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Remote Control Project Briefing - April 2016

'Drone Chic'

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Policy Recommendations:

Within the UK there is currently a bias depicting drones as precise, clean and value free. Our recommendations question this.

1) **Precision is a 'myth'**: We need to stop deceiving ourselves that progress is being made and costs are being avoided through precision. War is never cost-free. But it appears to be in most accounts of contemporary conflict. We term this 'Drone Chic'. The stories we tell ourselves deceive us.

2) **No strategy:** Drones are tactical devices and cannot substitute for an overarching and coherent national strategy. Yet we ignore the primacy of the tactical and celebrate false 'victories' through simply 'proportionate and discriminate' means. A form of Moralism has replaced Politics.

3) **The Victims**: It is not just 'death' on the receiving end of the drone that demands attention. There are profound consequences for those living under the ever present and seemingly omnipotent machines hovering in the sky above. Drones are, we believe, 'disheartening'. They change cultural practices and cause psychological damage.

4) **'Where are the women?':** More investigation is needed as to the gendered effects of drones and drone killing on the ground. What are the hard socio-economic implications for families when the men are killed? What are the psychological implications for those who witness drone strikes? Can the rise in female suicide rates in places such as Afghanistan be attributed in part to an increase in drone strikes?

5) **The Veterans:** One of the important 'stories' we are told about drones is that they are accurate and precise. Yet the mounting evidence points, on numerous occasions, in 'precisely' the opposite direction. Do drone pilots 'suffer' trauma and PTSD from their duties?

6) **Future concerns:** As drones continue to proliferate into the hands of both state and non-state actors, we must realize that drones can be used in a multitude of ways which may compromise our safety.

Background

The imperative that the human 'costs' of war should and can be kept to a 'minimum' underlies much of contemporary Liberal strategic thought. This is a relatively recent phenomenon, most usually tracked to the first Gulf War and the short but seemingly successful Western intervention in Kosovo. In both cases the use of airpower was depicted as accurate, effective and humane. Not only were these campaigns presented as 'cost free' for those attacking but certainly in the example of Kosovo much was made of the low 'costs' inflicted upon civilians and the accuracy of targeting. This despite some spectacular failures in mistaking targets[1]. The possibilities though of no cost/low cost was widely picked up and celebrated by any number of Western scholars. The more thoughtful, however, rejected any such easy analysis highlighting instead more disturbing aspects of contemporary warfare.[2] Arguably, the presentation of intervention as clinical and effective had led to a critical misreading of the consequences of what Michael Ignatieff termed 'Virtual Wars'. Scathingly, Ignatieff termed Western actions in Kosovo as akin to a 'turkey shoot'.[3] More ominously, the celebration of the primacy of airpower ignored the fact that for those on the receiving end there was a continued condition of vulnerability to the vicissitudes of Western targeting. For those on the ground – there was little if no immediate defence against modern air attack. In this respect, there was no new 'Nirvana' of accuracy and damage limitation, but rather a return to earlier periods of airpower.

For instance, in the nuclear age air attack was expected to prevail, or at the very least, intimidate and coerce those on the other side to moderate behavior considered unhelpful. A constant sense of fear underlay mutually assured destruction (MAD). The point was to render the other side vulnerable and malleable. The threat of punishment literally hung in the air. At the beginning of the nuclear age this situation of vulnerability was described by Bernard Brodie in simple but telling terms: that nuclear weapons made defence against strategic bombing enormously more difficult and 'disheartening' to the defender.[4] (We will return to the issue of 'disheartening' in our discussion of the psychological effects of drone strikes.)

That type of situation to a considerable degree characterizes the current use or threat of the use of drones. Opponents/terrorists in zones of conflict, whether it be in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan or Yemen, can be killed at the pleasure of the President or Prime Minister by drone strike. Enemies can be punished in an instant. Civilians killed around and about the actual intended victim are merely collateral damage. Those who perpetrate the attacks from Langley, Creech Air Force Base or other such facilities take no obvious risks but transfer the risk of death and injury to the people on the ground.

One consequence is that some of those on the receiving end adapt their behavior. There is no 'mutually assured destruction' in the classical sense but there are a series of 'possibilities'. So there are the escapades of disguise and deception: insurgents hide, mingle and roam amongst the people. 'Targeting' therefore becomes more complex and

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[1] For a list of those targets see BBC News, June 1, 1999. See also Joel Harerman, 'Convoy Deaths May Undermine Moral Authority' in Los Angeles Times, April 15, 1999.

[2] Some scholars offered thoughtful and informed analysis of this type of warfare. See for example, Paul W. Kahn, 'The Paradox of Riskless Warfare' in Yale Law School Legal Scholarship Repository. For a critical analysis of the Kosovo Campaign see Benjamin S. Lambeth, NATO's Air War for Kosovo: A Strategic and Operational Assessment. 16 November, 2001, The RAND Cooperation.

[3] Michael Ignatieff, (2001). Virtual War: Kosovo and beyond, London: Vintage. p.5

[4] Bernard Brodie, Strategy in the missile Age Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1959.

the potential killing of 'innocents' surely more likely: especially we suggest in the category of women and children. Here, though, we do not ignore the fact that on occasion – perhaps many occasions – there are considerable failures in the intelligence about those targeted and killed. Sometimes the 'kill chain' fails.[5] And forms of 'retaliation' exist and are utilized. Hence, a widespread use of IEDs, hostage taking and execution of foreign nationals.[6] There is as yet no direct air-to-air combat with drones – although there will at some point undoubtedly be yet more technological innovation in terms of drone warfare. The 'enemy' who has proved adept at adapting and innovating the IED will utilize drones.[7]

This insurgent action may constitute a 'deterrent' strategy, one designed to cause political embarrassment to governments which cannot protect their aid workers or civil servants in troubled areas. There is also, to hark back again to the nuclear age, at least an option which seems to be increasingly utilised of 'suicide - or -surrender'. Unable to 'win' within the theatre of conflict, suicide bombing is an obvious retaliatory weapon either within the region or in distant towns such as Brussels or Paris. Foreign cities may also be the destination for nomadic insurgents who move their activities away from simple rural or small town environments to more complex terrain in teeming urban areas such as Mumbai. [8] Criminality may, indeed almost certainly does, accompany this displacement.

In short, Western states utilize drone technology to intimidate/avenge/kill enemies abroad. This, although presented as clean and cost free has, we argue, considerably complicated the terrain of warfare and has consequences not just in 'human costs' but raises a number of concerns about the West and war.

What are the Concerns?

'A set of concerns were discussed and debated at the 'Who Bears the Cost?' workshop sponsored by Remote Control in St Andrews in September, 2015. In one noteworthy session Dr Tom Waldman utilized the Prussian General and philosopher of war, Carl von Clausewitz to establish a framework for understanding contemporary warfare and our own 'delusions'. As Waldman argued, fighting in ways which seek to defray costs, states quite often end up over the longer term incurring multiple costs or provoking a different set of costs.

So, adopting a Clausewitzian political perspective, Dr Waldman observed how the notion of 'cost-free war' inevitably unravels in war and highlighted an essential truth that war is not and cannot be risk or cost free. This report, building on Waldman, argues that while risks to 'our' side can be seemingly minimized – for example through flying at higher altitudes before dropping bombs, or using drones – the human costs remain high for those on the receiving end of military action, but also inevitably produce complex consequences for all of those involved.

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[5] Scott Shane, 'Drone Strikes Reveal Uncomfortable Truth: US is often unsure about who will die' in The New York Times, April, 23, 2015.

[6] On the adaption of the IED, see 'Western Advisors Stunned by Remote Control Bombs' in The Times, Technology, Friday 8 January, 2016.

[7] For more on this issue see. James I. Rogers & Caroline Kennedy. (2015). IEDs, Drones & Future Threats. *Defense Global*. pp. 96-97. Also see. Mark Pomerleau, 'Army Addressing an emerging threat: drones as IEDs in Defense Systems. July 10, 2015.

[8] The Oxford Research Group has funded work on this type of displacement. Needless to say those who migrant are usually young men.

(We should be mindful not to confuse the closely related concepts of risk and cost. Political leaders have arguably been willing to take huge risks in recent years, one need only think of the decision of the Prime Minister Tony Blair to join the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The crucial point is that politicians have not, on the whole, been willing to accept the human costs on our side associated with those risks; especially as those risks rise for a number of reasons. This has occurred for a variety of reasons which can be listed as the nature of liberal society, the spread of 24-hour mass media and a general distaste for the costs of war on our side especially as the wars endure over many years with seemingly little resolution as in Afghanistan or worse in outright failure as in Iraq.)
As a result, a handful of overarching themes or features in the general cost-averse approach to war emerge, most notably: casualty sensitivity, the desire for quick and easy wars, and the attraction of coercion. This is accompanied by pervasive short-termism and a preference to seek solutions through the application of advanced technology rather than political and diplomatic solutions. There is also a temptation to seek out evidence that drone strikes have little impact beyond the 'killing', that drone strikes do not bring about 'blowback' and, perhaps most dangerous of all, a prevalent view that those on the ground approve or at least do not disapprove of this type of Western intervention. So there are practical concerns but there are also profound academic worries. Much of the current research in the 'Academy' rests upon- and this is somewhat ironic- fieldwork carried out at a 'distance' by strangers. Many academics will not enter a zone of conflict, know little of the country and nothing of the 'people'. Yet it is with confidence that the idea is perpetuated that drones do not have negative consequences for Western states or for those on the ground. Hence, our view is that a 'drone chic[9] prevails in academic and government circles.

Concern 1: '*Drone Chic: Stories We Tell Ourselves'*.

This emphasis on the offensive is accompanied by new narratives which seek to change the language of war. Hence, we see the use of language such as 'disposition matrix', 'collateral damage' or 'signature strike'. In short we deceive ourselves that progress is being made and costs are being avoided through the construction and mythology of precision.[10]

The costs associated with war are proverbially reduced to those of 'blood and treasure', referring to lives lost (which have been increasingly expanded to incorporate civilian casualties) and the economic costs of war.[11] But in the discussion of drones a second major process at play relates to the way 'cost avoidance' breed forms of cognitive dissonance and damaging institutional practices.[12] Critical perspectives detailing costs of all sorts are ignored and marginalized and there are pressures toward best-case reporting or deception. This leads, we argue, to a knotty problem of 'counting casualties' as well as 'stories we tell ourselves' about precision.

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[9] The phrase 'drone chic' is derived from Tom Wolfe and his mediation on the support for revolutionary causes amongst the fashionable in New York. See Tom Wolfe, Radical Chic: That Party at Lenny's in New York Magazine, June 8, 1970.
[10] James I. Rogers, (2014). Desiring Precision, *APSA BPG Research Note*. Retrieved from: http://britishpoliticsgroup.blogspot.co.uk/2014/11/desiring-precision-desire-behind-use-of.html
[11] For instance, the Iraq War is estimated to have cost the US in the region of a trillion dollars. On the human costs of war see Taylor B Seybolt, Jay D. Aronson and Baruch Fischhoff, Counting Civilian Casualties: An Introduction to Recording and Estimating Nonmilitary Deaths in Conflict. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[12] See for example, Christopher L. Elliott, High Command. British Military Leadership in the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. Hurst, London, 2015.

Military casualties have been studied for many centuries. We know that civilian leaders (especially in democracies) are notoriously sensitive to the loss of military life. Studies of civilian casualties have only recently begun to appear; thus reflecting the interests and concerns of lawyers, NGOs, journalists and academics. However, in the case of drone casualties what is striking is the prevalence of journalistic or unofficial statistics challenging 'official' figures and explanations.[13] We suggest that this 'difference' between the claims of accuracy in official figures and those produced elsewhere are crucial to any understanding of the human costs of the drone or any claims about accuracy and precision. More needs to be done to account for the 'dead' and maimed. The warning here, though, is that the very nature of drone strikes, the lack of 'politics' in the debate over these strikes and the lack of a 'conversation' about the other side means that 'we' deceive ourselves as to the costs and consequences of the actions taken.[14]

Concern 2: '*Moralism has replaced Politics'.*

With the end of the Cold War came a prevailing view that ideology had ended and on a deeper level it meant that politics was reduced to a form of moralism. Michael Oakeshott, for example, argued that the Twentieth Century had abolished war and that prudence had replaced idealism. Nowhere, we argue, is this clearer than in the moralistic nature of the drone debate – the prevailing wisdom is that not only do the use of drones keep 'boots off the ground', but at little cost to ourselves we can obliterate our enemies.

But this hides the deeper problem, that the utilisation of drones provides an excuse. Although wars may be 'lost' and original political objectives unfulfilled, somehow drones are delivering what could not be accomplished through conventional war and the deployment of militaries – that is a defeat of the enemy. But, and this is what needs further investigation, drones are *tactical* devices and cannot substitute for an overarching and coherent strategy. Sir Hew Strachen has for a number of years argued that there is a 'lost art' to strategy.[15] We agree. The current challenge is that political leaders envisage drones as strategic – that is as game changing technology that cannot only alter the battle space, but alone they can achieve political ends.

So there is confusion here. Drones can indeed kill people in increasing numbers but do little to address the underlying causes of conflict or the attraction of the terrorist cause. In fact, although it may be possible to decapitate the leadership of insurgent groups in the short term, as David Galula pragmatically pointed out many years ago, in most insurgent groups there are many others willing to take the place of those killed or assassinated precisely because the 'hearts and minds' of the people have not been won.[16] Indeed, alienation occurs and grievances proliferate. As perhaps one of the most serious commentators on war Basil Liddell Hart suggested, the humanisation of war rested ...in the enlightened realization that the spread of death and destruction endangers the victor's own future prosperity and reputation. [17]

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[13] See for example The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, September 25, 2015. Also see the work of Chris Woods and Airwars.org.

[14] For a vivid account of the consequences of airstrikes on communities in war zones, see Carlotta Gall, The Wrong Enemy: America in Afghanistan, 2001- 2014, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014)

[15] See comments reported in The Telegraph, Sunday 6 March, 2016.

[16] David Galula, 'Pacification in Algeria 1956 -1938/ RAND Corporation at www.rand.org -2006.

[17] Quoted in Alex Danchev, Alchemist of War. The Life of Basil Liddell Hart. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, p. 163.

Concern 3: '*Disheartening Drones*'.

However, it is not just 'death' on the receiving end of the drone that demands attention. It is now clear after many years of drone use that there are profound consequences for those living under the ever present and seemingly omnipotent machines hovering in the sky above. This condition is what we describe as 'disheartening'. Living under/with drones causes mass psychological and emotional damage: hence anxiety, insomnia and paranoia.[18] The belief prevalent on the ground that drones deliberately target rescuers after an attack has, for example, changed the pattern of social behavior on the ground. Hence, funeral rites have changed and those who would rescue family members or friends from the wreckage of a drone attack now hesitate and demur for fear of further retaliation.[19] In Pakistan, civilians report symptoms of trauma and psychological damage from living with drones. [20]

Concern 4: '*Looking in all the wrong places: Women and War*'.

O darling, you're American in my eyes./
You are guilty; I apologize.[21]

Landay Poem, (Anon).

Evidence is also mounting that drone strikes and the presence of drones have especially negative effects on women.[22] The ironies here abound as the Afghan War was justified by the first Bush Administration, in part, by the emancipation of the women of that country.[23] More investigation is needed as to the gendered effects of drones and drone killing on the ground and there are a myriad of questions which mandate future investigation. Not the least of these is how women cope with the after effects of drone strikes both psychologically but in hard socio-economic terms when the men folk are killed. Although it may be difficult to disentangle the negative effects of drones on women, who anyway suffer high levels of suicide and suicide attempts in countries such as Afghanistan, it is important to attempt such a study. [24] Our own project at the University of Hull utilizes the poetry and art of women on the ground to suggest that there is a distinctly female voice (however muted it may be) which points to a wholly negative narration of the impact of drones.[25] (Here too we are critical of much ongoing research which conspicuously ignores or sidelines female voices and experiences).

So a series of policy questions follow. Might it be that within certain communities there is an acceptance of the futility of existence, a turn to suicide, self-harm and overall an

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[18] See James Cavallaro, 'Living Under Drones: Death, Injury and Trauma to Civilians from US drone Practices in Pakistan'. Stanford, Calif, International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic, Stanford Law School, 2012. See also Middle East Monitor, 'US drone strikes have traumatized a generation of Yemenis and will push them towards Militancy'. 20 April, 2015.
[19] See Scott Shone, 'US said to target rescuers at drone strike sites' in New York Times, 5 February, 2012.
[20] 'Every Person is Afraid of the Drones: The Strikes' Effect on Life in Pakistan'. The Atlantic, September 12, 2012.
[21] Poetry Foundation, 2013.
[22] Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, 'Embrace Me in Your Suicide Vest' Unpublished paper for presentation at the Remote Control Workshop, St Andrews, September 2015.
[23] Ann Jones, 'The Missing Women of Afghanistan' in The Nation, October 30,2014.
[24] Edwin Mora, 'Report: Suicide Deaths in Afghanistan Higher Than Murders, War Deaths Combined. In 2014 there were 4.136 self-immolation cases. See www.breitbart.com/afghanistan - 4- 13G
[25] See the Poetry & Politics Project: http://www2.hull.ac.uk/fass/politics/research/research-projects-and-grants/poetry--politics-hull.aspx

increased brutality against groups such as women? In effect, does resistance become internal, local and targeted against the vulnerable? Our work thus far (and it is early in this research project) points to a series of complex interactions on the ground amongst peoples caught in 'theatres' regarded as primitive and expendable. Poetry such as landays, oral traditions and data/commentaries on suicides, violent acts such as rape, assault, forced marriages and migration can be utilised to construct a rather different version of what it means to be female under drones and drone strikes.

(Here this is a supplementary but intriguing question – what have been the cultural ramifications of the use of female soldiers in Afghanistan? So we know now that the US deployed female soldiers in Cultural Support Teams to try and 'engage' with the women of Afghanistan but there is as yet little work on how these female teams and indeed female drone pilots have affected cultural norms or grievances. A question to consider here is whether female drone pilots affect concepts of martyrdom.[26])

Concern 5: '*Looking in all the wrong places: Women and War*'.

While the concern throughout our workshops has been predominantly with those on the receiving end of 'precise' strikes, increasing evidence appears to point to the negative effects upon the service personnel perpetrating attacks. From Vietnam onwards, a considerable number of studies on PTSD, suicide rates and domestic violence amongst veterans and those who serve have been undertaken. Nancy Sherman's work, for example, has debated the issue of trauma.[27] Yet there needs to be yet more work on how the 'mythology' of killing impacts upon those who unleash this precise technology. In fact, one of the important 'stories' we are told about drones is that they are accurate and precise. Yet the mounting evidence points on numerous occasions in 'precisely' the opposite direction.[28] In itself this is 'disheartening' to those who carry out orders. [29] So what are and may be the longer term effects of such imprecise missions on those who execute them?

Concern 6: '*Law, Norms and Ethics*'.

Finally, in all of this there needs to be an extension of the debate about the norms, ethics and laws which govern or should govern 'killing' at a distance in foreign states with which 'we' are not even at war. But the very existence of drones and the inevitably that more states (and non-state actors) acquire such technology raises a series of further challenges. While in our project we interrogate drones as killing machines and instruments of coercion we appreciate that in some, indeed in many other aspects of international and domestic politics, drones bring economic benefits and opportunities for developing regions not least in the ability to cross terrain rapidly and cheaply. Africa, for example, may prove to be an interesting 'theatre' for economic exploitation and opportunity.[30] However, in the excitement of utilizing new technology the darker side of drones in fighting insurgency and terrorism should not be ignored.

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[26] Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, 'Women at War: How Women ended up in the front line in Afghanistan. May 28, 2015 at IDEAS.TED.COM

[27] Nancy Sherman, The Untold War: Inside the Hearts and Minds of our Soldiers. New York: W.W.Norton and Company.

[28] Andrew Cockburn, Kill Chain Drones and the Rise of High-Tech Assassins (London: Verso, 2015)

[29] Ed Pilkington, Life as a Drone Operator: Ever step on ants and never give it another thought?' in The Guardian, 18 November, 2015.

[30] See Michele Olivier, Comments at the St Andrews workshop. September 2015. See also 'Another African leapfrog: First drone highway could be operational in Rwanda by 2016' Mail & Guardian Africa, Mgafrica.com/…2015 09.21.

There is no doubt that the debates over the utility of drones will continue. Within the UK, there is at the moment though an overwhelming bias towards seeing these weapons as precise, clean and value free. Our recommendations argue that far more work needs to be undertaken not just on the consequences of drone strikes for those on the ground, voices need to be listened to and an array of 'evidence' picked apart from those on the receiving end. Equally important though is a thorough appraisal of what drones mean for strategic not tactical thinking in zones of conflict.

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