance of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance from ‘air-mounted collection platforms’ and (in certain circumstances) the ‘enormous value’ of ‘precision air attacks’.³⁸ This may all seem a world away from Lawrence, but long before he resigned his Army commission and re-enlisted in the Royal Air Force as Aircraftsman Ross, he had been drawn to the wide open spaces of the sky as well as those of the desert. Patrick Deer suggests that in Lawrence’s personal mythology ‘air control in the Middle East offered a redemptive postscript to his role in the Arab Revolt of 1916-18’. He had imagined the Arab Revolt ‘as a kind of modernist vortex,’ Deer argues, fluid and dynamic, ‘without front or back,’ and in *Seven Pillars* he recommended ‘not disclosing ourselves till we attack.’ To Lawrence, and to many others at the time, the intimation of a nomadic future war gave air power a special significance. ‘What the Arabs did yesterday,’ he wrote, ‘the Air Forces may do tomorrow – yet more swiftly.’ As Priya Satia has shown, this rested not only on a military Orientalism that distinguished different ways of war but also on a *cultural*

³⁷ Gregory, ‘The rush to the intimate’.

³⁸ AFM 3-24 § E.5-E.11.

Orientalism that represented bombing as signally *appropriate* to the people of these lands. This was, minimally, about intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. ‘According to this pervserse logic, Satia explains, ‘the RAF’s successful persecution of a village testified to their *intimacy* with the people on the ground, without which they would not have been able to strike it accurately.’ More than this, however, ‘the claim to empathy ultimately underwrote the entire air control system with its authoritative reassurances that bombardment was a tactic that would be respected and expected in this unique land.’ From this perspective, Satia continues, Arabs saw bombing as ‘pulling the strings of fate from the sky.’ They understood it ‘not as punishment,’ so Lawrence informed his readers, ‘but as misfortune from heaven striking the community.’ And if women and children were killed in the process that was supposedly of little consequence to them: what mattered were the deaths of ‘the really important men.’³⁹ As far as I know, Lawrence has not been invoked by any of the contemporary advocates of airpower in counterinsurgency, but many of these formulations, translated into an ostensibly more scientific vocabulary, reappear in debates about the deployment of drones in Afghanistan. Their mission is not only to provide intelligence through their persistent presence over the war zone but to capitalize on that knowledge to conduct accurate strikes; and many of those strikes, especially those conducted across the border in Pakistan by the CIA, are directed (im)precisely at killing what are described as ‘high value targets’: that is, ‘the really important men’.

³⁹ Patrick Deer, ‘From Lawrence of Arabia to Aircraftsman Ross: air power’s imperial romance’, in his *Culture in camouflage: war, empire and modern British literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) pp. 64-73; Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: the Great War and the cultural foundations of Britain’s covert empire in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) pp. 242, 249-51, 256-8.

If Lawrence casts a long shadow, however, it is refracted through the prism of a decidedly contemporary counterinsurgency whose techno-cultural apparatus has transformed the battle space in two ways. First, conventional warfare has traditionally been fought in territorial terms that require the detection, capture or destruction of determinate objectives like buildings, gun batteries or missile silos that are for the most part fixed, whereas counterinsurgency is fought within a multi-dimensional battle space in which the contours of the enemy are indeterminate and fluid. This has necessitated the development of visual technologies that can overlay the object-ontology of conventional warfare with an event-ontology adequate to the speed at which these hybrid, late modern wars are conducted.⁴⁰ Second, this in its turn has involved the operationalization of a scopic regime that, from the point of view of the American military, makes the battle space fully transparent. This is about more than dispelling the ‘fog of war’. Because counterinsurgency is now as much about the population as the insurgents – because it involves anatomizing the population, tracking the movements of insurgents through the population and their interactions with the population – it becomes necessary to expose the ‘human terrain’ to view in an intimate, continuous and time-sensitive manner. To probe the recesses of everyday life requires more than ‘intelligence from three-letter agencies and satellite photographs’, as one smart colonel recognized, but it also

⁴⁰ The ghost in this particular machine is again Virilio. ‘Space is no longer in geography,’ he once declared, ‘it’s in electronics’, and for this very reason ‘the distribution of territory’ yields – he actually wrote ‘becomes’ – ‘the distribution of time’: Paul Virilio, *Pure War* (New York: Semiotexte), 1983) p. 115; see also his *Speed and politics* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986). But in this case exorcism is long overdue; like so many other versions of the ‘end of geography’ thesis, this depends upon a dismally absolutist conception of ‘geography’.

involves more than a ‘conflict ethnography’ that mimics what Andrew Bickford ‘the panoptic conceits of early anthropology’. ⁴¹ At the limit it requires a techno-cultural apparatus capable of securing a militarized regime of comprehensive and constant *hypervisibility*:

‘Visibility is a complex system of permission and prohibition, and hysterical blindness... Hypervisibility is a kind of obscenity of accuracy that abolishes the distinctions between “permission and prohibition, presence and absence.” In a culture seemingly ruled by technologies of hypervisibility, we are led to believe that neither repression nor the return of the repressed, in the form of either improperly buried bodies or countervailing systems of value or difference, occurs with any meaningful result.’ ⁴²

Let me now show how these modalities operate in practice.

Securing Baghdad: counterinsurgency and the event-ful city ⁴³

The new counterinsurgency doctrine has been remarkably, radically visible, and Nicholas Mirzoeff argues that visibility plays a central role in its implementation too. He suggests that ‘the Petraeus doctrine’, as he calls it, endorses a ‘sovereign visibility’ where the commander is supposed to see the

⁴¹ Wunderle, ‘Through the lens of cultural awareness’, p. 3; Andrew Bickford, ‘Anthropology and HUMINT’, in Network of Concerned Anthropologists, *The Counter-counterinsurgency Manual* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2009) pp. 135-151: 147.

⁴² Avery Gordon, *Ghostly matters: haunting and the sociological imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) pp. 15-16.

⁴³ This section is derived from the fuller discussion in Derek Gregory, ‘Seeing Red: Baghdad and the event-ful city’, *Political geography* 29 (2010) in press.

battle space as a totality and where its unfamiliar cultural terrain is transformed into a simulacrum of a video game that troops can navigate with supreme confidence.⁴⁴ It is, I think, more complicated than that. Multiple visual technologies have been deployed by the US Army in Baghdad, but two systems can exemplify the basic elements: the Command Post of the Future and the Tactical Ground Reporting Network.

The Command Post of the Future (CPOF) is a networked collaboration and visualization system, a sort of super Geographical Information System that allows commanders to see ‘anywhere in the battle space’ and their subordinates to see their own actions within the evolving operational situation. In Baghdad the system tracked the real-time movement of troops and the incidence of events to produce the city as what Caroline Croser calls an ‘event-ful battle space’. In contrast to visualizations derived from static (‘dead’) databases, CPOF operates on live data. It provides multiple screen images of the battle space that ‘do not cohere but exist layered (side by side), and do not stay the same but alter moment to moment’ (Figure 2). As Croser emphasizes, within this system Baghdad was ‘never resolved into a single, definite picture’ and the battle space was made to appear as ‘constantly updated, fluid and always in the process of construction.’⁴⁵ This allowed the US Army to assert visual and hence – at least in principle – physical control over the contingent, which is the fulcrum of late modern security practices. In Baghdad, those practices

⁴⁴ Nicholas Mirzoeff, ‘War is culture: Global counterinsurgency, visibility and the Petraeus doctrine’, *PMLA* 124 (5) (2009) 1737-1746.

⁴⁵ Caroline Croser, ‘Networking security in the space of the city: event-ful battlespaces and the contingency of the encounter.’ *Theory and event* 10:2 (2007); see also Croser, *The new spatiality of security: operational uncertainty and the US military in Iraq* (London: Routledge, 2010).

required the performance of a continuous audit that compiled reports of significant events (Significant Activity Reports or SIGACTS) and correlated the incidence of those ‘enemy actions’ with a series of civil, commercial and environmental indicators of the population at large. This mattered because counterinsurgency required the simultaneous pursuit of ‘kinetic’ (offensive) and ‘non-kinetic’ (reconstruction) operations: hence Kilcullen’s vainglorious description of it as ‘armed social work’. These multiple, overlapping lines of operation reappeared on the multiple screens of the CPOF, so that there was a close correspondence between the technical and the conceptual: ‘CPOF was in some ways the perfect technology for COIN operations.’⁴⁶



Figure 2: Command Post of the Future

⁴⁶ Caroline Croser, ‘Organising complexity: modes of behaviour in a networked battlespace’, Australian Army, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Working Paper 133 (2007) p. 38.

CPOF is a command-level system, however, and counterinsurgency requires a closely textured *local* knowledge. The Tactical Ground Reporting Network (TIGR) is a virtual notebook, a militarized combination of Google Earth and a Wiki, into which troops upload their own digital images, videos and field observations to produce a different sort of collaborative, interactive database. Like CPOF, the focus of TIGR is on a map-based interface that allows users to pull back events, people and places within a designated area or along a specified patrol route. Unlike CPOF, however, the system is permissive not prescriptive, and it is predicated on the rapid, horizontal transmission of information rather than the vertical chain of command and control. The transition from a sovereign model of information to a capillary model, where the threshold of visibility is lowered towards the close-in, meshes with the new counterinsurgency doctrine, and it rapidly reinforced the production of Baghdad as an event-ful city by inverting the pyramid in which satellite feeds and imagery from high-altitude drones and other centralized resources were first analyzed at command levels and then filtered down to ground troops, and substituting a much more fluid, ‘just-in-time’ system of monitoring, analysis and decision.

Bush’s Baghdad was hardly the Corsican’s Cairo, and the Iraqi capital was seen as a (degraded) modern city rather than an Orientalist labyrinth. But the Americans had as much trouble reading the signs as the French had had in Cairo, and the US Army was just as determined to open the occupied city to its gaze. These two systems, in concert with others like the biometric scanning of the local population, provided a more intimate mapping than Napoleon’s *ingénieurs-géographes* could ever have imagined: fluid rather

than fixed, live rather than dead, interrogatory rather than inert. Yet when these mappings were re-presented to public audiences, their liquidity congealed into the sovereign map. While these new technologies produced Baghdad as ‘messy, complex and ever-mutable’, capturing the quicksilver capacity of the insurgency, the public assertion of command – the public performance of that crucial operational competence – required the event-ful city to be staged as an ordered, coherent totality. This was achieved by exporting these mappings of the city to digital display systems and incorporating them into Press Briefings that worked to stabilize Baghdad visually, imaginatively and rhetorically.

As the violence on the streets of Baghdad intensified, it became increasingly dangerous for journalists and camera crews to chase their own stories, and this gave the Press Briefings conducted by Multi-National Force Iraq at its Combined Press Information Centre in Baghdad’s Green Zone an extraordinary power. Briefers constantly asserted that only the US military had the capacity for ‘top sight’ – the ability to integrate reporting chains ‘at the top’ and so see the city as a whole – and only the US military could guarantee ‘ground truth’ through its deployment of armed patrols and surveillance drones. Baghdad was staged cartographically through two sorts of plots: fleeting traces of terrorist and insurgent activity (Figure 3) and tracks of military operations against al-Qaeda in Iraq, insurgent cells and death squads (Figure 4).

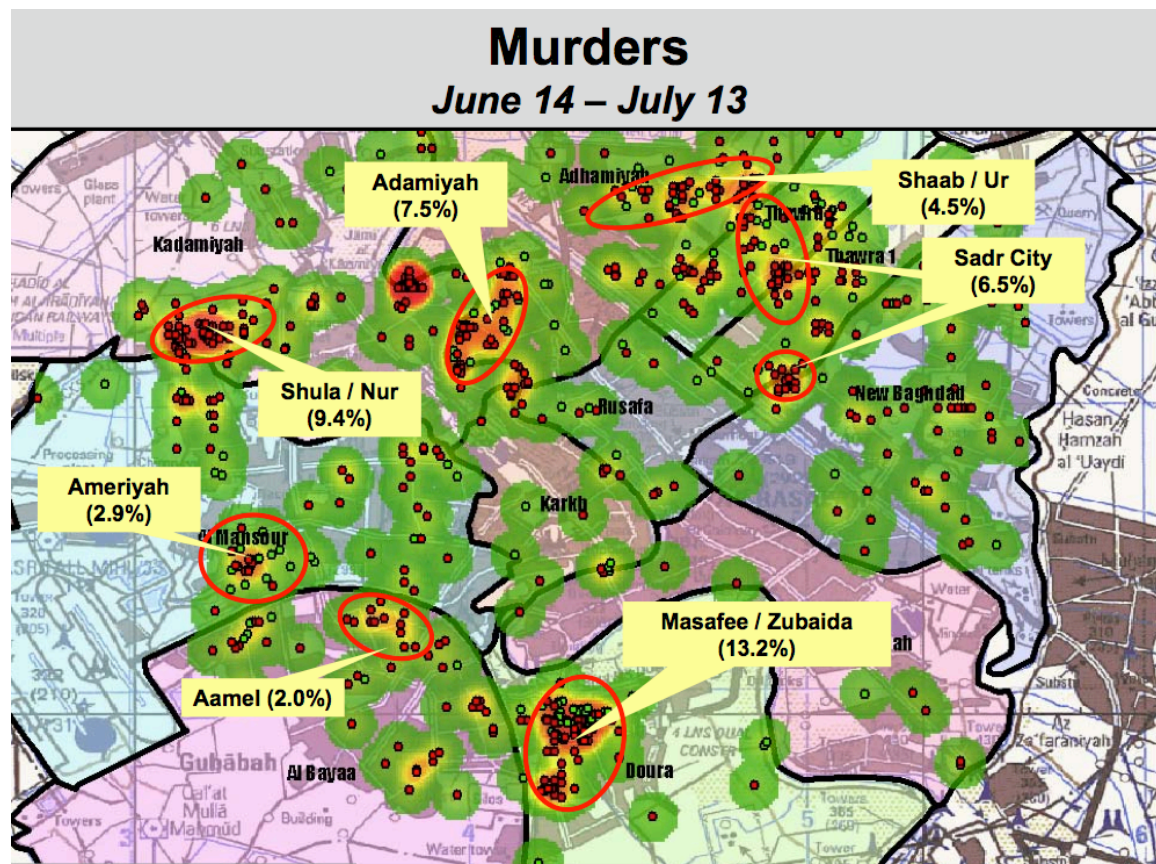


Figure 3: Murders in Baghdad, 14 June – 13 July 2006

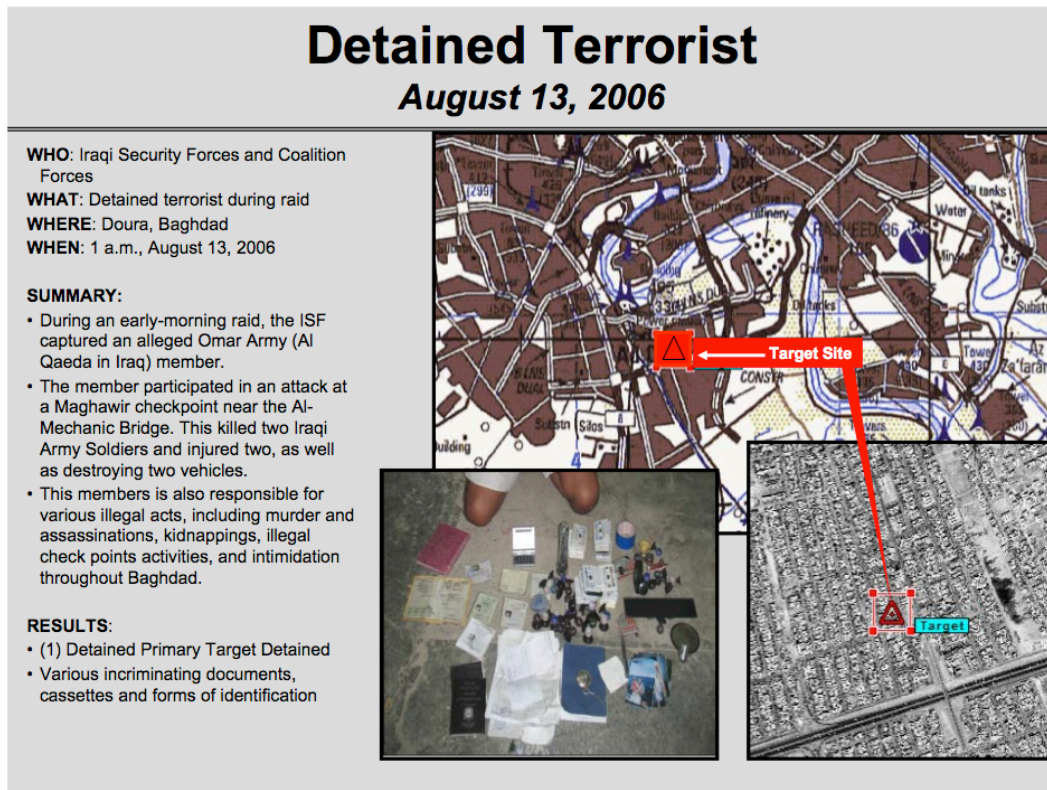


Figure 4: Detention of a terrorist, 13 August 2006

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

grid put in place through maps and surveillance imagery (Figure 4). As Louise Amoore notes, visualization strategies like these ‘secure the presence of a rational observer’ with the power – the conjunction of Reason and resources – to bring order to the disordered.⁴⁷ The counter-view is put most succinctly by a character in William Boyd’s *Ice-Cream War* who finds himself in a war-zone for the first time: ‘Gabriel thought maps should be banned. They gave the world an order and a reasonableness which it didn’t possess.’ But that was precisely the point: the maps were offered as a visible sign of operational competence, confirming the military’s capacity to be on top of what was going down.

These mappings produced the city as a space pockmarked by and constituted through cascades of events that could be generalized into smooth surfaces that captured the intensification or containment of the violence (Figure 5). If Baghdad was not reduced to the object-space of conventional combat, however, neither was it seen as the emergent field of practices that would have been consistent with a culturally informed analysis. Instead, within this event-ontology the framing narrative – the ‘command message’ – was one in which the actions of ‘the enemy’, exhibited on one series of maps, were confounded by the actions of the military, exhibited on another. Cultural sensibility was limited to a ritual ‘*Sala’am aleikum*’ at the start of the briefing and interpretation to a stark dualism, endlessly repeated, in which the intentions of ‘the enemy’ were counterposed to the wishes of ‘the people’; how either were divined remained a mystery, but the strategy

⁴⁷ Louise Amoore, ‘Vigilant visualities: the watchful politics of the ‘War on Terror’, *Security Dialogue* 38 (2007) 215-232: 226

conveniently re-positioned the American military as watching over, making sense of but ultimately not responsible for the situation.

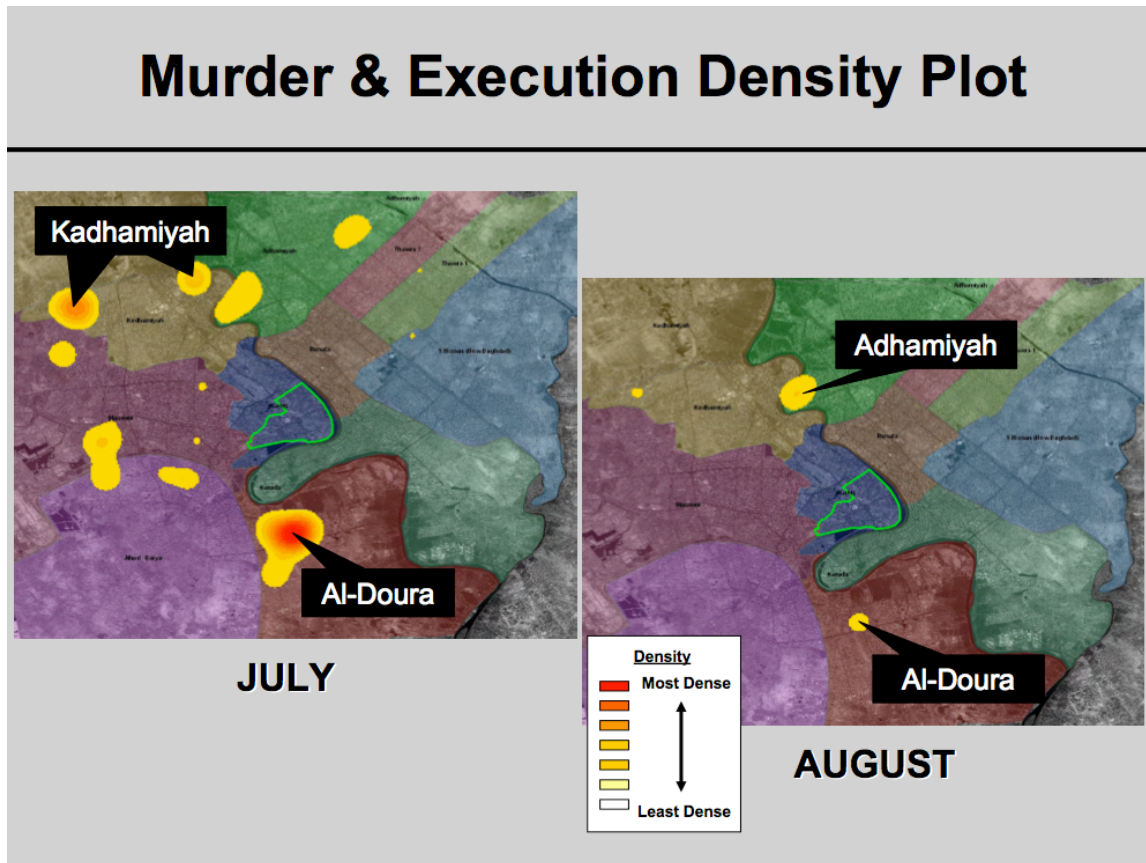


Figure 5: Murders and executions in Baghdad, July-August 2006

From a view to a kill: drones and counterinsurgency in Afghanistan⁴⁸

Less than a month after 9/11, one of Britain's most prominent military historians, Sir John Keegan, offered an explanation of those terrible events in starkly Orientalist terms. 'Westerners fight face to face, in stand-up battle, and go on until one side or the other gives in,' he declared, while 'Orientals, by contrast, shrink from pitched battle, which they often deride as a sort of game, preferring ambush, surprise, treachery and deceit as the best way to overcome an enemy.' On September 11, the Oriental way of war 'returned in an absolutely traditional form. Arabs, appearing suddenly out of empty space like their desert raider ancestors, assaulted the heartlands of Western power in a terrifying surprise raid and did appalling damage.' He went on to claim that 'this war belongs within the much larger spectrum of a far older conflict between settled, creative, productive Westerners and predatory, destructive Orientals.'⁴⁹ With exquisite irony, on the same day that Keegan was composing his wretched column the United States flew its first armed Predator mission over Kabul and Kandahar.

Keegan's intervention was not only absurdly racist, it conspicuously failed to recognize the predatory nature of the 'new imperialism'.⁵⁰ This was scarcely surprising for someone of Keegan's conservative views, but it

⁴⁸ This section is confined to the drone missions flown by the USAF in Afghanistan; it is derived from the fuller discussion in Derek Gregory, 'Predatory wars', forthcoming, where I also examine the missions conducted by CIA-operated drones in Pakistan.

⁴⁹ John Keegan, 'In this war of civilizations the West will prevail', *Daily Telegraph* 8 October 2001. He was not alone in his racism: see Gregory, *Colonial present*, pp. 58-9 and *passim*.

⁵⁰ David Harvey, *The new imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). This makes Said's observation all the more prescient. 'Orientalism has been successfully accommodated to the new imperialism': *Orientalism*, p. 322.

was surely strange for him to ignore the military transformations of the last thirty years. Also writing in the shadow of the Twin Towers – and, let us not forget, the Pentagon – sociologist Zygmunt Bauman offered a contrary and much more convincing reading when he argued, in an uncanny echo of Lawrence, that contemporary ‘globalizing wars’ conducted by advanced militaries are ‘reminiscent of the warfare strategy of nomadic tribes’ and depend on an ‘ability to descend from nowhere without notice and vanish again without warning’.⁵¹ This is the return of Lawrence with a vengeance, and Bauman saw this ‘haunting’ as part of the ‘re-enchantment of war’ that Christopher Coker seems to find so admirable and James Der Derian so objectionable. He continued:

‘Remote as they are from their targets, scurrying over those they hit too fast to witness the devastation they cause and the blood they spill, the pilots-turned-computer-operators hardly ever have a chance of looking their victims in the face and to survey the human misery they have sowed. Military professionals of our time see no corpses and no wounds.’⁵²

⁵¹ Zygmunt Bauman, ‘Wars of the globalization era’, *European journal of social theory* 4 (2001) 11-28: 15. Bauman opposed ‘globalizing wars’, designed to make the world safe for capital through the production of a smooth global space under the sign of a ‘liquid’ modernity, to ‘globalization-induced wars’ that were reactive and defensive, fought around the particularities of place. I think this unconvincing; the latter, ‘new wars’, are not mere responses to globalization but are also deeply involved in trans-local formations and deformations that constitute a sort of ‘shadow globalization’. Afghanistan is no exception. See Derek Gregory, ‘War and peace’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 35 (2010) 154-86.

⁵² Bauman, ‘Wars’, p. 27; Christopher Coker, *The future of war: the re-enchantment of war in the twenty-first century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network* (New York: Routledge, 2009; second edition). This sense of abstraction has a much longer history than Bauman allows, and one might say much the same about most air campaigns,

This is an easy jibe to make from a desk, but it was true of the high-level bombing campaign that preceded the ground invasion of Afghanistan, which was conducted by conventional aircraft and long-range missiles, and which Allen Feldman castigated as a ‘new Orientalism’.⁵³ It was – and remains – a far cry from the brutal intimacy of ground war. To many critics, however, the subsequent extensive deployment of drones has made that sense of optical detachment even more complete. Although these Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) or Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPAs) are launched from airbases in Afghanistan, most of their missions are controlled via Ku-band satellite link by operators from one of six Ground Control Stations in the continental United States (Figure 6).⁵⁴ When Robert Kaplan visited the Global Operations Center at Creech Air Force Base in Nevada, he was told: “‘Inside that trailer is Iraq, inside the other, Afghanistan’” (Figure 7). In other words, Kaplan explained, ‘Inside those trailers you leave North America, which falls under Northern Command, and enter the Middle East,

including the combined bombing offensive over Germany during the Second World War. But what Bauman is getting at is the emergence of a new visual technology of abstraction, and the speed-rush that he invokes can be traced back to the Balkans wars. As one NATO pilot explained: ‘Killing people does not go through your mind [...] From the air, the human factor doesn’t mean what it would in an army guy. When you’re a fighter pilot, you don’t see eyes. You see things – a building, a truck, a bridge, a dam. It’s all so technological. I had no Serbian in mind [...] I was shooting at a radar pulse.’ Cristina Masters, ‘Bodies of technology’, *International feminist journal of politics* 7 (2005) 112-132: 123.

⁵³ Allen Feldman, ‘Ground Zero Point One: on the cinematics of history’, *Social analysis* 46 (2002) 110-19. Here the painstaking work of Mark Herold in recovering the record of those killed by US air strikes in Afghanistan is indispensable.

⁵⁴ The 7,000 mile distance imposes a delay in control inputs that makes it impossible for them to perform take-offs and landings, which are the responsibility of forward deployed Launch and Recovery crews that use a line-of-sight data link.

the domain of Central Command. So much for the tyranny of geography.’⁵⁵ But to critics of the drone missions, there is another tyranny of geography in which, by these means, power is projected not only without vulnerability – as the US Air Force frequently asserts – but without compunction. Distance lends re-enchantment, you might say.⁵⁶

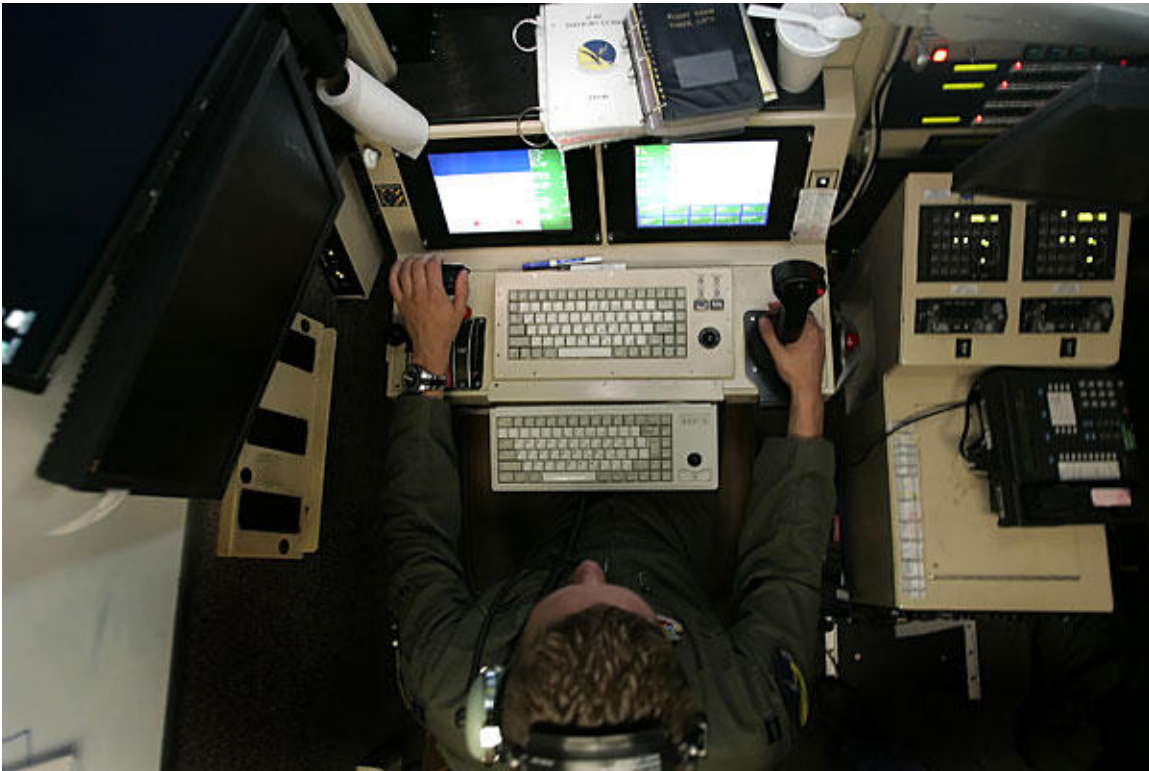


Figure 6: Flying a drone over Afghanistan

⁵⁵ Robert Kaplan, ‘Hunting the Taliban in Las Vegas’, *Atlantic Monthly*, September 2006: 81. Now Britain’s Royal Air Force also controls its drones over Afghanistan from Creech AFB.

⁵⁶ Dave Webb, Loring Wirbel and Bill Sulzman, ‘From space no one can watch you die’, *Peace Review* 22 (2010) 31-39.



*Figure 7: 'Inside that trailer is Afghanistan...'
(Creech Air Force Base, Nevada)*

As the Predators and Reapers flown by the USAF have become more closely integrated into counterinsurgency, however, that picture has become more complicated. The Air Force estimates that counterinsurgency requires three to four times as much intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance as major combat operations because it involves a fluid target set that requires the much longer dwell times that only drones can sustain. Ground operators can be changed at the end of a shift while the aircraft remains on station and the video stream is uninterrupted. The standard multi-spectral targeting system in the drones provides real-time full-motion video feed but its field of view is restricted. When the camera zooms in observers complain that

‘it’s like looking through a soda straw.’ This will change with the introduction of the ‘Gorgon Stare’, which will enable a single Reaper to stream 12 live video feeds by the end of this year and 65 by 2012 (Figure 8). The images will be quilted into a single, tiled mosaic that will, in principle, allow individuals and movements to be tracked through multiple networks. The production of a macro-field of micro-field vision solves one problem by creating another, and the Air Force has become keenly aware of the danger of ‘swimming in sensors and drowning in data’. A video camera collects over 100,000 image frames per hour, and the US Air Force has already archived 400,000 hours of video from Predators and other remote platforms; the rate of accession is rapidly accelerating as ISR coverage is increased. To cope with this image surge, the analytical field has been expanded too. Drone operators are part of an extended network that includes commanders, controllers and military lawyers at Central Command’s Combined Air and Space Operations Center at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar and data analysts and image technicians at its Distributed Common Ground System at Langley Air Force Base in the United States. Experiments are also under way with automated software systems for ‘truthing’ and annotating video imagery (Figure 10), and new TV technologies are being explored to tag and retrieve images. These developments reinforce the ‘rush to the intimate’ that characterizes counterinsurgency operations on the ground. The increase in resolution level allows for close monitoring of individuals and ‘patterns of life’, and the hierarchies of this extended apparatus are flat and fluid too so that the spaces of these missions are complex and compound. They are performed in video feeds and online chat rooms, whose spaces are intimately interconnected: as one Air Force colonel describes the extended network,

‘We’re mostly online with each other as we go’. And they bring into detailed view the space of the target in real time and full motion.

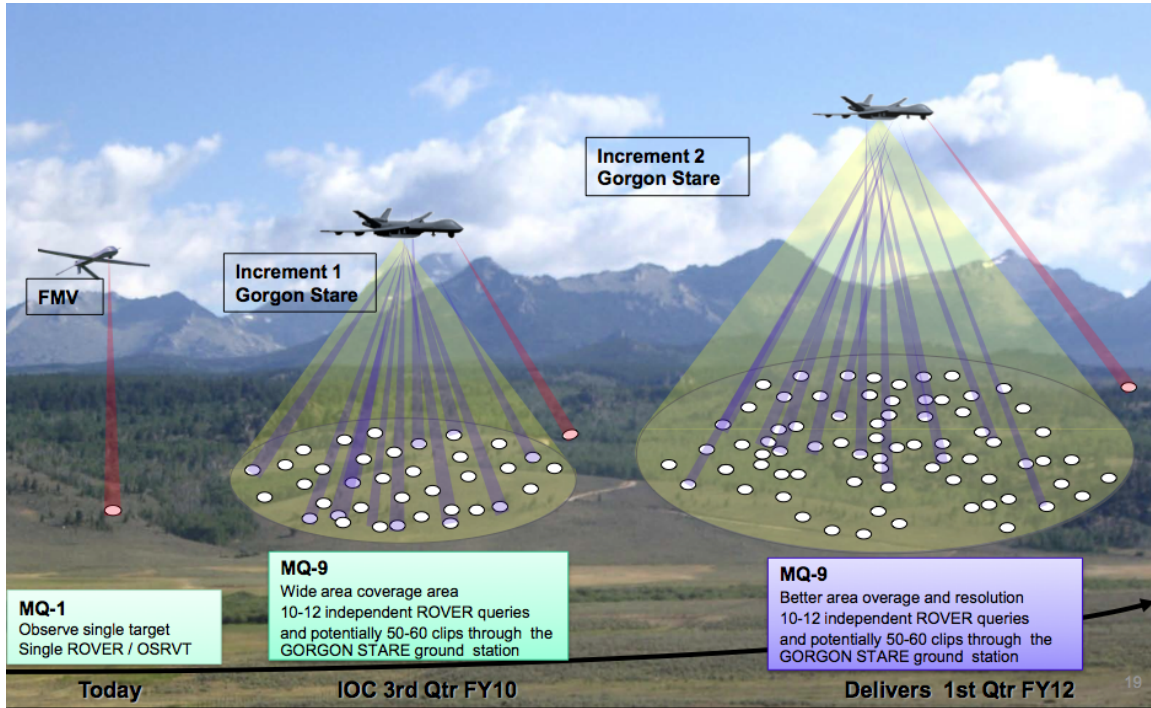


Figure 8: Wide-Area Airborne Surveillance



Figure 9: Combined Air Operations Center, Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar

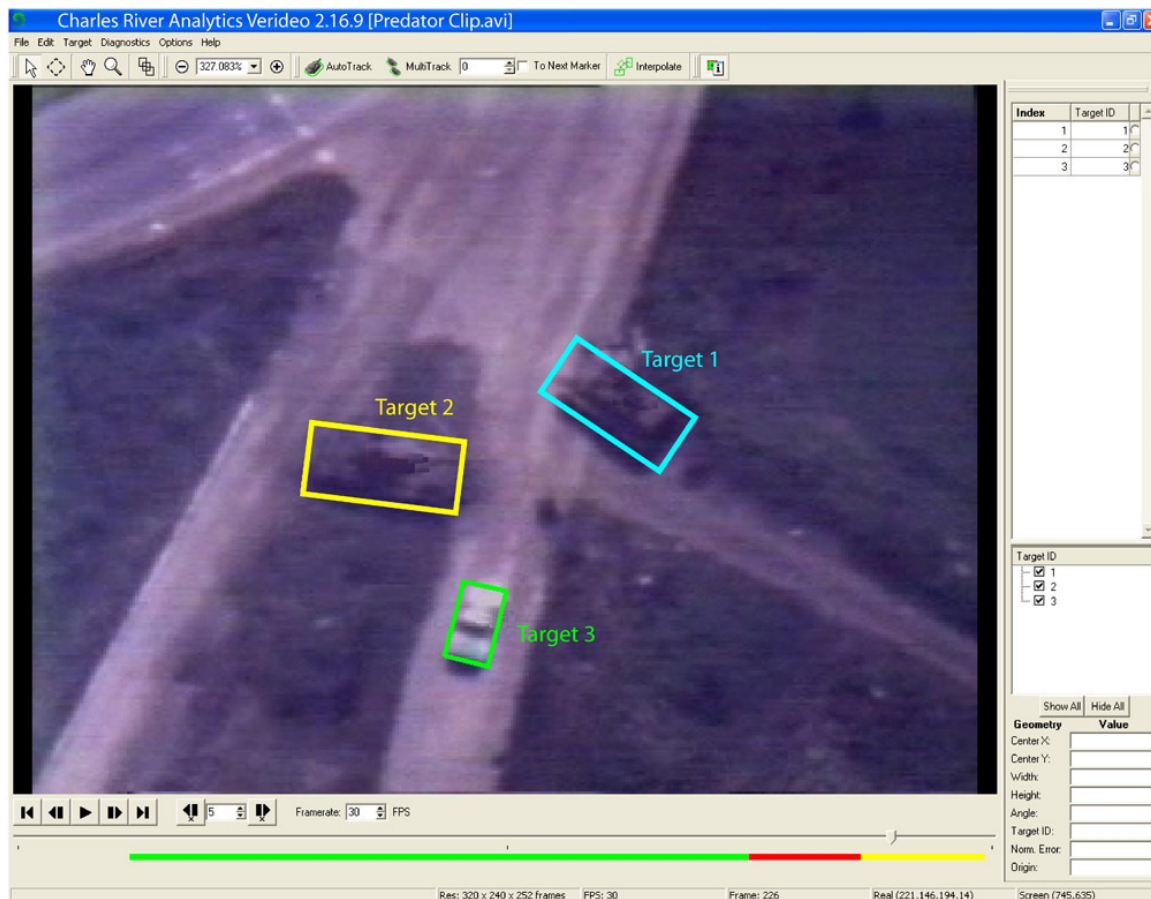


Figure 10: Video truthing an image from a Predator (Veridio ®)

It is important not to be starry-eyed about this. The system is more than a late modern version of Mitchell's 'viewing platform', the apotheosis of the desire 'to see and yet not be seen', because it is also a weapon system. The MALE (sic: Mid-Altitude Long-Endurance) drones increasingly carry out the hunter-killer role implied by their hideous names. The Predator carries two Hellfire missiles, and the Reaper can carry fourteen Hellfire missiles or two 500lb JDAM bombs and four Hellfire missiles. The enhanced ISR capacity has not made 'bombing at the speed of thought' a reality, but it has dramatically compressed the 'kill-chain' (Figure 11). This is, in part, what the extended network is designed to produce, and it can be thought of as a

dispersed and distributed *apparatus* (people, machines, practices, discourses, affects) that entrains all those who are made part of it and constitutes them as particular kinds of subjects.⁵⁷ In previous air wars the kill chain was extended; different tasks were assigned to different, specialized locations, each department producing, annotating and transforming maps and imagery, and the time from target identification to execution could extend over several days. Few of those involved could see the process in its entirety, which explains the commingling of what Chad Harris calls ‘the mundane and the monstrously violent’. The prevailing techno-cultural apparatus of imaging, of producing and passing the target through the links in the chain, rendered violence everyday: as Harris has it, ‘extreme forms of violence and normal bureaucratic practices’ were made ‘co-extensive’.⁵⁸ But the late modern compression of the kill-chain has brought everyone involved much closer to the target: the cruel intimacy of the killing space. ‘Traditional bomber pilots don’t see their targets,’ argues Peter Singer, but in contrast to Bauman’s claims about ‘pilots-turned-computer-operators’, he insists that all of those watching online in real time now ‘see the target up close, [they] see what happens to it during the explosion and the aftermath. You’re further

⁵⁷ The term derives from Foucault, but Deleuze’s gloss is particularly apposite: *dispositifs* or apparatuses comprise ‘curves of visibility and curves of enunciation’, in other words, ‘they are machines which make one see and speak’: ‘What is a dispositive?’ *Michel Foucault Philosopher: Essays* (trans. Timothy Armstrong) (New York: Routledge, 1992) p. 160.

⁵⁸ Chad Harris, ‘The omniscient eye: satellite imagery, “battlespace awareness” and the structures of the imperial gaze’, *Surveillance and society* 4 (1/2) (2006) 101-122: 102, 114. Harris was describing the targeting cycle during the first Gulf War; for a parallel discussion of the kill-chain during the combined bombing offensive in the Second World War, see Derek Gregory, ‘Doors into nowhere: dead cities and the natural history of destruction’, in Michael Heffernan, Peter Meusbürger and Edgar Wunder (eds), *Cultural Memories* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2010 in press. These are not, of course, recent realizations, and for a moving and parallel account from an intelligence analyst during the Cold War, see Henry T. Nash, ‘The bureaucratization of homicide’, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 36 (4) (1980) 22-27.

away physically but you see more.’⁵⁹ The sense of being only ‘eighteen inches from the battlefield’ – the distance between the eye and the screen – is, in part, the product of training, of the deliberate inculcation of a ‘warrior culture’ among those involved in the missions, but it is also in part a product of interpellation, of being drawn into and captured by the visual field itself.

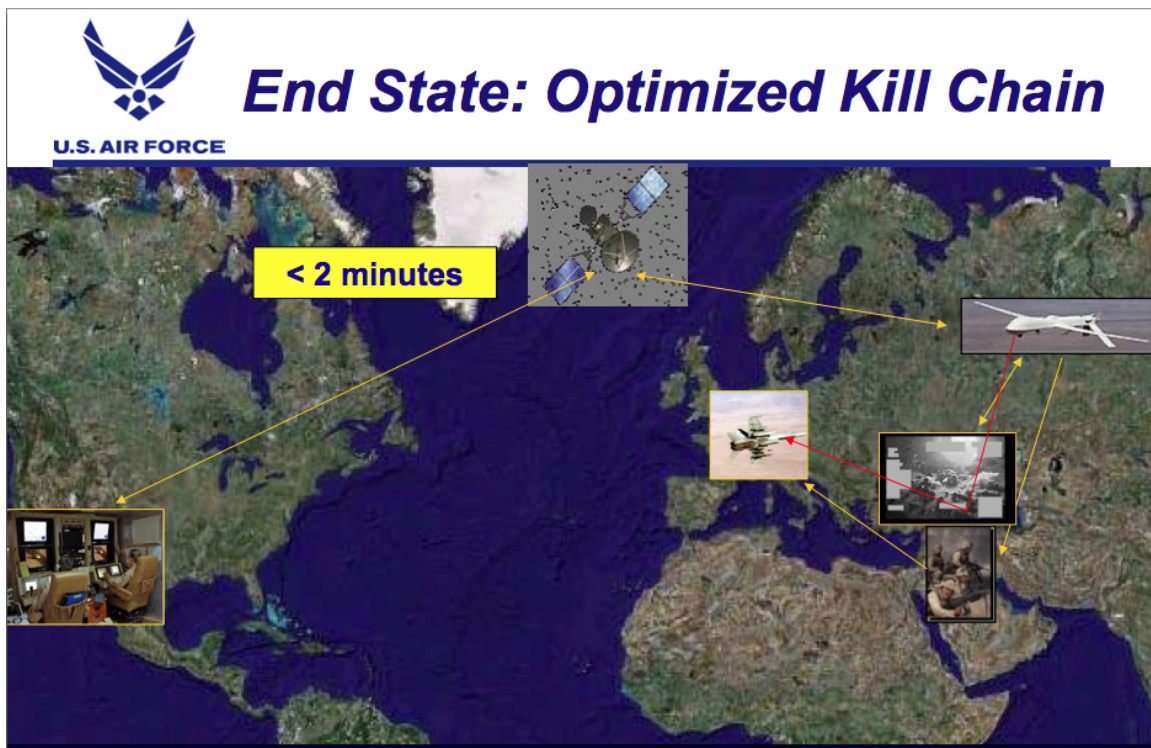


Figure 11: ‘Optimized kill-chain’ (USAF)

For this reason criticisms of the drone missions as a sort of ‘video war’, that risks developing what Philip Alston has called a ‘Playstation mentality

⁵⁹ Peter Singer, ‘The soldiers call it war porn’, *Spiegel Online* 12 March 2010; see also his *Wired for war: the robotics revolution and conflict in the 21st century* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009).

to killing’, may be wide of the mark.⁶⁰ There are many valid criticisms to be made of first-person shooter video games, but they do *not* stage violence as passive spectacle. They are on the contrary profoundly immersive, which is in part why the US military has invested so much in their development for its pre-deployment training.⁶¹ Reports of the operators of drones suffering from PTSD should not be dismissed as airy fantasies. And unlike the racist scriptings of many commercial off-the-shelf or online video games staged in simulacra of the region, the live video-feeds show a landscape inhabited by figures other than caricatured ‘terrorists’ or ‘insurgents’, and the presence of so many ‘eyes’ in that now crowded sky – commanders, analysts, military lawyers – can be an ever-present caution that the presence of civilians is a constant possibility. That is why it is important to see the Predator or the Reaper not as a single UAV but as a networked Unmanned Aerial System; that is why being ‘online as we go’ matters so much; and that is how what Michael Smith calls geo-legalities have become wrapped into the targeting process.

Yet this does not settle matters at all. When the *Wall Street Journal* announces that ‘never before in the history of air warfare have we been able to distinguish as well between combatants and civilians as we can with drones’, and that ‘smart weapons like the Predator make for a more moral

⁶⁰ Philip Alston, Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Addendum: Study on targeted killings (United Nations General Assembly, Human Rights Council) 28 May 2010: p. 25.

⁶¹ See, for example, Timothy Lenoir, ‘All but war is simulation: the military-entertainment complex’, *Configurations* 8 (2000) 238-35; Roger Stahl, ‘Have you played the war on terror?’ *Critical studies in media communication* 23 (2006) 112-130; Marcus Power, ‘Digitised virtuosity: video war games and post 9/11 cyber-deterrence’, *Security dialogue* 38 (2007) 271-88; Ian Shaw and Barney Warf, ‘Worlds of affect: virtual geographies of video games’, *Environment and Planning A* 41 (2009) 1332-1343.

campaign’, we need to recognize that this sidesteps the crucial question of how a civilian is defined.⁶² When the former Associate Deputy General Counsel (International Affairs) to the US Department of Defense suggests that ‘virtual distance’ – the eighteen inches from eye to screen – is giving new significance to the proportionality requirements of international law ‘by eliminating some of the key excuses that states have long used to escape responsibility for attacks that appear to cause excessive civilian casualties’ – they can no longer plausibly claim ‘we didn’t know’ – we need to recognize that this sidesteps the crucial question of how a civilian is defined.⁶³ When he suggests that the longer dwell times of the drones and their enhanced ISR capability enables ‘attack planners to make much more precise estimates of how many civilians are likely to die in a particular strike’, we need to recognize that this sidesteps the crucial question of how a civilian is defined.⁶⁴ When others emphasize the Air Force’s programs for collateral damage simulation (Raindrop), its attempts at blast mitigation and the involvement of military lawyers in what they call ‘the prosecution of the target’, these too are silent about how a civilian is defined. What all these interventions do, in

⁶² Editorial, *Wall Street Journal* 9 January 2010; it sidesteps other questions too, about the rhetoric and practice of precision, which I discuss in detail in ‘Predatory wars’. See also J. Marshall Beier, ‘Discriminating tastes: ‘smart’ bombs, non-combatants and notions of legitimacy in warfare’, *Security dialogue* 34 (2003) 411-25; J. Marshall Beier, ‘Outsmarting technologies: rhetoric, revolutions in military affairs and the social depth of warfare’, *International Politics* 43 (2006) 266-80; Maja Zehfuss, ‘Targeting: precision and the production of ethics’, *European journal, of international relations* (forthcoming).

⁶³ Jack Beard, ‘Law and war in the virtual era’, *American Journal of International Law* (2009) 409-45: 430.

⁶⁴ One consequence of this new capability, Beard continues, ‘is that civilian deaths in such attacks may be incidental but no longer are accidental’: Beard, ‘Law and war’, p. 438. But Patricia Owens raises plausible doubts about the calculus within which such ‘accidents’ are constructed: Owens, ‘Accidents don’t just happen: the liberal politics of high-technology “humanitarian” war’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 32 (2003) 595-616.

various ways, is substitute the new *visibility* (or otherwise) of the figure of the civilian for its conceptual *viability*.

But even this visibility turns out to be conditional. The new air war is not quite the ‘war without witnesses’ of the original invasion of Afghanistan, but the space in which these operations have been brought into public view is nevertheless strikingly limited.⁶⁵ Media coverage in North America and Europe has focused on the space of the extended network; there have been detailed and for the most part highly enthusiastic reports of the expansion of the drone program, wide-eyed tours of the trailers at Creech Air Force Base and the Combined Air Operations Center in Qatar, and extensive coverage of directives to reduce ‘collateral damage’ through a more restrained and ‘surgical’ deployment of air strikes.⁶⁶ But for the most part the space of the target has been radically underexposed. The US Air Force issues terse airpower summaries in which each day Predator operators provide ‘armed overwatch’ and destroy ‘enemy positions’, ‘targets’ and ‘vehicles’, the reassertion of a conventional object-ontology in which ground truth vanishes in the ultimate ‘God-trick’, whose vengeance depends on making its objects visible and its subjects invisibl’. Like its predecessor in Iraq, there is a United States Forces – Afghanistan channel on YouTube, but only a handful of combat clips have been posted there. This invisibility is compounded by the absence of the vigorous local press coverage of drone strikes across the border in Pakistan where, ironically, we consequently know much more about the impact of the CIA’s ‘secret war’. There are exceptions, to be sure, but these are always treated as just that: exceptions that prove the rule, and

⁶⁵ Gregory, *Colonial present*, pp. 52-3.

⁶⁶ ‘Surgical strike’ has become a commonplace but the term was first widely used during the Vietnam war.

in so doing they confirm that spaces of constructed visibility are also always spaces of constructed invisibility.

Biopolitics and Orientalism

In many ways it seems that the separations of the exhibitionary order – the world as exhibition now mutated into the world as target – have been compromised by these new technologies that both propel and make possible the ‘rush to the intimate’ of contemporary counterinsurgency. But even as those separations are dissolved they are reinstated in an artful dialectic; the screen changes into the map, event-ontology reverts to object-ontology. This dialectic is reinforced by a metaphoric that reactivates the performances of Orientalism in concert with this new techno-cultural apparatus.

If the discourse of Orientalism produces ‘the Orient’ as a space of dis/order, as I have suggested, diplomatic and geopolitical discourses have often produced the ‘Middle East’ as a corollary space of dis/ease. From the middle of the nineteenth century the major European powers treated the Ottoman Empire as a ‘sick man’, haemorrhaging territories through a series of disastrous wars, and in the early twentieth century the British and the French governments joined forces to impose a ‘cure’. Sir Mark Sykes, the ‘amateur Orientalist’ who, in conjunction with François-Georges Picot, negotiated the secret agreement to partition the post-Ottoman Middle East between Britain and France, and evidently no stranger to the performative power of mapping, described their remedy as ‘cutting out the cancer.’⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Sir Mark Sykes, ‘The future of the Near East’, *Daily News* 18-19 September 1918; Renton, ‘Changing languages of Empire and the Orient’, pp. 652-6. It was Sykes who

This bio-medical metaphor can be traced down to the present, and it continues to be given rhetorical power through mappings. Displays like Figure 5 are the product of a smoothing algorithm known as quadratic kernel density estimation that converts point data into a continuous surface. This technique was also used to produce the maps of ethno-sectarian violence displayed by Petraeus in his reports to Congress in September 2007 and April 2008. It is no accident that they resemble medical scans of the body politic, where violence is visualized as a series of tumours. In his testimony Petraeus called ethno-sectarian violence ‘a cancer that continues to spread if left unchecked.’⁶⁸ The same cartographic techniques are used to visualize the incidence of insurgent attacks in Afghanistan (Figure 12). Lt General William Caldwell, who conducted many of the Press Briefings in Baghdad, was subsequently transferred to US Forces – Afghanistan, and his new prescription for what he calls ‘curing Afghanistan’ is so remarkable it deserves to be quoted at length:

‘Rather than describing Afghanistan with the language of war and battles, we have come to think of the country as an ailing patient – in many ways analogous to a weakened person under attack by an aggressive infection....

‘This diagnosis of Afghanistan’s illnesses came too late,

drafted Lt Gen Sir Stanley Maude’s proclamation to the people of Baghdad on 19 March 1917: ‘Our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators.’

⁶⁸ For a detailed critique of those maps, see Derek Gregory, ‘The Biopolitics of Baghdad: Counterinsurgency and the counter-city’, *Human Geography* 1 (2008) pp. 6-27.

allowing the infection that has debilitated it – i.e., insurgent forces and the Taliban – to grow in strength. As a result, a low-level antibiotic is now insufficient to the task of restoring health. For several years, coalition and Afghan senior leaders did not fully appreciate the potential lethality of the Taliban's infectious insurgency. The 30,000 additional troops approved by U.S. President Barack Obama in December 2009 can be viewed as a late but powerful and much-needed dose of antibiotics. The surge was designed to shock and stunt the insurgency, thereby gaining time and space to allow the country's indigenous immune system to be restored. NATO's combat presence in Afghanistan is considerable. At its peak, combat troops will number nearly 130,000..., augmented by special operations forces and complete coalition air dominance through both manned and unmanned armed platforms.

‘To be sure, similar to a powerful antibiotic, the use of large numbers of combat troops brings with it side effects that can cause discomfort and pain to the body politic of Afghanistan. The effects range from disruption of civilian day-to-day life to, regrettably, sometimes civilian casualties. Senior NATO commanders seek to minimize civilian casualties and thus apply combat power with restraint and, to the extent possible, surgical precision.’⁶⁹

⁶⁹ LTG William Caldwell, CPT Mark Hagerott, ‘Curing Afghanistan’, *Foreign Policy*, 7 April 2010.

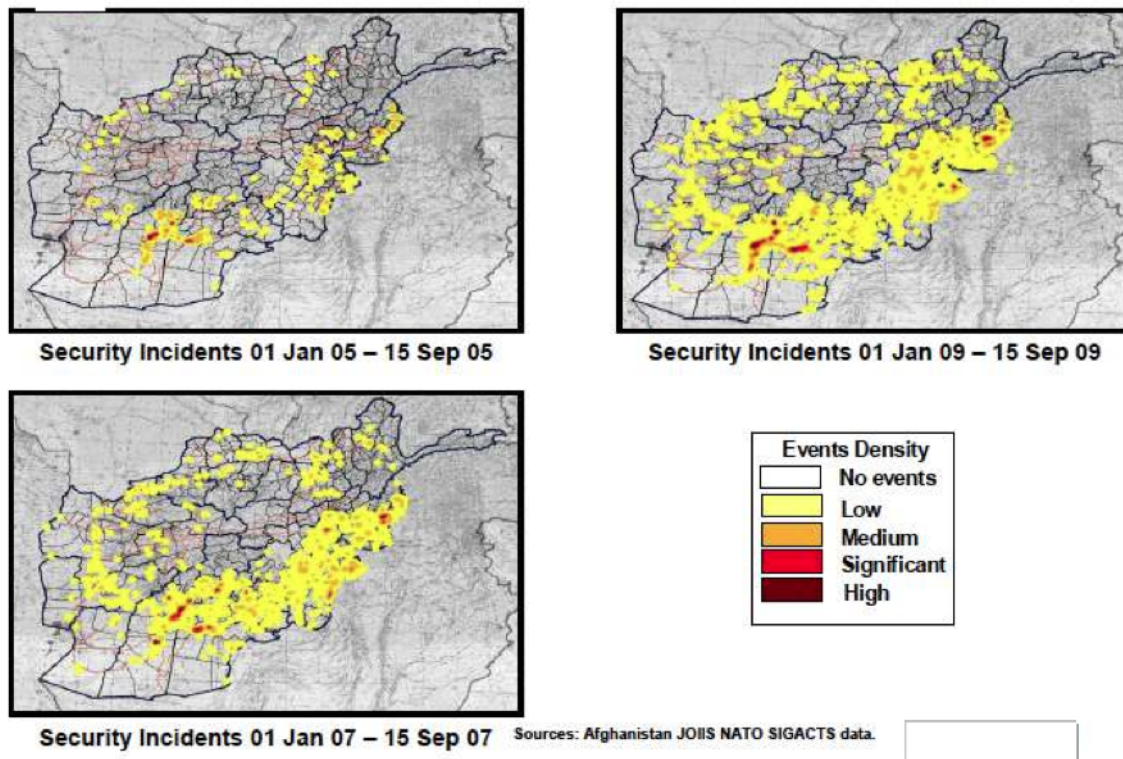


Figure 12: Insurgent attacks in Afghanistan

These mappings become so many visual performances of an intrinsically biopolitical field.

Michael Dillon and Luis Lobo-Guerrero have suggested that the present incarnation of the Revolution in Military Affairs is not simply a technical transformation ‘but also a transformation in military strategic cognition throughout which biologised thinking, together with health and

medical analogies, abound.’⁷⁰ This disposition has been incorporated into the American counterinsurgency doctrine, which prescribes three operational phases: ‘Stop the bleeding’; ‘Inpatient care – recovery’; ‘Outpatient care – movement to self-sufficiency’.⁷¹ Counterinsurgency is more than emergency triage, and Kilcullen anticipated Caldwell’s prescription for Afghanistan when he described the clinical stages of counterinsurgency as infection, contagion, intervention and rejection. ‘I use a medical analogy advisedly here,’ he explained, ‘because just as a virus or bacterium is more easily able to affect a host whose immune system is compromised or to superinfect an existing wound, so *takfiri* groups opportunistically exploit existing breakdowns in the rule of law, poor governance or pre-existing conflict.’ The oncological metaphor raises the stakes still further, and this appears in AFM 3.24, where counterinsurgents are likened to ‘surgeons cutting out cancerous tissue while keeping other vital organs intact’.⁷²

These are simple models – though they can be elaborated in more sophisticated ways⁷³ – and you might think that in these elementary forms nothing much turns on them. But they matter for at least two reasons. First, their translation into maps, screens and displays underscores the performative role of what Foucault once called the ‘nomination of the visible’. Within the military’s space of constructed visibility, the capacity to produce a target – to detect a ‘tumour’ – by ‘objective’ rational-scientific

⁷⁰ Michael Dillon and Luis Lobo-Guerrero, ‘Biopolitics of security in the 21st century: an introduction’, *Review of International Studies* 34 (2008) 265-292: 278

⁷¹ AFM 3-24: §5.3-5.6.

⁷² David Kilcullen, *The accidental guerilla: fighting small wars in the midst of a big one* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) p. 35; AFM 3-24: §1.26

⁷³ Roberto Esposito, *Bíos: biopolitics and biophilosophy* (trans. Timothy Campbell) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

means becomes inseparable from a series of no less ‘objective’ truth-claims about the danger posed by the target-tumour. The emphasis on danger, or on what Foucault called ‘dangerousness’, is vital to the development of a martial biopolitics and a militant Orientalism. The lexicon has mutated: danger into risk, prevention into pre-emption, and detection into destruction. But the aggressive propensity of biopolitics has been aggravated throughout these transformations – the second reason these tropes matter – because they make military violence appear to be intrinsically therapeutic. As the oncological metaphor depoliticizes and pathologizes insurgency so it turns counterinsurgency’s offensive operations into a form of chemotherapy – Caldwell’s ‘side-effects that can cause ‘discomfort and pain: killing insurgent cells and sometimes innocent bodies to save the body politic. This rhetorical effect becomes even more powerful as these tropes circulate through the public sphere; whatever the regional effects of the counterinsurgency campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, these medicalized images help to make the cultural turn and the operations carried out under its sign therapeutic for the American military and the American public.