Rationalising Drone Warfare

The Biopolitics and Necropolitics of US, Israeli and UK Drone Warfare

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S1543350

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MA MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES

Leiden University,

Faculty of Humanities

August 2019

Abstract

This thesis examines how liberal democracies rationalise drone warfare. Drawing on the philosophical works of Michel Foucault, Michael Dillon, Julian Reid and Achille Mbembe, I argued that liberal democracies rationalise drone warfare through a discourse of biopower – the power over life - that presents drones and drone operators as life-preserving. Lethal drone strikes are rationalised as necessary acts of pre-emptive killing in order to save valuable life (killing to make life live). However, I also found that liberal democracies rationalise drone warfare through a discourse of necropower – the power over death – that deems acceptable the putting to death of entire populations living under drones. Hence, this thesis demonstrates that drone warfare reflects both a biopolitical and a necropolitical rationality.

Keywords: drone warfare, biopolitics, necropolitics

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1. Introduction

In 2005 Lawrence Freedman – foreign policy advisor to former Prime Minister Tony Blair and Professor of War Studies at King's College London – published an influential article entitled "The age of liberal wars".[1] Echoing the liberal peace thesis, Freedman argued that liberal democracies conduct war in the name of liberal values such as human security, reflecting "the need to protect the weak and the vulnerable, especially in the face of great violence."[2] Therefore, liberal democracies pursue a humanitarian agenda that seeks to "liberate" and "empower" the "repressed" victims of "illiberal" rule.[3]

Yet, over the past two decades, the large scale "humanitarian interventions" that have characterised the War on Terror have been replaced by a less costly remote type of warfare. Instead of the so-called "boots on the ground", this remote warfare relies on unmanned aerial vehicles, commonly referred to as drones. In contrast to Freedman's liberal wars, drones are not operated under the guise of "humanitarian intervention" or the "liberation" of "victims of repression". Instead, drones are often operated outside of the theatres of war, hidden from public scrutiny, to find, monitor and kill the self-designated enemies of liberal democracies.

The drone campaigns, carried out by the United States (US), Israel and the United Kingdom (UK), have killed and wounded thousands of insurgent suspects and civilians in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Gaza, Somalia and Libya. In addition, many more have been exposed to the invading gaze of the drone, its continuous buzzing sound and the fear for a lethal strike. Hence, drone warfare contradicts the value of individual human life and freedom to which these liberal democracies ascribe. As such, their appears to be a fundamental contradiction between drone warfare on the one hand and the liberal rationale for war on the other hand. It is the purpose of this thesis to understand this paradox of drone warfare and liberalism. Therefore, the following research question is raised: How are liberal democracies rationalising drone warfare?

To examine how drone warfare is rationalised by liberal democracies, this thesis draws on the works of Michel Foucault, Achille Mbembe, Michael Dillon and Julian Reid. Specifically, it draws on the concept of biopolitics, the informationalisation of life and necropolitics as they appear in the works of the beforementioned philosophers. Thus, rather

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[1] Lawrence Freedman, 'The age of liberal wars', Review of International Studies, 31 (2005): 93–107.

[2] Freedman, 'The age of liberal wars', 95,

[3] Ibid., 98.

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than criticising the legality, strategy or ethics of drone warfare, this thesis critically interrogates the epistemologies that are used to rationalise drone warfare. As a result, this thesis contributes to the literature that takes a philosophical approach to drone warfare.

1.1. Research Question

How are liberal democracies rationalising drone warfare? The research question contains three elements that need to be defined and explained: (i) drone warfare, (ii) political rationality, and (iii) liberal democracies. First, drone warfare is defined as the use of militarised armed drones for the purpose of warfare. This includes the use of drones for so-called intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance (ISTAR) operations and the use of drones to carry out air strikes in counterinsurgency operations and in other military operations.

Second, political rationality is defined here as "a systematic form of knowledge specifically aimed at formulating techniques and objectives of government."[4] This includes justifications for government but also a broader set of discourses and practices that construct the objects and objectives of government. Hence, philosophically speaking, examining the political rationalities for drone warfare creates a fundamental understanding of the relationship between drone warfare and liberalism. Furthermore, political rationality is particularly suited for the application of Foucault's theories of power as Foucault himself examined the political rationalities of liberal government.

Thirdly, there is the issue of defining liberal democracies. This thesis examines the rationalities of drone warfare in the US, Israel and the UK because these are the only three liberal democracies that have carried out drone strikes.[5] To be clear from the outset, the reason why this thesis classifies Israel, the US and the UK as liberal democracies is because they self-identify as such. In other words, this thesis is concerned with the shared perception of Israel,

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[4] Lars Cornelissen, "what is political rationality?" *Parrhesia* 29 (2018): 130. It is important to note that this thesis uses rationality and rationale, or the accompanying verb "to rationalise", interchangeably.

[5] Other states such as Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, the United Arab Emirates and Iraq have carried out drone strikes, but they do not self-identify as liberal democracies. Furthermore, other liberal democracies such as France, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands operate drones but have not carried out strikes so far. For more information see: https://www.newamerica.org/in-depth/world-of-drones/2-who-has-what-countries-drones-used-combat/. In fact, the US, Israel and the UK have by far the most advanced armed drone systems.

the US and the UK that they are liberal democracies, guided by shared norms and values of liberalism and democracy.[6]

So far, the literature on drone warfare has focussed mostly on the US. Limited scholarly attention that has been paid to the drone warfare of Israel and the UK. While some studies have examined Israel's policy of targeted killings in Gaza, there appears to be no critical interrogation of the discourses surrounding Israel's drone warfare.[7] Moreover, to my surprise, there are no specific studies on the discourses and practices of British drone warfare, apart from some policy and legal reviews, often conducted by the British government itself. That is why, this thesis extends the narrow focus on the US drone warfare by including insights from British and Israeli drone warfare. This contributes to a better understanding of how liberal democracies rationalise drone warfare.

1.2. Structure

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter two discusses the theoretical framework and the existing literature on drone warfare that draws on or is inspired by Foucault. In chapter three, I outline the methodology of this thesis. Subsequently, in chapter four, I contextualise the drone warfare of the US, the UK and Israel. Additionally, chapter four discusses the capabilities of drones that will return in the analytical chapters. The analytical chapters are structured in accordance with the theoretical framework: chapter five "Humanitarian Drone Warfare", chapter six "Killing to Make Life Live" and chapter seven "Producing Killable Bodies". Finally, chapter eight concludes by presenting the main arguments of the analytical chapters and by suggesting some ideas for further research.

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[6] Israel's status as a "liberal" democracy can be disputed because of the illiberal occupation of the Palestinian territories or the ethnic preference for Jews over Palestinian Arab citizens. See, Sammy Smooha, "The model of ethnic democracy: Israel as a Jewish and democratic state," *Nations and Nationalism* 8, no. 4 (2002): 475–503. However, James Eastwood has conducted an in-depth study of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) self-perception as a liberal and moral army. Similarly, in the US and the UK there is no question among government elites that they are liberal democracies.

[7] Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007); Lisa Hajjar, "Lawfare and Armed Conflicts: A Comparative Analysis of Israeli and U.S. Targeted Killing Policies and Legal Challenges against Them," in *Life in the Age of Drone. Warfare,* eds. Lisa Park and Caren Kaplan, 59–88 (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017).

2. Theoretical Framework

For examining the logics of drone warfare, this thesis draws on the philosophical works of Foucault, Dillon and Reid and Mbembe. Most importantly, I use Foucault's concept of biopolitics, which has been further developed by Dillon and Reid in their discussion of the liberal way of war and by Mbembe in his influential essay on necropolitics. This chapter then outlines the theoretical framework of this thesis. Firstly, by discussing the concept of biopolitics and its relationship to liberal wars, and secondly, by discussing how the concept of necropolitics serves as a valuable and necessary addition to biopolitics. Furthermore, this chapter discusses how biopolitics has been applied in the literature on drone warfare so far.

In order to understand the emergence of biopolitics in the work of Foucault, it is necessary to discuss Foucault's genealogy of power. In Foucault's genealogy of power, sovereign power appears as the first mode of power. For Foucault, sovereign power refers to the legal power of the ruler or state over its subjects. Hence, the sovereign state is characterized by a complete submission to the law. Ultimately, sovereign power is reflected in the sovereigns right to decide over life and death (to take life or let live), a sovereign right justified only in itself. This form of power, epitomised by the king's sword, used to be the dominant form of power in the West in the Middle Ages.[8]

However, the modernization of Western societies in the 18th and 19th centuries saw the emergence of new forms of power that corresponds with the problems in society of birth-rate, longevity, public health, housing, and migration.[9] Foucault therefore argues "there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of 'bio-power.'"[10] This new technique of power was directed at humans as species, their health and effectiveness as a totality.[11] Biopower thus works to manage and control populations, or as Foucault wrote: "to ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order."[12]

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[8] Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* (1976) (trans. By Robert Hurley, 1978), 136.

[9] Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge,* 140.

[10] Ibid., 140. Note that Foucault uses biopower and biopolitics interchangeably. I will mainly use the word biopolitics.

[11] Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended" Lectures at the College de France, 1975–1976*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson and trans. David Macey. New York: Picador, 2003, 242–243.

[12] Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge,* 138.

In contrast to the sovereign power of taking life and letting live, biopower is described as the power to make live and let die. In Foucault's genealogy, biopower gradually the primacy of sovereign power. Or as Foucault stated, "one might say that the ancient right to take life or let live was replaced by a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death."[13] This power of making life is one of the key characteristics of liberalism, which constitutes "the condition of intelligibility of biopolitics."[14] Liberalism, according to Foucault, is preoccupied with governing through the promotion of freedom. Freedom, however, is not a given to the natural society of the state but is rather constantly manufactured through the market, consumption, property rights, discussion, and even expression.[15]

In order to sustain the production of freedom, liberalism requires biopolitical management of the population "to ensure that it does not create conditions – and subjects – that are not amenable to government."[16] Liberalism thus requires biopolitics in order to (re)produce populations that are governable.[17] Hence, it is biopolitics within the framework of liberalism that determines who must be free to live and/or to die, who must be monitored or controlled, and who must be killed.[18] But how should we understand the violence that is produced through these biopolitics?

2.1. Liberal Way of War

Scholars of contemporary biopolitics locate the meaning of this violence within the liberal regime of government itself. They argue that biopolitical violence is enacted conform the regulatory norms of liberalism, dispersed through bureaucratic bodies, and justified as a necessary act to sustain, maintain and control the life of species.[19] Therefore, even war, the antithesis of the liberal devotion to perpetual peace, is produced within the very framework of

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Angélica Guerra-Barón, "Biopower and International Relations," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies,* November 20, 2017. https://oxfordre.com/internationalstudies/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-80.

[16] Kyle Grayson, "The ambivalence of assassination: Biopolitics, culture and political violence," *Security Dialogue* 43, no 1 (2012): 28.

[17] Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, *The Liberal Way of War: Killing to Make Life Live* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 87.

[18] Dillon and Reid, *The Liberal Way of War*, 87.

[19] Grayson, "The ambivalence of assassination," 28.

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liberalism.[20] Indeed, Foucault would argue contrary to liberal theories of international relations that modern warfare should not be understood "as a primitive state of being against which liberal societies and their power relations can be differentiated…but rather as the integral condition of life against which politically qualified forms of life within liberal societies have been defined and mobilised to struggle."[21]

In their book, *The Liberal Way of War: Killing to Make Life Live,* Dillon and Reid analyse this contradictory mechanism within liberalism – that is, the commitment to pacification through the pursuit of deadly force – in relation to the War on Terror. Dillon and Reid conceptualise the War on Terror as a biopolitical war, a killing in the interest of species survival. The liberal way of war is characterised by preventive and pre-emptive action. Hence, Dillon and Reid argue that "the real focus of biopolitics – the schwerpunkt of its war on life to emancipate life from war – is the future. It is not so much what life currently is, as what life may become, that is the preoccupation of biopolitics in the age of life as information."[22]

2.2. Informationalisation of Life

Considering that biopolitics in the liberal way of war takes life as its referent object, it is necessary to understand how life is defined. While Foucault understood the referent object of biopolitics largely in terms of its biological properties, Dillon and Reid argue that life is no longer just defined by its biopolitical properties, but also by the information it represents. They call this process the "informationalisation of life", which "required a massive and successive reduction of language to the utilitarian demands of 'communication', 'information' and, finally, 'code'," to the extent where code has come to define life itself.[23] Of particular importance to this informationalisation of life have been the molecular revolution in biology and the digital revolution in information sciences during the second half of the twentieth century.[24] These revolutions have changed the very definition of life by exposing it "to a logic of relentless manipulation and re-formation."[25]

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[20] Julian Reid, *The Biopolitics of the War on Terror: Life struggles, liberal modernity, and the defense of logistical societies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 20.

[21] Reid, *The Biopolitics of the War on Terror*, 20.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., 21.

[24] Dillon and Reid, 22.

[25] Ibid., 21.

Life is thus increasingly defined through what Foucault would call a logic of empiricism and positivism, which is inextricably linked to liberal thought and biopolitics.[26] But this biopolitical logic of empiricism and positivism does not recognise or target the properties of individual life. Rather, it is directed at life in its generality. In the words of Foucault: "The mechanisms introduced by biopolitics include forecasts, statistical estimates, and overall measures. And their purpose is not to modify any given phenomenon as such, or to modify a given individual insofar as he is an individual, but, essentially, to intervene at the level at which these general phenomena are determined, to intervene at the level of their generality." [27]

Even more than Foucault could foresaw, information has become the "vital sign of life across a whole variety of new domains of scientific enquiry and technological advance," to the extent that life no longer just refers to the biological, but also to the mechanical and the electronic.[28] As Dillon and Reid so eloquently put: "once the transactions and interactions concerning biological and other forms of life-like systems were construed in terms of information exchange, then the transactions and interactions concerning all manner of 'systems' – mechanical and electronic as well, for example – also came to be analysed in terms of life."[29]

The interactions between biological life, mechanical life and electronic life have been studied by cybernetics, "a theory of communication and control applying equally to animals, humans and machines."[30] Cybernetics envisions the development of hybrid "systems" where human and machine are combined informationally, with the ultimate aim of creating a post-human.[31] Cybernetics has greatly influenced military thinking especially in liberal democracies because it embraces the complexities and uncertainties of modern-day warfare, by incorporating these very complexities in innovative and adaptive systems.[32]

Indeed, Dillon and Reid argue that the liberal way of war is preoccupied with managing the complexities and uncertainties of life. Living entities, they argue, are contingent, which means that they are continuously adaptive and subjected to change. But "no external law

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[26] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended,* 248.

[27] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended,* 246.

[28] Dillon and Reid, 61–62.

[29] Ibid.

[30] N Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 7. Cybernetics is also defined as "the science of communications and automatic control systems in both machines and living things."

[31] Dillon and Reid, 64.

[32] Ibid.

governs their appearance, and no external law governs their continuous adaptive emergence."[33] Instead they are governed by an immanent law, which is not causal or linear, but rather probabilistic and non-linear, meaning that "the changes which living things exhibit cannot simply be read off from the extrapolation of their previous behaviour or from the permanence of their fixed properties."[34]

But if life is unknown and unpredictable, how then can this life be governed? In other words, how does biopolitics manage the contingency of life? It has been said that liberal security practices and discourses seek to foreclose this contingency of life.[35] Yet, what this view fails to recognise is how liberal rule has come to intervene precisely through the contingency of life by continuously monitoring, measuring and calculating its probabilities. Although liberal rule sometimes effectively forecloses life's contingency, its aim is rather to make this contingency amenable through biopolitical techniques such as statistics, metadata and algorithms.[36]

The so-called Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) that took place in the 1990s and 2000s has been crucial for governing the contingency of life.[37] The RMA sparked a rapid acceleration in innovative information communication technologies (ICT), military systems, and security discourses.[38] The RMA has been the key driver for the development of modern-day military drones and the ways in which they are operated. Hence, it is all the more remarkable that drones are entirely absent in the book of Dillon and Reid.

The governance of contingency, enhanced by the RMA, is now also the driving logic in the US fight against terrorism. This is exemplified in the name changing of operations against terrorism from the "the global war on terror" to "Overseas Contingency Operations".[39] It is important to note that since all life is contingent, in theory, liberal biopolitics seeks to manage all life globally. Indeed, Dillon and Reid speak of a global liberal governance.[40] Yet, the focus

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[33] Ibid., 60.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Claes Tängh Wrangel, "Biopolitics of hope and security: governing the future through US counterterrorism communications," *Globalizations* (2019): 1–14.

[36] Michael Dillon, "Governing through contingency: The security of biopolitical governance," *Political Geography* 26, no. 1 (2007): 46.

[37] Bianca Baggiarini, "Drone warfare and the limits of sacrifice," *Journal of International Political Theory* 11, no. 1 (2015): 135.

[38] Timothy Vasko, "Solemn Geographies of Human Limits: Drones and the Neocolonial Administration of Life and Death," *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action* 6, no 1 (2013): 92-93.

[39] Dillon, "Governing through contingency," 42.

[40] Dillon and Reid, 105.

of this thesis will be on the peripheral spaces where the contingency of life is considered most dangerous to liberal democracies. The "ungoverned spaces" such as Gaza, Yemen, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq, which "breed terror" and where drones "need to" fly.

To conclude, Dillon and Reid have argued that in the contemporary biopolitical of liberal warfare, life is no longer just defined biologically but also by the information it represents. They call the change in the definition of life the informationalisation of life. In the final chapter of this thesis, I will examine how drone warfare seeks to manage and control populations by reducing it to information. Furthermore, I will draw on the insights from Dillon and Reid on cybernetic warfare – the cooperation between human and machine – to understand how drones and drone operators are constructed in biopolitical terms.

2.3. Humanitarian Drones

Humanitarianism is one of the key characteristics of the liberal way of war. First, liberal democracies have used humanitarian reasons to go to war. In Afghanistan and Iraq, for example the US and the UK have used humanitarian concerns over women's rights and repression of minorities to justify sanctions and intervention.[41] Second, liberal democracies usually send humanitarian aid and finance infrastructures of the "repressed" people in the "third world". Ironically, in the case of Iraq, this occurred before and after those liberal democracies had destroyed the very infrastructures and livelihoods of these peoples. Similarly, Yves Winter has described Israel's occupation of Gaza as a humanitarian siege where Israel manages and controls the wellbeing of the Gazan population by exercising full control over medical, food and water supplies.[42]

Third, liberal democracies often claim that they are committed to humanitarian ideals in the conduct of war. Legally this is known as the Jus in Bello, or International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Though not explicitly, some scholars have studied the humanitarian aspects of drone warfare. Especially relevant for this thesis is Allison Rowland's discussion of the biopolitical discourses surrounding US drone warfare. Rowland argues that US officials seek to legitimise drone warfare based on "a commitment to the sanctity of 'life itself' or to perform humanitarianism."[43]

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[41] Reid, *The Biopolitics of the War on Terror,* 53–54.

[42] Yves Winter, "The Siege of Gaza: Spatial Violence, Humanitarian Strategies, and the Biopolitics of Punishment Constellations," *Constellations Volume* 23, no. 2 (2016): 308–319.

[43] Allison Rowland, "Life-Saving Weapons: The Biolegitimacy of Drone Warfare," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 19, no 4 (2016): 603.

This biopolitical discourse of legitimacy contains three elements. First, drone operations are legitimised through a rhetoric that directly invokes life itself, which is best summarized in former President Barak Obama's statement: "Simply put, these strikes have saved lives."[44] Saving life refers not only to US soldiers, drones are also said to save the lives of innocent civilians because of their precision (assuming other means of violence as the counterfactual while ignoring/disregarding the pacifistic counterfactual). Second, drone warfare is legitimised through a biomedical discourse that presents the drone through its precision as a surgical instrument to eliminate the terrorist threat, a prophylaxis that cures to make live.[45]

To illustrate, the Counterterrorism Advisor to the Obama administration, John Brennan, presented drones as a "necessary and preventative medical instrument through which the 'cancer' that is Al-Qaeda terrorists can be removed."[46] Hence, Schwarz argues: "the act of ethical killing is biopolitically justified for purposes of prophylaxis and prevention, in order to maintain the homeostasis of an organic entity."[47] Third, the US government legitimises drones by juxtaposing the life preserving power of the drone against its death producing "terrorist targets". In other words, a US drone strike preserves life whereas a "terrorist's" only purpose is to annihilate life.[48]

Indeed, former President George W. Bush praised the US for having a "culture of life" and blamed Islamic groups for having a "culture of death".[49] Of course, this discourse has taken a whole new level under the Trump Administration, with former Attorney General, Jeff Sessions arguing that the true threat confronting the United States is "the toxic ideology of Islam".[50] According to Rowland, "the ongoing stripping of biolegitimacy from the Muslim Other creates favorable conditions for drones to be imbued with biolegitimacy in the ongoing War on Terror."[51]

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[44] Rowland, "Life-Saving Weapons," 612.

[45] Rowland, 613–614. See also, Elke Schwarz, "Prescription drones: On the techno-biopolitical regimes of contemporary ethical killing," *Security Dialogue* 47, no 1 (2016): 59–75.

[46] Schwarz, "Prescription drones," 68.

[47] Ibid., 71.

[48] Rowland, 616. See also, Grégoire Chamayou, *Theory of the Drone* (trans. Janet Lloyd, The New Press: New York and London, 2015).

[49] Rowland, 615.

[50] William McCants, "The implications of Donald Trump's sharps contrast from Obama and Bush on Islam," *Brookings,* December 15, 2016, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/12/15/the-implications-of-donald-trumps-sharp-contrast-from-obama-and-bush-on-islam/.

[51] Rowland, 617.

To conclude, various scholars have analysed US drone warfare from a biopolitical perspectives. They found that the US justifies drone warfare through a biopolitical discourse of humanitarianism, which takes life as its referent object. In chapter five, I examine the biopolitical discourses of humanitarianism in drone warfare. I extend the narrow focus on US drone discourses to Israel and the UK to find out the commonalities and differences between these liberal democracies.

2.4. Necropolitics

The previous section discussed how drone warfare has been analysed through the prism of biopolitics, the power to make life live. While this perspective is certainly useful to understand drone warfare, it does not touch upon a fundamental characteristics of drone warfare, namely the preoccupation with killing. Indeed, in the end the objective is to kill those who seem dangerous to the population. Thus, drone warfare not only entails the biopolitical power of making live, but also the sovereign power to take life. Drawing on Foucault's and Mbembe, this final section of the theoretical framework outlines how we may understand this convergence of biopolitics and sovereign power within drone warfare.

In the final section of his book *Society Must Be Defended,* Foucault discusses one of the fundamental puzzles of biopolitics and liberalism. He raises the question of how biopower, the power to make live, can be used to kill.

> How can a power such as this kill, if it is true that its basic function is to improve life, to prolong its duration, to improve its chances, to avoid accidents, and to compensate for failings? How, under these conditions, is it possible for a political power to kill, to call for deaths, to demand deaths, to give the order to kill, and to expose not only its enemies but its own citizens to the risk of death? Given that this power's objective is essentially to make live, how can it let die? How can the power of death, the function of death, be exercised in a political system centered upon biopower?[52]

For Foucault this power over death in a system of biopolitics can only be exercised on the basis of racism. He defines racism as "a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power's control: the break between what must live and what must die."[53] Racism essentially has two functions. The first is to fragment society into subgroups, "in short, a way

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[52] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 254.

[53] Ibid., 254.

of establishing a biological-type caesura within a population that appears to be a biological domain."[54]

The second function of racism is "to allow the establishment of a positive relation of this type: 'The more you kill, the more deaths you will cause' or 'The very fact that you let more die will allow you to live more.'"[55] Foucault acknowledges that this relationship "was not invented by either racism or the modern State. It is the relationship of war: 'In order to live, you must destroy your enemies.'"[56] However, racism is what shapes this relationship because in the political system of biopolitics it is not simply that the enemy must die, but that the Other must die if you want to live.

Drawing on Foucault's discussion of biopolitics and racism, Mbembe coined the concept of necropolitics, the power over death, to account for the forms of subjugation of life to the power of death, which has characterised colonial rule and the more recent War on Terror.[57] According to Mbembe, biopolitics is insufficient "to account for the contemporary ways in which the political, under the guise of war, of resistance, or of the fight against terror, makes the murder of the enemy its primary and absolute objective."[58] Therefore, he introduced the concept of necropolitics.

In contrast to biopower, necropolitics refers to the deployment of death rather than the targeting of life. This necropolitics is activated in a state of exception, which takes the sovereign's right to kill to its limits. But how does this necropolitics or necropower functions? Similar to Foucault, Mbembe argues that the crucial factors at work behind necropower are enmity and racism.[59] The logic of enmity rests on the idea that the Other poses, as Mbembe argues, "a mortal threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen my potential to life and security."[60]

The second factor is racism. Racism is closely related to enmity but functions more fundamentally as a filter through which people make their decisions. Racism involves a process of racialization, of inscribing group affinity and difference mainly onto the body of the Other.

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[54] Ibid., 255.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 39–40.

[58] Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 12.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid., 18.

Furthermore, racism involves the ascription of stereotypes to the Other and her dehumanization, commonly found in colonialism and Western imperialism.[61] Indeed, Mbembe considers colonial power a form of necropower, which does not distinguish between combatants and non-combatants or an enemy and a criminal.[62] This form of power considers the "savage" Other as less than life, worthy of death, "whose extinguishing must be managed in order for valuable life to flourish."[63]

According to Jamie Allinson, drones are a manifestation of necropower because they unite "the exercise of sovereign power with technologies of the surveillance, auditing, and management of populations."[64] While the drone's gaze reflects a form of biopower, it eventually strikes and destroys its target, reflecting the sovereign power to take life.[65] I use the concept of necropower in chapter seven, where I argue that the rationalities of liberal drone warfare go beyond the discourse of biopolitics.

To conclude, necropolitics provides useful insights into the convergence of sovereign power and biopower in drone warfare. Similar to biopolitics, necropolitics relies on a discourse of racism to determine who is disposable and who is not. Yet, contrary to biopolitics, a necropolitical rationale for drone warfare aims for the maximum destruction of the Other with no regards for the communities living under drones.

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[61] Jamie Allinson, "The Necropolitics of Drones," *International Political Sociology* 9 (2015): 118.

[62] Mbembe, 24.

[63] Allinson, "The Necropolitics of Drones," 117.

[64] Allinson., 119.

[65] Ibid., 119–120.

3. Methodological Approach

How are liberal democracies rationalising drone warfare? This chapter discusses the methodological approach that is used to apply the concepts of biopolitics and necropolitics to the research question. From the outset it should be noted that it is difficult to incorporate Foucauldian theories of power in a research design because Foucault never outlined clearly how his theories should be used. As Barry Smart noted, Foucault's work lacks "a recommendation or direction for action, an answer to the question 'What is to be done?'"[66]

So, what would be the best approach to examine how liberal democracies rationalise drone warfare through the concepts of biopolitics and necropolitics? Considering that political rationality entails the discourses and practises that construct the objects and objectives of government, the appropriate methodological approach is discourse analysis. In the three sections that follow, I elaborate on the method of discourse analysis, the selected data and the limitations of this thesis.

3.1. Discourse Analysis

As the name reflects, discourse analysis is used to examine discourse. Specifically, it examines how knowledge and meaning are socially constructed. Stuart Hall defines discourse as: "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment. Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect."[67] In agreement with Hall's definition, this thesis treats both the language and the practice of drone warfare as discourse.

Discourse analysis is a qualitative research approach which is "particularly good at examining and developing theories that deal with the role of meanings and interpretations."[68] Most importantly for this research, this method analyses how different forms of power affect the construction of meaning and knowledge. Hence, it is a useful approach to understand how biopower and necropower operate through the rationalities of drone warfare.

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[66] Barry Smart, "The Politics of Truth and the Problem of Hegemony," in Foucault: A Critical Reader, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 166.

[67] Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices,* ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 43.

[68] Douglas Ezzy, *Qualitative Analysis: Practice and innovation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), 3.

The application of discourse analysis emanates from the conceptualisation of biopolitics. As discussed, biopolitics takes species life (the population) as its referent object and the preservation and optimisation of life as its objective. From the discourses on drone warfare in the US, Israel and the UK, I identified three populations that "need preserving": (1) the soldiers or troops from the US, Israel and the UK, (2) the citizens from these countries and the "West" in general and (3) the populations targeted by drone warfare.[69]

Chapter five analyses the discourse of humanitarianism, which constructs drones and their operators as preserving the lives of soldiers and civilians living under drones. Subsequently, chapter six analyses the discourse of pre-emptive killing, which constructs lethal drone strikes as the pre-emptive killing of threats to the population. As discussed in the theoretical framework, biopolitics requires a discourse of threat for killing to be acceptable. Therefore, I examine how the people killed by drone strikes are constructed as "terrorist threats" to the populations through a discourse of racism that juxtaposes the Self against the Other.[70]

While chapter five and six discuss the external rationales for drone warfare, chapter seven discusses the internal rationales for drone warfare. In contrast to the external rationales, the internal rationales are not directed towards the domestic or international public. Instead they construct meaning and provide explanations for how to conduct drone warfare. In line with the definition of discourse, the internal rationales not only include the language used by government officials or drone operators, but also the practices of drone warfare. Specifically, chapter seven discusses the most controversial practice of drone warfare: the process of identifying and killing people. I examine how this process is used to constructs what I call killable bodies on the basis of drone surveillance and algorithms.

3.2. Data Selection

This section discusses the primary data that is used in the thesis including the motivations for selecting the data. The first two analytical chapters draw on public sources because they examine how drone warfare is rationalised to the population. For this, I selected a variety of public speeches, statements and documents from the US, Israel and the UK. In line with the

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[69] In this thesis the notion of the "West" as a space is not limited geographically to countries in Western Europe and North America. The West refers to those spaces that are constructed as liberal and democratic. Furthermore, the biopolitical terms "preserving life" and "saving life" are used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

[70] People who are killed by drone strikes are publicly referred to as "targets", "terrorists" or "unlawful combatants". In the remaining part of the thesis, I will not use quotation marks when referring to these terms. Naturally I do acknowledge that these are social constructs which are used to justify drone strikes.

research question, the sources had to meet three conditions: originating from the government, mentioning the use of militarised drones and providing explanations for the use of drones. Naturally, the selected sources are not exhaustive but they provide a comprehensive basis for examining the biopolitical rationale for drone warfare.

To examine the US discourse on drone warfare, I mainly drew on former President Barack Obama's 2013 speech at the National Defense Academy as well as two speeches from John Brennan, the former Counterterrorism advisor to President Obama.[71] The UK discourses on drone warfare were examined on the basis of parliamentary reports and statements from former Prime Minister David Cameron and former Defence Secretary, Philip Hammond. Finally, to examine Israel's drone discourses, I drew on statements from the Israeli government and the IDF, individual drone operators and YouTube videos released by the IDF. The reason why I have not examined speeches from Israeli government officials is because the public discourse on drone warfare is largely absent and limited to the military in Israel.

While chapters five and six draw on public sources, chapter seven examines classified documents from the US military that have been made public through a freedom of information request or by leaks from the US intelligence community. The two main sources are a classified Pentagon study on US drone warfare, which was publicised by the Intercept in 2015, and a transcript of the exchanges between a US drone crew detailing a drone strike on a group of Afghan civilians in the province of Uruzgan in 2010.

3.3. Limitations and Positionality

In this final section of the methodology, I discuss my positionality as a researcher and the limitations of this research respectively. I am in no way personally involved in drone warfare nor do I have any friends or relatives whose lives have been impacted by drone strikes, who are in the military or part of the intelligence establishment in one of the three countries that I investigated. However, personally I am critical of drone warfare. In fact, one of the reasons why I conducted this research is to criticise the assumptions that underpin liberal drone warfare. Hence, my research should not be seen as an attempt to objectively determine whether drone

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[71] Specifically, I will draw on Brennan's 2010 speech at CSIS and his 2012 speech at the Woodrow Wilson Center. See: Brennan 2010, Remarks by Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism John Brennan at CSIS | The White House. Available at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-assistant-president- homeland-security-and-counterterrorism-john-brennan-csi; John Brennan, "Counterterrorism: The Ethics and Efficacy of the President's Counterterrorism Strategy," (speech, April 30, 2012), Woodrow Wilson Center, http://www.cfr.org/counterterrorism/brennans-speech-counterterrorism-april-2012/ p28100.

warfare is necessary or ethical or not. Rather, I seek to criticise how drone warfare is presented as necessary and ethical from an interpretivist perspective.

There are a few limitations to my research that need to be addressed. First, the time frame for selecting data ranges from the first employment of armed drones in 2001 to June 2019. However, my analysis focusses on the period after Obama was elected President in 2008, because this marked a stark increase in the use and rhetoric on drones. Second, due to a lack of publicly available data on the UK and Israel, I could only examine the targeting processes of US drone warfare. Hence, the analysis in chapter seven is based largely on evidence from the US. Third, Israel has never publicly acknowledged the use of armed drones. However, there is a public discourse on targeted killings, which are mostly carried out by drones. Therefore, I examine this discourse in chapter six.

Fourth, given the scope of this thesis, not all practices of drone warfare could be discussed. Therefore, chapter seven only discusses the two most important elements of the targeting process within drone warfare: (i) the US disposition matrix and (ii) the pattern of life analysis used to identify threats. Fifth, I recognise that the discourses and practices of drone warfare are not new but part of a wider range of discourses and practices of modern warfare. While I note this in my analysis, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to extensively discuss the wider regime of modern surveillance and precision warfare of which drones are the most recent and controversial phenomenon.

4. History of Drone Warfare

The debate on drone warfare has mainly focussed on the covert drone programme of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in Waziristan, which was initiated by the Bush Administration in 2004 and greatly expanded by the Obama Administration since 2008. However, military drones are operated extensively by the US Air Force (USAF), the Israeli military and the British military in many spaces across the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa. Furthermore, the history of drone warfare by liberal democracies extends far beyond the CIA's counterinsurgency operations. Hence, this chapter traces the history of American, Israeli and British drone warfare from their first use in the twentieth century to their proliferation in twenty-first century.

The chapter first traces the history of Israel's drone warfare from 1973 Yom Kippur War to its current use of drones in Gaza. Subsequently, this chapter discusses the history and contemporary use of drones by the US and the UK. Finally, I will outline the capabilities of armed drones that are currently used by the US, the UK and Israel. As such, this chapter will provide the context for the analytical chapters.

4.1. Israel and Drones

While drones were already used in the First World War and later during the Vietnam War in the 1970s, they first played a decisive role in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, when Israel's Defence Forces (IDF) used unarmed drones to mislead the Egyptian ground-to-air missiles.[72] Israel was also the first country to recognise the potential of drones to target insurgent fighters in increasingly asymmetrical wars. During the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, the IDF used drones to locate targets for piloted aircrafts, and in 2001, it was reported that Israel's military industrial complex had started to develop missile carrying drones that could be used to strike enemy targets.[73]

Israel's armed military drones are produced by the Israeli companies Elbit Systems and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI).[74] The Israeli Air Force (IAF) operates two armed IAI-manufactured drones: The Heron 1 and the Heron TP. In addition, the IAF operates the Hermes

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[72] Grégoire Chamayou, *A Theory of the Drone,* trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: The New Press, 2015), 27.

[73] Markus Gunneflo, *Targeted Killing: A Legal and Political History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 80–81.

[74] Mary Dobbing and Chris Cole, *Israel and the Drone Wars: Examining Israel's production, use and proliferation of UAVs* (Oxford: Drone Wars UK, 2014), 7.

450 and Hermes 900, which are produced by Elbit Systems. The Hermes 450, which can be equipped with two Rafael or Spike missiles, has been used most extensively by the IAF to conduct lethal operations in Gaza and during the Lebanon War in 2006.[75] In addition, the Hermes 450 is popular among Israel's arm's customers including the UK, which has been operating unarmed Hermes 450 drones in Iraq since 2007.[76]

It should be noted that Israel has never acknowledged that it operates armed drones up till today.[77] However, various reports have proven beyond doubt that Israel has used armed drones to conduct airstrikes in Gaza and Lebanon.[78] Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Fightglobal reported on several drone strikes in Lebanon in July 2006 during the 2006 July War, which were conducted by Israel's Heron 1 drones.[79] Reports from Israeli, Palestinian and Lebanese non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also indicated an intensive use of Elbit Systems' Hermes 450 drones equipped with two Rafael-made missiles in Gaza, the July Lebanon War and Sudan in 2009.[80]

Yet the vast majority of Israel's drone strikes have been conducted in Gaza as part of Israel's targeted killing campaign of Hamas members and other designated "terrorists". Eyal Weizman argues that "throughout the years of the second Intifada [September 2000 – February 2005], major efforts were directed at the development and 'perfection' of the tactics of airborne targeted assassinations. From a 'rare and exceptional emergency method' it has become the Air Force's most common form of attack."[81] Indeed, since Israel's ground forces were withdrawn from Gaza in August 2005, airborne "targeted assassinations have become the most significant and frequent form of Israeli military attack."[82]

Certainly, drones are pivotal in airborne targeted assassinations. Not only are they used extensively by the Israeli Air Force (IAF) to provide continuous intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance over Gaza, they are also increasingly used to conduct strikes on alleged Hamas

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[75] Dobbing and Cole, *Israel and the Drone Wars,* 11.

[76] Ibid*.,* 22.

[77] Ibid., 3.

[78] Ibid., 8.

[79] Ibid., 10–11.

[80] Yaakov Katz, "IDF believed to be using armed UAVs," *Jerusalem Post*, August 8, 2012, https://www.jpost.com/Defense/IDF-believed-to-be-using-armed-UAVs.

[81] Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007), 238.

[82] Weizman, 238. Although Israel withdrew its ground forces, many human rights organisations and the United Nations have noted that Gaza remains under Israeli occupation. Weizman refers to this as the "airborne occupation".

military facilities, suspected members of Hamas, and other suspected "terrorists". According to the Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights and the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, out of the 2100 persons killed by air strikes between September 2000 and December 2013, at least 644 were killed by drone strikes. The center classified 399 of the 644 persons as civilians, including 183 children and 16 women.[83]

Although the total number of deaths resulting from Israeli drone strikes has not been verified by international organisations, it is clear that drones have had a devasting impact on Gaza by killing and wounding hundreds of people and destroying infrastructures and housing. In fact, HRW, Amnesty International and Defense for Children International Palestine (DCIP) have provided detailed reports of the high number of civilian casualties as a result of Israeli drone strikes.[84] For example, DCIP documented at least 48 civilian deaths from drone strikes during Operation Cast Lead between December 27, 2008 and January 18, 2009. In addition, DCIP documented that Israeli drones killed at least 164 children during Operation Protective Edge between July 8 and August 26 in 2014. Chapter five examines how Israel is able to presents its drone operations as "humanitarian" despite the high number of civilian casualties. It will be argued that this notion of "humanitarianism" reflects the biopolitical rationale of Israel's drone warfare.

4.2. US and Drones

Inspired by Israel's successful use of drones in Lebanon, the US started to developed its own advanced military drones in the 1980s. In the early 1990s, the company General Atomics Aeronautical Systems built the MQ-1 Predator drone, which was initially conceived for aerial intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance roles, but later upgraded with two Hellfire missiles to carry out air strikes.[85] The Predator would not live up to its name until the war in Afghanistan in 2001. According to President George W. Bush, Afghanistan marked the

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[83] Atef Abu Saif, "Sleepless in Gaza: Israeli drone war on the Gaza Strip" (Ramallah: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Regional Office Palestine, 2014), 23.

[84] Human Rights Watch, *Precisely Wrong: Gaza Civilians Killed by Israeli Drone-Launched Missiles* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2014); Saif, *Sleepless in Gaza*; Defense for Children International Palestine, *Operation Protective Edge: A war waged on Gaza's children* (Ramallah: Defense for Children International Palestine, 2015).

[85] "MQ-1B Predator," Facts Sheets, U.S. Air Force, last modified September 23, 2015, https://www.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/104469/mq-1b-predator/.

beginning of a new age in warfare, an age that requires "innovative doctrines in high-tech weaponry", which are key in defeating "shadowy, entrenched enemies".[86]

Bush proudly claimed that "the Predator is a good example" of such high-tech weaponry, as he added that "this unmanned aerial vehicle is able to circle over enemy forces, gather intelligence, transmit information instantly back to commanders, then fire on targets with extreme accuracy. Before the war, the Predator had sceptics because it did not fit the old ways. Now it is clear: The military does not have enough unmanned vehicles."[87] Accordingly, the US greatly expanded its armed drone fleet in the years to follow, from sixty Predators in 2001 to 246 operational Predators in 2014.[88] In addition, the US had 126 operational MQ-9 Reapers in 2014.[89]

The Reaper was introduced as the successor of the Predator in 2007.[90] With a twenty-meter wingspan, a maximum altitude of 15.000 meters, a maximum speed of 480 km/h and an endurance of thirty hours without and fourteen hours with full payload, the Reaper is larger, faster and more powerful than its predecessor. Furthermore, the maximum payload of 1700 kg allows the Reaper to carry up to four AGM-114 Hellfire missiles and two laser-guided bombs, which makes it more apt for killing.[91] Hence, in the words of General Atomics: "twice as fast as Predator, it carries 500% more payload and has nine times the horsepower. Predator B [other name of the Reaper] provides a long-endurance, persistent surveillance/strike capability for the war fighter."[92]

Just like the Predator, the Reaper drones are launched from US airbases in Afghanistan, Iraq or Somalia and operated via Ku-band satellite link from Creech Air Force Base near Las Vegas.[93] The vast infrastructure of satellite links, which is used by the US and its international partners, is also used to transmit real-time imagery of the various sensors aboard the Reaper "to

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[86] George W. Bush quoted in Richard Whittle, *Predator: The Secret Origins of the Drone Revolution* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2014), 292.

[87] Bush quoted in Whittle, *Predator: The Secret Origins of the Drone Revolution,* 292.

[88] "MQ-1B Predator," Facts Sheets, U.S. Air Force, last modified September 23, 2015, https://www.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/104469/mq-1b-predator/.

[89] "MQ-9 Reaper," Fact Sheets, U.S. Air Force, last modified September 23, 2015, https://www.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/104470/mq-9-reaper/.

[90] "MQ-9 Reaper," Fact Sheets, U.S. Air Force.

[91] Ibid.

[92] "Predator B RPA", General Atomics Aeronautical, accessed July 2, 2019, http://www.ga-asi.com/predator-b.

[93] Derek Gregory, "From a View to a Kill: Drones and Late Modern War," *Theory, Culture & Society* 28, no. 7–8 (2011): 192.

ground users around the clock, and beyond-line-of-sight."[94] The combination of advanced sensor systems with persistent surveillance and strike capability make the Reaper the most popular intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance (ISTAR) drone platform.[95]

The enhanced endurance of the Reaper in combination with the increase of the operational drone fleet resulted in a stark increase in the accumulated flying hours of America's armed drones. While the accumulated flight time of the Predator drone had been one million hours between the 1990s and 2011, the flight hours of the combined Reaper and Predator force doubled in the next two and a half-year to two million, and in March 2019, the USAF announced that the Predator and Reaper together had completed more than four million flight hours.[96] Chapter seven will address the question of how these ISTAR capabilities of the Predator and the Reaper have influenced the informationalisation of life. The chapter will focus in particular on the methodologies used to by the US military to "find, fix and finish" targets.

Besides the size of its drone fleet and the number of flying hours, the US is also the country that has carried out the most drone strikes in countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, Iraq and Syria. Drone strikes really surged since Obama took office in 2008. During his two terms in office, the US military carried out 563 strikes in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen, which is ten times more than his predecessor in the eight years before.[97] The strikes killed between 384 and 807 civilians, according to reports logged by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism.[98] According to the Bureau, the total number of killed people by American drones since the start of the programmes in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia is 8,459–12,105, including 769–1,725 civilians of which 253–397 children.[99]

It should be noted that it is difficult to account for all the civilian casualties of drone strikes because of the secrecy surrounding drone warfare and the problematic definition of what constitutes an enemy combatant, a civilian or a child. Moreover, President Donald Trump rolled

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[94] "MQ-9 Reaper," Fact Sheets, U.S. Air Force.

[95] Ibid.

[96] "USAF Predator, Reaper hit four million hours," *Shephard Media*, March 15, 2019, https://www.shephardmedia.com/news/uv-online/predator-reaper-hit-four-million-hours/.

[97] Jessica Purkiss and Jack Serle, "Obama's covert drone war in numbers: ten times more strikes than Bush," *Bureau of Investigative Journalism,* January 17, 2017, https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2017-01-17/obamas-covert-drone-war-in-numbers-ten-times-more-strikes-than-bush.

[98] Purkiss and Serle, "Obama's covert drone war in numbers."

[99] Ibid.

back the little transparency gained under the last few years of the Obama administration by removing the need for US intelligence officials to publicise the numbers of civilians killed in air strikes outside official war zones in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan.[100]

As mentioned in the introduction, the ability to discriminate between civilians and combatants is one of the major promises of drone warfare. Yet, the number of civilian casualties of US drone strikes, which at times even surpasses that of conventional air strikes, reveals a different reality.[101] Still the presentation of drones as humanitarian weapons remains at the forefront of US drone discourses. This paradox is discussed in chapter five.

4.3. UK and Drones

The RAF began using the armed drones in October 2007, with the first British drone strike taking place in Afghanistan in May 2008.[102] Unlike Israel and the US, the UK does not have domestically manufactured armed drones.[103] Instead, the British Royal Air Force (RAF) relies on the US manufactured MQ-9 Reaper, of which it has nine currently operational, to carry out air strikes and for most intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions.[104] Until 2012, the British Reaper drones were even operated from the Creech Air Force Base in Nevada by RAF air crews.[105]

Since 2012, an additional RAF drone squadron began operating Reapers from RAF Waddington in Lincolnshire, UK.[106] Yet, the intertwinement of the British armed drone programme with the American drone programmes has continued with the UK relying on US satellites and both countries exchanging intelligence on potential targets. Moreover, the US has only exported the missile carrying Reapers to the UK. This intertwinement can be seen as the result of the so-called "special relationship" between the UK and the US which developed after

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[100] Jessica Purkiss, "Trump rolls back transparency on civilian drone deaths," *Bureau of Investigative Journalism,* March 7, 2019, https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2019-03-07/trump-tells-cia-dont-tell-world-about-dead-civilians.

[101] Micah Zenko, "Drones Kill More Civilians Than Pilots Do," *Foreign Policy,* April 25, 2016, https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/25/drones-kill-more-civilians-than-pilots-do/.

[102] "British Drones: An Overview," Drone Wars UK, last modified May 2019, https://dronewars.net/british-drones-an-overview/

[103] The British military does operate a variety of domestically manufactured unarmed surveillance and reconnaissance drones. Yet, the focus of this thesis is on armed drones because they have the capability to kill people in addition to the "conventional" reconnaissance and surveillance capabilities.

[104] "British Drones: An Overview," Drone Wars UK.

[105] Ibid.

[106] "13 Squadron," Royal Air Force, accessed May 22, 2019, https://www.raf.mod.uk/our-organisation/squadrons/13-squadron/.

the Second World War. The intertwinement of British drone warfare with American drone warfare will be discussed in chapter seven. Especially how this intertwinement relates to the informationalisation of life.

Between 2007 and 2014, the RAF only deployed armed drones in Afghanistan. During this time, it reported only one instance where civilians were killed.[107] In October 2014, the RAF began deploying armed drones against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Iraq as part of Operation Shader. The deployment of armed drones expanded to Syria in December 2015, when a British Reaper drone targeted and killed the British citizen Reyaad Khan together with his Belgium brother Ruhul Amin.[108] This specific case is discussed in chapter six as part of the discourse of pre-emptive killing.

4.4. Conclusion

This provided a brief overview of the histories of US, Israeli and UK drone warfare. While the academic literature focusses mainly on US drone warfare, this chapter demonstrated that Israel has a long history of operating unarmed and armed drones. Most importantly, Israel relies on drones to kill suspected members of Hamas. Furthermore, the UK has also become a major player in the world of armed drones since the past decade. The purpose of this chapter was to provide an introduction into the drone warfare of these three countries and outline the capabilities of armed drones. The following three chapters are the core of this thesis as they examine how drone warfare is rationalised.

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[107] On March 25, 2011, a British Reaper drone fired its Helfire missiles on two vehicles in the Afghan district of Helmand, intentionally killing two Taliban insurgents but also four Afghan civilians who were only identified in the post-strike analysis. Nick Hopkins, "Afghan civilians killed by RAF drone," *Guardian,* July 5, 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/jul/05/afghanistan-raf-drone-civilian-deaths.

[108] Ben Quinn, "Briton Reyaad Khan believed killed in air strike on Islamic State in Syria," *Guardian,* July 21, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jul/21/briton-reyaad-khan-believed-killed-air-strike-islamic-state-syria.

5. Humanitarian Warfare

> "There's a war going on and drones are the most refined, accurate and humane way to fight it" (Jeff Hawkins, US State Department).[109]

Despite the thousands of civilians killed and wounded in drone strikes proponents of drone warfare claim that it represents "a major step forward…in humanitarian technology."[110] They argue that drones are humanitarian since they do not only preserve the lives of troops, but also preserve the lives of civilians in times of war. As such, drones are said to reflect the liberal value for life. Hence, this chapter raises the following sub-question: How are liberal democracies rationalising drone warfare through a discourse of humanitarianism?

To explain how the US, Israel and the UK present drone warfare as humanitarian, this chapter draws on the statements from government officials and drone operators as well as government reports and videos released on YouTube by the RAF and the IDF. From these primary sources, I identified three arguments of how drones safe lives. First, by removing soldiers from the battlefield, drones save the lives of soldiers. Second, the technologies of drones enhance the operators' ability to save lives. Third, the drone's surgical precision allows to preserve the lives of civilians. In accordance with the wider aim of the thesis, the purpose of this chapter is to conceptualises the humanitarian rationale of drone warfare. I will argue that this discourse of humanitarianism reflects a biopolitical logic of making live.

5.1. Preserving Soldiers' Lives

> "The real advantage of unmanned aerial systems is that they allow you to project power without projecting vulnerability" (David Deptula, an Air Force officer).[111]

The financial and human costs of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have been the main driving forces for the US and the UK to pull back their troops and instead rely on drones to fight the "continuing threat" posed by al-Qaida and its affiliates. In contrast to soldiers on the ground or pilots in the air, drone operators, stationed thousands of miles away from the battlefield, do not face the risk of being killed or wounded in battle themselves. The turn to drones is thus informed by a biopolitical rationale because it preserves soldiers' lives.

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[109] Audrey Borowski, "How drones have made war heroes redundant," *Newsweek,* May 30, 2016, https://www.newsweek.com/how-drones-have-made-war-heroes-redundant-464384.

[110] Chamayou, *A Theory of the Drone,* 135.

[111] Chamayou, 12.

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For example, on April 30, 2012, in one of the first public mentions of US deployment of armed drones, Brennan said: "they [drones] can be a wise choice because they dramatically reduce the danger to U.S. personnel, even eliminating the danger altogether."[112] In addition, drones are said to support ground forces by providing intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance on the location and behaviour of enemy fighters. Therefore, Brennan argued that drones have "saved the lives of our men and women in uniform".[113]

Yet, apart from Brennan's speech in 2012, the discourse of "saving the lives of soldiers" is largely missing in the US. In the UK, on the other hand, this discourse permeates many government documents and newspaper articles which defend Britain's use of combat drones. For instance, in a 2014 report on the deployment of combat drones in Afghanistan and Iraq, the British Ministry of Defence (MoD) writes: the provision of enhanced intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance support to our troops on the ground has undoubtedly saved lives and prevented casualties."[114] Moreover, the UK has even changed the name of the US-manufactured successor of the Reaper, the MQ-9B Reaper, to "Protector", presumably to indicate the commitment to safeguard the lives of British soldiers.[115]

Drones are thus used asbiopolitical tools because they "protect" the lives of British troops by monitoring the enemies' movements from the air. However, this biopolitical rationale of making live is not limited to the technological capabilities of the drone. Rather, it is reflected in the close cooperation between the drone and its operator. Indeed, the MoD stated:

> The increased information available to operators and subsequently ground commanders, the endurance of REAPER and the substantial operational experience of REAPER crews, whose years of experience flying missions over Afghanistan, results in an unrivalled depth of knowledge. This in itself can make a significant contribution to the safety and security of UK and coalition forces in Afghanistan.[116]

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[112] John Brennan, "Counterterrorism: The Ethics and Efficacy of the President's Counterterrorism Strategy," (speech, Woodrow Wilson Center, April 30, 2012), http://www.cfr.org/counterterrorism/brennans-speech-counterterrorism-april-2012/ p28100.

[113] Brennan, counterterrorism speech, 2012.

[114] House of Commons Defence Committee, *Remote Control: Remotely Piloted Airy Systems – current and future UK use: Government Response to the Committee's Tenth Report of Session 2013–14* (Sixth Special Report of Session 2014–15), 14.

[115] Drone Wars UK.

[116] House of Commons Defence Committee, *Remote Control: Remotely Piloted Airy Systems,* 14.

Consequently, some have argued that drones have revolutionised warfare because it reduces the risk to soldiers' lives to zero.[117] As Chamayou remarks: "warfare, from being possibly asymmetrical, becomes absolutely unilateral.[118]

The idea of reducing the risk to one's soldiers in warfare is not novel or limited to drone warfare. In particular liberal democracies, with their "commitment to the sanctity life", have always sought to reduce the risks to soldiers by advancing military capabilities and tactics. For example, during the intervention in Kosovo in 1999, NATO planes were purposely flying at high altitudes to preserve the lives of NATO soldiers.[119] Consequently, "NATO planes carried out 38,004 raids in seventy-eight days without sustaining a single loss among the members of their crews."[120] William Cohen, Bill Clinton's Defense Secretary at the time, said after the war that "the paramount lesson learned from Operation Allied Force is that the well-being of our people must remain our first priority."[121]

This idea that liberal democracies should strive for full combatant immunity has also been propagated by Israel. Asa Kasher and Amos Yadlin, the in-house ethics philosophers of the IDF, have argued that preserving the lives of the subjects of the nation state is the state's supreme moral duty which should be placed above the protection of civilians in times of war.[122] Interestingly, this biopolitical discourse of preserving soldiers' lives is not applied to Israel's drone operators. Maybe this is because drones take away the possibility of "heroic sacrifice", which, according to Yoav Galai, has played an important role in Israeli media discourses on war.[123]

5.2. Cooperation Between Drone and Operator

This section discusses how the cooperation between the drone and its operator is presented as "saving civilian lives". As discussed in the historical chapter, one of the major differences between manned military aircrafts and unmanned drones is endurance. Drones can loiter over

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[117] Peter W. Singer, *Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009).

[118] Chamayou, 13.

[119] Chamayou, 127.

[120] Ibid., 128.

[121] Quoted in Chamayou, 128.

[122] Asa Kasher and Amos Yadlin, "Military ethics of fighting terror: Principles," *Philosophia* 34, no. 1 (2006): 75–84.

[123] Yoav Galai, "The victory image: Imaging Israeli warfighting from Lebanon to Gaza," *Security Dialogue* (2019): 1–19.

the battlefield for more than twenty hours and they do not tire or get hungry as humans do. According to RAF drone operator, Justin Thompson (a pseudonym), this is a "big advantage as it allows you to build up a very detailed picture of what is going on in a particular area."[124] The operator relies on the persistent gaze of the drone to identify and monitor "enemies" on a continuous basis. In combination with the "substantial operational experience of REAPER crews", this "results in an unrivalled depth of knowledge".[125]

It is important to note that the discourse of saving lives does not just refer to the drone itself. This point was made specifically by Philip Hammond, the British former Secretary of State for Defence, who argued in the Guardian that "though physically unmanned, the aircraft is guided and controlled by a team of highly trained people. Pilots, sensor operators and analysts all make decisions in real time."[126] Consequently, the MoD states: "the operation of UAS should be seen as part of a system of systems which optimises decision-making by trained officers."[127] In this system of systems, drones and operators work together to optimise, in biopolitical terms, the management and control of the population.

This cooperation between human and machine demonstrates the influence of cybernetics on drone warfare, where the biological (the operator) and the electronic (the drone) cooperate to maximise the information on the enemy and optimise decision-making. In chapter seven, I will elaborate more on the cybernetic aspects of the targeting methodologies in drone warfare. For now, the focus will be on how the cooperation between drone and operator is said to save lives. Studying US drone warfare, Schwarz has described this cooperation between the drone and its operator as a techno-biopolitical regime of expertise, where the drone is said to enhance the operator's biopolitical conduct to save lives.[128]

In his 2012 speech, Brennan articulates this logic when he says: "compared against other options, a pilot operating this aircraft remotely, with the benefit of technology and with the safety of distance, might actually have a clearer picture of the target and its surroundings, including the presence of innocent civilians."[129] A similar but more elaborate version of this

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[124] Justin Thompson (pseudonym of a British drone operator), interviewed by Chris Cole, transcript May 2017.

[125] House of Commons Defence Committee, *Remote Control: Remotely Piloted Air Systems* (Session 2013-14), https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmdfence/writev/772/rpa01.htm.

[126] Phillip Hammond, "In defence of drones," *Guardian,* December 18, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/18/in-defence-of-drones-keep-civilians-troops-safe.

[127] House of Commons Defence Committee, *Remote Control: Remotely Piloted Air Systems*.

[128] Schwarz, 60–61.

[129] Brennan, counterterrorism speech, 2012.

biopolitical rationale is given by the British MoD's in its response to their on question: "Is the use of Armed UAS Moral?"

> Due to the greater loiter-time of REAPER (affording a detailed assessment of any target, and the ability to select the optimum time for an attack which minimizes the risk of civilian casualties or unnecessary damage to property), crews are able to exercise their judgement in a more measured way, free from the stresses of the combat zone or concerns about survivability. This minimises the risk of civilian casualties and increases confidence levels in target identification while at the same time reducing the risk to our own forces.[130]

The persistent gaze of drones is particularly useful for militaries who target densely populated areas. This is most eminent in Gaza, which ranks as the third most densely populated polity in the world.[131] The continuous operation of drones over Gaza is therefore considered as necessary by the IDF to "minimise the risks of civilian casualties". Indeed, an Israeli drone operator, referred to as Captain "N" argues: "Probably the most important thing that the UAVs help during combat is to distinguish terrorist from civilians because most of the enemy techniques here in the region is to operate from civilian areas."[132]

To support the argument that drone technology safeguards civilian life, the public relations unit of the IDF regularly releases drone footage documenting how air strikes are allegedly aborted, redirected or postponed because figures identified as civilians appear in close proximity to the intended targets.[133] The public can identify the figures by the label "civilian" or "terrorist" or by the recorded voice of the operator. Clearly, the videos are used to demonstrate to the Israeli and international public that the IDF is a moral army that seeks to protect the lives of civilians.

Besides the armed combat drones, the IDF uses auxiliary drones equipped with cameras to observe the surrounding area before an impending attack. Specialist employed specifically to reduce "collateral damage" use these images as they decide on the accepted level of danger

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[130] House of Commons Defence Committee, *Remote Control: Remotely Piloted Air Systems.*

[131] Markus Gunneflo, *Targeted Killing: A Legal and Political History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 120.

[132] "Israeli Military Using Drones to Save Lives," *CBN News,* September 8, 2014, https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/insideisrael/2014/march/idf-uses-drones-to-save-lives.

[133] "Exclusive Interview With IAF Pilots: How They Limit Casualties," Israeli Air Force, IDF, July 20, 2014, https://www.idf.il/en/minisites/israeli-air-force/exclusive-interview-with-iaf-pilots-how-they-limit-casualties/. See also, "IDF Postpones Strikes on Hamas Targets after Identifying Civilians in the Area," IDF, YouTube, July 16, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yE7ykidY7FA&featre=youtu.be.

to which Palestinian bystanders can be subjected.[134] According to Weizman, these IDF specialists "see their work not as facilitating assassinations but as saving lives; minimizing the slaughter that would undoubtedly occur were they not there to maintain vigilance"[135] Again, this demonstrates how drone technology is said to enhance the biopolitical conduct of the operator.

Yet, in contrast to the British discourse on the close cooperation between the drone and operators, Israel emphasises the superior life-saving morale of the operator. Indeed, the IDF presents drone operators in biopolitical terms as highly moral individuals who are devoted to safeguard "all human life" including civilians living in Gaza. This discourse is exemplified in an "exclusive interview" published on the IDF's website with Israeli drone operator Lieutenant Or, who is introduced as: "a 25-year-old soldier with an enormous responsibility. He decides whether to call off an airstrike in Gaza for the sake of preserving human life."[136] Lieutenant Or recalls: "In one instance, we acquired a target but we saw that there were children in the area. We waited around, and when they didn't leave we were forced to abort a strike on an important target." [137]

Thus, similar to the British discourse on drone warfare, Israel presents both the drone and its operator in biopolitical terms as life-preserving. However, Israel has larger focus on the biopolitical conduct of the Israeli drone operator as is illustrated in the testimony by lieutenant Or. This biopolitical conduct is epitomised by the IDF's ethical code, which defines the protection of the population and the preservation of human life in military operations as core values of the IDF.[138] Correspondingly, Israel's former Defence Minister, Avigdor Liberman, has described the IDF as the "most moral army in the world."[139]

Naturally, this is contradictory to the human rights abuses committed by the IDF including the targeting of unarmed men, women and children with drones in Gaza. Interestingly, the IDF and individual Israeli drone operators do not hesitate to acknowledge the

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[134] Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*, 250.

[135] Weizman, 250.

[136] "Exclusive Interview With IAF Pilots: How They Limit Casualties," Israeli Air Force.

[137] Ibid.

[138] James Eastwood, *Ethics as a Weapon of War: Militarism and Morality in Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 47.

[139] Jeff Barak, "Reality Check: The Most Moral Army in the World. Really?" *The Jerusalem Post,* April 15, 2018, https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Reality-Check-The-most-moral-army-in-the-world-Really-549906.

killing of innocent civilians, which they refer to as "mistakes".[140] This is not to say that human "mistakes" result in reconsiderations or public criticism of the conduct of Israeli drone operators. On the contrary, the very fact that drone operators reflect on their "mistakes" is presented as a sign of their morality.

To illustrate, an Israeli drone operator, referred to as Major Yair, says: "We learn from those mistakes. You'll see no smiling face after an incident where kids were killed. None of us wants to be in a position where he does these mistakes. We learn and try to avoid this as much as we can." Later he adds: "It's not easy. I've made mistakes that, for many years, will come back at me. But it's something that people have to do."[141] Thus, according to Israeli belief, civilian casualties are regrettable, but drone warfare is necessary.

According to James Eastwood it is, "through such moments of testimony recalling moral judgements, an interior space is carved out inside the soldier, the space of reflection, restraint, and decision."[142] I content that this interior space is informed by a biopolitical rationale, which seeks to optimise, vitalise and indeed "save" civilian lives. Either by a "necessary" act of killing or by refraining to strike. In both cases, the Israeli drone operator comes out as the life-preserving soldiers engaged in moral violence.

While these biopolitical testimonies are especially striking for Israel, Obama delivered a similar testimony in his speech at the National Defense Academy in 2013. Speaking about civilians who lost their lives as a result of US drone strikes, Obama said: "for me, and those in my chain of command, those deaths will haunt us as long as we live."[143] Yet, he argues: "the death toll from their ["terrorists"] acts of terrorism against Muslims dwarfs any estimate of civilian casualties from drone strikes. So doing nothing is not an option."[144] Although this claim has been refuted by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, the Obama administration keeps repeating it.[145]

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[140] "Exclusive Interview With IAF Pilots: How They Limit Casualties," Israeli Air Force.

[141] David Blair, "Israeli drone commander: 'The life and death decisions I took in Gaza'," *The Telegraph,* November 19, 2014, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/11234240/Israeli-drone-commander-The-life-and-death-decisions-I-took-in-Gaza.html.

[142] Eastwood, *Ethics as a Weapon of War,* 41.

[143] Barak H. Obama, "Remarks by the President at the National Defense University," *The White House,* May 23, 2013, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/23/remarks-president-national-defense-university.

[144] Obama, "Remarks by the President at the National Defense University," 2013.

[145] Zenko, "Drones Kill More Civilians Than Pilots Do," *Foreign Policy*.

Moreover, Brennan argued that despite the loss of civilian lives, "we constantly work to improve and refine our efforts so that we are doing everything in our power to prevent the loss of innocent life. This too is a reflection of our values as Americans."[146] This twisted logic of Obama and Brennan not only deems drone strikes as a necessary evil, it also constructs a binary image between the life-preserving US and the death-producing "terrorist" Other. In chapter six, I will elaborate more on this construction of binaries between the life-preserving Self and the death-producing Other.

5.3. Surgical Precision

The third argument of why drone warfare is humanitarian rests on the assumption that drones are more precise in targeting than conventional weapons. Therefore, drone strikes are said to optimise the ability to target enemy combatants, thereby preserving civilian lives. This discourse of precision is most prevalent in the US. For example, in his speech at the Woodrow Wilson Center in 2012, Brennan declared: "With the unprecedented ability of remotely piloted aircraft to precisely target a military objective while minimizing collateral damage, one could argue that never before has there been a weapon that allows us to distinguish more effectively between an al Qa'ida terrorist and innocent civilians."[147]

Specifically, Brennan argued that drone technologies provide a "surgical precision—the ability, with laser-like focus, to eliminate the cancerous tumor called an al-Qa'ida terrorist while limiting damage to the tissue around it—that makes this counterterrorism tool so essential."[148] In this biomedical metaphor, drone operators represent the surgeons while drones are their tools. By removing the "cancerous tumours" with "extraordinary care" and "precision", the surgeon not only saves the lives of Americans at home, (s)he also effectively "cures" the population from the disease that is "the al-Qaida terrorist".[149]

Hence, Schwarz has argued that "the act of ethical killing is biopolitically justified for purposes of prophylaxis and prevention, in order to maintain the homeostasis of an organic entity."[150] Indeed, this logic is biopolitically informed as it reflects the "will to health", to

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[146] Brennan, counterterrorism speech, 2012.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Ibid.

[149] Brennan, "Remarks by Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism John Brennan at CSIS," *The White House Office*, May 26, 2010, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/realitycheck/the-press-office/remarks-assistant-president-homeland-security-and-counterterrorism-john-brennan-csi.

[150] Schwarz, "Prescription drones," 71.

optimise and vitalise the population.[151] Not only is the US considered a surgeon with the will to health, it is presented as *the best* surgeon in the world, committed "to the highest possible standards".[152] Indeed, Press Secretary Jay Carney, claimed: "a hallmark of our counterterrorism efforts has been our ability to be exceptionally precise, exceptionally surgical and exceptionally targeted in the implementation of our counterterrorism operations."[153] This discourse of superiority resembles Israel's discourse of the most moral army in the world.

While the biomedical discourse on drone warfare is most pervasive in the US, Israeli officials also describe air strikes carried out by drones as "surgical".[154] More commonly, however, drone strikes are referred to as "pinpoint" strikes. In fact, the IDF often releases videos on Youtube of airstrikes carried out by drones on designated Hamas terrorists under the name "pinpoint". For example, on November 14, 2012, the IDF released a video of the airstrike that killed Ahmed Jabari, the military commander of the Hamas military brigades, with "pinpoint accuracy".[155] Another video allegedly shows how the IDF targets a "terror facility" without harming a school located closely to the target.[156] In both instances, the precision weaponry of the IDF is presented as preserving civilian lives.

In addition to the US and Israel, British officials also emphasises the superior precision of armed drones. For example, the MoD has published a video which allegedly demonstrates how an "RAF Reaper neutralises a Taliban bomb factory...using a precision missile strike".[157] Besides, in an opinion piece published in the Guardian in December 2013, Defence Secretary Hammond wrote: "Reaper has flown more than 54,000 hours over Afghanistan; in that time, it has fired just 459 precision weapons. The sophistication of these weapons provides the ability

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[151] Foucault, *A Will to Knowledge,* 146–147.

[152] Brennan, counterterrorism speech, 2012.

[153] Jay Carney, "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney," *The White House Office*, January 31, 2012, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/01/31/press-briefing-press-secretary-jay-carney-13112.

[154] Gili Cohen, "Israeli Army's Drone Commander: Surgical Strikes Were Key in Operation Pillar of Defense," *Haaretz,* November 16, 2013, https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-drone-chief-strikes-were-key-in-gaza-1.5291037.

[155] "IDF Pinpoint Strike on Ahmed Jabari, Head of Hamas Military Wing," Israel Defense Forces, YouTube, November 14, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6U2ZQ0EhN4.

[156] "Precision Attack of Terror Target in Gaza," Israel Defense Forces, YouTube.

[157] "RAF Reaper neutralises Taliban bomb factory," Ministry of Defence, YouTube, November 25, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m63c3W8I-Rw.

to change their course after release if innocent civilians stray into a strike area – one example of the many safeguards in place."[158]

An often heard mantra from British officials is that the UK rules of engagement push for "zero civilian casualties".[159] RAF drone operators and commanders even claim that their restrictive rules of engagement are the main reason why British drone strikes have killed only a "few" civilians while the US and Israel have killed hundreds if not thousands of civilians.[160] To illustrate, the RAF claims that the 970 weapons released by Reapers in the air campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria between August 2014 and March 2019, resulted in only one civilian death.[161] During the same period, the RAF claims to have killed 4013 ISIS fighters, wounding another 302. Hence, the RAF has called it the most "precise" air campaign in history.[162]

However, experts have questioned the RAF's post-strike analysis which relies solely on videos and photos taken by aircrafts which loiter high above the ground. For example, Lydia Wilson, research fellow at Oxford University's Centre for the Resolution of Intractable Conflict, argued that in cities such as Raqqa and Mosul it is impossible to "distinguish between fighters and civilians when buildings have collapsed on top of inhabitants, and on-the-ground, independent reporting is impossible."[163] Moreover, the international coalition against ISIS of which the UK was among the prime contributors, killed a minimum of 1257 civilians during that same period, making it highly unlikely that the UK was only responsible for one civilian casualty.[164]

More generally, the discourse of precision in the UK, Israel and the US is problematic because it conflates three related but not synonymous aspects of precision: the firing accuracy

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[158] Phillip Hammond, "In defence of drones," *Guardian,* December 18, 2013.

[159] Chris Cole, "'Here's their actual stories, make of them what you will.' Dr Peter Lee on 'Britain's Reaper Force,'" *Drone Wars UK,* September 27, 2018, https://dronewars.net/2018/09/27/peter-lee-reaper-force/.

[160] Cole, "'Here's their actual stories, make of them what you will.' Dr Peter Lee on 'Britain's Reaper Force.'"

[161] "UK Drone Strike Stats," *Drone Wars UK,* Accessed May 25, 2019, https://dronewars.net/uk-drone-strike-list-2/. Reapers were responsible for 32% of the total RAF air strikes in Iraq and Syria. In total the RAF claims to have killed 4013 ISIS fighters, while wounding another 302.

[162] "RAF killed '4,000 fighters in Iraq and Syria'," *BBC News,* March 7, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-47477197.

[163] "RAF killed '4,000 fighters in Iraq and Syria'," *BBC News* (published online on March 7, 2019), accessed on May 25, 2019. https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-47477197.

[164] "RAF killed '4,000 fighters in Iraq and Syria'," *BBC News* (published online on March 7, 2019), accessed on May 25, 2019. https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-47477197.

of the missile, the impact radius of the missile, and adequately identifying the target.[165] The firing accuracy of the drone's hellfire missile is high as it they explodes at the designated spot. However, the impact radius or "kill radius" of the hellfire missile is estimated at fifteen meters.[166] Thus anyone within fifteen meters from the target will probably be killed. Finally, the idea that targets can be distinguished from civilians is even more problematic considering that enemies and civilians have the same appearance.

Before concluding, it should be noted that the discourses of humanitarianism and precision, propagated by the UK, Israel and the US to defend drone warfare, are not new. Instead, they are part of a long history of counterterrorism discourses that can be traced back to the Reagan, Clinton and Bush administrations, as well as imperial and colonial discourses of the RAF.[167] For example, in 1923, the British Commanding Air Officer in India declared: "If we use our Air Force wisely and humanely, such outcry as there is will cease and air action will be regarded as a normal and suitable weapon for enforcing the just demands of government".[168]

The discourses that portray drone warfare and precise and humanitarian should thus be seen as a continuation of a long history of imperial and colonial discourses. However, there is a noticeable shift in the value for human life in contemporary discourses on drone warfare. Air strikes, once presented as precise and humanitarian, are now turned into the ultimate surgical weapons that express, in the words of Brennan, "the premium we put on protecting human life." Indeed, this chapter demonstrated, the commitment to "saving lives" is a key element of today's drone discourses.

5.4. Conclusion

"If used correctly ... the MQ9 Reaper is the most potentially ethical use of airpower yet devised" (former RAF official, Dr Peter Lee).[169]

This chapter demonstrated that drone warfare is presented as the most humanitarian type of warfare by liberal democracies. An examination of the US, Israel and UK discourses revealed

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[165] Chamayou, A Theory of the Drone, 141.

[166] Chamayou, 142.

[167] Marina Espinoza, "State terrorism: orientalism and the drone programme," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 11, no. 2 (2018): 379.

[168] Mark Neocleous, "Air power as police power," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 31, no. 4 (2013): 381.

[169] Phil Maynard and Ken Macfarlane, "Is the use of unmanned military drones ethical or criminal? - video debate," *Guardian,* December 2, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/video/2013/dec/02/unmanned-military-drones-battle-ethical-video-debate.

that all three countries construct drone warfare as life-preserving. Hence, I conceptualised these discourses as biopolitical. However, the emphasis on whose lives require saving, the referent objects of these biopolitical discourses, varied per country. The saving of soldiers' lives by removing them from the battlefield is stressed in particular by the UK and to a lesser extent by the US. In Israel, on the other hand, there is no public discourse on drones safeguarding the lives of Israeli soldiers.

In addition to preserving the lives of soldiers, this chapter revealed how the cooperation between drones and operators is presented as saving the lives of civilians living under drones. This time all three countries emphasised how the technology of drones enhances the saving of civilian lives. Furthermore, Israeli drone operators provide short testimonies in which they reflect upon their operation in Gaza. I contended that these testimonies are informed by a biopolitical rationale that constructs Israel's drone operators as life-preserving soldiers rather than executioners of the sovereign power of the law.

Finally, this chapter demonstrated that even drone strikes, the very killing of people, are constructed as humanitarian through a discourse of life-saving precision. For example, in the US, drone strikes are biopolitically justified through a biomedical discourse of precision. This presents the US drone operators as surgeons who remove the "cancerous tumours" that are called al-Qaida with great care and precision, thereby preserving the lives of civilians. As such, the communities targeted by drone warfare constitute the referent objects that need to be "cured" from the al-Qaida "cancers". This reveals the following paradox: in order to save lives, it is necessary to kill. The next chapter, chapter six, examines this paradox of killing.

6. Killing to Make Life Live

The previous chapter discussed how the biopolitical logic of making live is revealed in the discourses on drone warfare. It was argued that military drones and drone operators are presented in biopolitical terms as preserving the lives of soldiers and civilians living under drones. Hence, the focus has been on the capabilities of the drone and the conduct of the operator. Yet, a defining element is still missing from our discussion of liberal drone warfare, that is the rationale for killing. Therefore, this chapter raises the following sub-question: How are liberal democracies rationalising lethal drone strikes?

In line with the chapter five, this chapter draws on biopolitics to conceptualise the rationales for lethal drone strikes as they appear in the US, Israel and the UK. However, contrary to chapter five, this chapter examines the function of killing in the system of biopolitics, in which life is both the object and the objective. For Dillon and Reid, the function of killing is inherently biopolitical because it aims precisely to make life live (killing to make to life live). Yet, as discussed in the theoretical framework, biopolitics requires a discourse of racism in order to kill. Thus, the state requires racism, the creation of a biological caesura between populations, to exercise its sovereign right to kill.[170]

Accordingly, the first section of this chapter examines the discourses of racism in the US, Israel and the UK. Specifically, I examine the construction of threats to the population that are eventually targeted and killed by drones. It should be noted that the discourse of threat is a function of biopolitics as well as necropolitics. As mentioned in the methodology, this chapter examines the biopolitical rationale for killing, while the necropolitics of drone warfare is discussed in chapter seven.

The second section examines how drone strikes are presented in biopolitical terms as the necessary means to pre-empt or prevent the perceived threats from materialising. To examine the discourses of threat and the discourses of pre-emption, I draw on speeches from the Obama administration, statements from British officials and the IDF and some statements from Israeli drone operators.

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[170] Foucault, Society Must Be Defended, 258.

6.1. Imageries of Threat

"The ideological roots of the jihadist terrorism, of which al-Qaeda is the most notable exponent, are profoundly illiberal, in stressing theocracy and intolerance of diversity and dissent above democracy, as well as being socially homophobic and misogynist" (Lawrence Freedman, foreign policy advisor to Tony Blair).[171]

Perhaps the single greatest similarity between drone strikes carried out by the US, Israel and the UK is that they all target one kind of enemy, the terrorist. The term "terrorist" is in itself subjective and often criticized under the mantra "one person's terrorist another person's freedom fighter."[172] Yet, terrorism, as it is defined by these states, has at least one feature that distinguishes it from a conventional (state)enemy. Terrorists, in contrast to state enemies, cannot and usually do not threaten the territory or sovereignty of the liberal democratic state. Instead, terrorists (only) present a threat to the population.[173]

But who are those designated terrorists, where do they live and what is the nature of their threat? By examining the discourses of threat in the US, Israel and the UK, this section responds to these questions. Drawing on Foucault, it is argued that the discourses on the targets of drone warfare function in a racist manner by creating a biological caesura within society and between populations. Invoking old Orientalist tropes, the US, Israel and the UK construct binaries between the life-preserving Self and the death-producing Other and between the "governed" West and the "ungoverned" spaces in the East.[174]

Since 9/11, the primary objective of US drone warfare has been to counter the threat posed by al-Qaida. Despite the death of Osama bin Laden and two decades of war including thousands of drone strikes, the perceived threat of al-Qaida remains at the forefront of the US government discourse. Indeed, Brennan says: "it would be a mistake to believe this threat has passed."[175] In addition to al-Qaida, US drone warfare is now directed against numerous "al-Qaida affiliates" or new "terrorist organisations" including Boko Haram and al-Shabaab.

The UK has also treated al-Qaida as its primary enemy abroad. Yet, since the emergence of ISIS in 2014, the UK has shifted its military drone operations from Afghanistan to Iraq and Syria. Finally, Israel's drone warfare has been mainly directed towards Hamas in Gaza and, to

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[171] Freedman, "The age of liberal wars," 106.

[172] Robert Kennedy, "Is one person's terrorist another's freedom fighter? Western and Islamic approaches to 'just war' compared," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 11, no. 1 (1999): 1–20.

[173] This is not to say that state enemies may not present a threat to the population. However, terrorists **only** have the capacity to threatening the population.

[174] Here I am indebted to the work of Edward Said who famously examined the discourses of Orientalism.

[175] Brennan, counterterrorism speech, 2012.

a lesser extent, towards Islamic Jihad.[176] It should be noted that Israel has also conducted drone strikes on militants in Sudan and the Egyptian Sinai.[177]

While the militant organisations described here vary in their military objectives, organisational structures, and ideologies, they are all referred to as terrorists by the US, Israel and the UK. As previously mentioned, the term "terrorism" is by no means a neutral term nor does it have an universal, uniform definition. Naturally, since the term varies per country and accompanying interests.

For example, in the US, the term terrorism exclusively applies to violence committed by Muslims. If white supremacists kill people in the name of racist ideologies, with the explicit or implicit goal of instigating terror among the often racially targeted communities, this is called a hate crime committed "by a lone wolf".[178] On the other hand, if an individual who identifies or more importantly "looks like" a Muslim, kills people in the US in the name of an Islamic ideology, this is automatically referred to as an act of terror.[179] Thus, the very term "terrorism" has a racial function of dividing people into subgroups of "terrorist" worthy and "terrorist" unworthy. This is, according to Foucault, "the first function of racism: to fragment, to create caesuras within the biological continuum addressed by biopower."[180]

6.1.1. Constructing Binaries

But how is this division between populations created? In other words, how does this racism function? The most important mechanism in play is the construction of binaries between the Self and the Other. The designated terrorists are dehumanised and juxtaposed in their very identity against the "free" and "liberal" people in the West. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, Bush praised the US for having a "culture of life" in contrast to the "culture of death" of Islamic groups.[181]

This juxtaposition between the life-preserving Self and the death-producing Other is epitomised in the means of warfare. While the drone represents the commitment to preserve life, the terror bomber, represents a commitment to death. The drone is considered wise, clean,

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[176] Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation,* 248.

[177] Dobbing and Cole, *Israel and the Drone Wars,* 13.

[178] Sunaina Maira, "'Good' and 'Bad' Muslim Citizens: Feminists, Terrorists, and U. S. Orientalisms," *Feminist Studies* 35, no. 3 (2009): 631–656.

[179] Ibid., 636.

[180] Foucault, Society Must Be Defended, 255.

[181] Rowland, "Life-Saving Weapons," 615.

efficient, rational and technologically advanced. In contrast to the suicide bomber who is considered messy, inefficient, irrational and technologically primitive.[182] This shows the framing effect of language as it appears in the discourse of terrorism.

This construction of binaries between the means and conduct of warfare of the Self and of the Other is most prevalent in Israeli discourse. As discussed in chapter five, Israeli drone operators and drones are presented as life-preserving. In contrast, Israel portrays Hamas as immoral and death-producing. Israel argues that Hamas "deliberately puts civilians in the line of fire" by using human shields and by basing its "command centers, weapons storage facilities and concealed rocket launchers inside civilian neighborhoods, sometimes even inside houses."[183]

For example, Israeli drone operator, Lieutenant Or claims: "I have personally seen rockets fired at Israel from hospitals and schools, but we couldn't strike back because of civilians nearby." Indeed, he argues: "We [Israel] are the only side in this conflict that attempts to prevent civilians from being harmed." This discourse is also sustained by charts (see appendix 1) and video footage of Hamas allegedly using civilians as human shields. One video shows how civilians gather on the roof of a building to allegedly form a human shield after an Israeli warning strike, or so-called "roof knocking".[184] Hence, when journalists report civilian casualties after a drone strike, the IDF often counters by claiming that Hamas intentionally used humans as shields to prevent the IDF from striking.[185]

In addition to the means and conduct of warfare, there is also a binary construction between the "developed" spaces of the West and the "undeveloped" spaces of the East. Specifically, the "ungoverned spaces" in the East. According to the conservative US think tank, the Rand Corporation, "spaces are considered ungoverned if they lack strong state control and

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[182] Ibid., 616–617.

[183] "Exclusive Interview With IAF Pilots: How They Limit Casualties," Israeli Air Force.

[184] "How is the IDF Minimizing Harm to Civilians in Gaza?" IDF, July 16, 2014, https://www.idf.il/en/articles/hamas/how-is-the-idf-minimizing-harm-to-civilians-in-gaza/. According to the IDF, "'Roof knocking' is when the IAF targets a building with a loud but non-lethal bomb that warns civilians that they are in the vicinity of a weapons cache or other target."

[185] Harriet Sherwood, "In Gaza, Hamas fighters are among civilians. There is nowhere else for them to go," *Guardian,* July 24, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/24/gaza-hamas-fighters-military-bases-guerrilla-war-civilians-israel-idf.

if the social practices in these spaces are tribal or otherwise pre-modern."[186] They are referred to as spaces that serve as the "safe havens" and "breeding grounds" for terrorism.[187]

To "govern" those "ungoverned" spaces the US relies on drones. Particularly in the inaccessible mountainous area of Waziristan in Pakistan, where al-Qaida is said to hide and plot attacks. Indeed, in March 2009, Obama argued that al-Qaida has "used this mountainous terrain as a safe haven to hide, to train terrorists, to communicate with followers, to plot attacks, and to send fighters to support the insurgency in Afghanistan." "For the American people," he continued, "this border region has become the most dangerous place in the world."[188] Hence, he concluded that Pakistan requires the help from the US to bring order to these "often ungoverned" spaces. Here Obama invokes the Orientalist notion that order should be brought from the outside to the Other's space.[189]

6.1.2. Absolute Enmity

So far, I have discussed how racism functions to create divisions between peoples and spaces. "Terrorists" are considered to be fundamentally at odds with the liberal way of life. But what is the nature of this threat? The enemies targeted by drones are not considered threats to the sovereign's will or to the territory of liberal democracies. Rather, they constitute an absolute and existential threat to life. Hence, only their full destruction is perceived to secure the existence of species' life. This reflects the rationale of absolute enmity, which rests on the idea that the Other poses, as Mbembe argues, "a mortal threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen my potential to life and security."[190]

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[186] "'Ungoverned space': the concept that puts humanitarian aid in the firing line of the War on Terror," *Conversation,* October 16, 2015, http://theconversation.com/ungoverned-space-the-concept-that-puts-humanitarian-aid-in-the-firing-line-of-the-war-on-terror-49010.

[187] Obama, "Remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan," 2009; House of Lords and House of Commons Joint Committee on Human Rights, *The Government's policy on the use of drones for targeted killing* (Second Report of Session 2015-16), 68; Bassam Tawil, "Gaza Strip: Breeding Ground for Radical Terror Groups," *Gatestone Institute,* November 1, 2017, https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/11257/gaza-strip-terror-groups

[188] Obama, "Remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan," *The White House,* March 27, 2009, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-a-new-strategy-afghanistan-and-pakistan.

[189] Former British Prime Minister David Cameron has described northern Syria as an "ungoverned space". Patrick Wintour, "David Cameron to unveil new counter-terrorism measures in Syria statement," *Guardian,* September 7, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/sep/07/david-cameron-counter-terrorism-measures-syria.

[190] Mbembe, 18.

Ironically, Obama articulated this rationale of absolute enmity in his 2009 acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace prize when he proclaimed: "evil does exist in the world. A nonviolent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies. Negotiations cannot convince al-Qaeda's leaders to lay down their arms."[191] In other words, this enemy is different from conventional enemies. This enemy is not a rogue regime or faction that is restricted to a certain territory, but rather operates globally under a common ideology that seeks to target liberal life in the very essence of its freedom.[192]

Similarly, when speaking about Palestinians who engage in hostilities against Israel, Judge Mazza of Israel's Supreme Court said: "it [terrorism] is the enemy of all humanity. All countries view terror as a joint shared enemy."[193] ISIS is perhaps the most recent of these absolute threats. According to the British Air Commodore Johnny Stringer, "these people hate the way we live, they don't like our values and they don't like us and they would rather kill us."[194]

The notion of absolute threat can also be found in the legal classification of suspected members of al-Qaida and Hamas. The US and Israel insist that such "terrorists" cannot be protected by the normative agreed standards set in international humanitarian law because they constitute "unlawful combatants" – that is, neither a civilian with the fundamental right to life, nor a combatant with the legitimate right to use violence or to surrender.[195] Firstly, this is because terrorist organisations are no nation states. Secondly, and more importantly, because their conduct in war, the nature of their violence, is considered to be fundamentally at odds with international law. Thirdly, because unlawful combatants are constructed as "non-civilized people" who cannot be expected to reciprocate the norms of international law.[196]

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[191] Eric Stoner, "A Lesson on Nonviolence for the President," *Foreign Policy in Focus,* December 17, 2009, https://fpif.org/a_lesson_on_nonviolence_for_the_president/.

[192] Freedman, 'The age of liberal wars', 106.

[193] Quoted in Gunneflo, 16.

[194] Larisa Brown, "Dramatic moment RAF pilots use drone-controlled single missile to stop ISIS public execution 2,000 miles away as it's revealed secret strikes in Iraq and Syria have stopped terror attacks on British soil," *Mail Online,* September 19, 2017, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4900738/RAF-pilots-stop-ISIS-public-execution.html.

[195] Lisa Hajjar, "Lawfare and Armed Conflicts: A Comparative Analysis of Israeli and U.S. Targeted Killing Policies and Legal Challenges against Them," in *Life in the Age of Drone. Warfare,* eds. Lisa Park and Caren Kaplan (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), 64.

[196] Frédéric Mégret, "From 'savages' to 'unlawful combatants': a postcolonial look at international humanitarian law's 'other'," in *International Law And Its 'Others',* ed. Anne Orford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 300.

Consequently, unlawful combatants are reduced to what philosopher Giorgo Agamben has called "bare life" – that is, life placed outside of the law, whereby it can be killed without impunity.[197] This state of exception, in addition to the relation of absolute enmity, provides, as Mbembe argued, "the normative basis of the right to kill".[198] For Mbembe, this is where necropower comes into play. At the same time, this discourse of threat is biopolitical, because it establishes a positive relationship between the Other's death and the life of the Self; the more enemies are killed, the more the Self will live. This biopolitical logic of killing to make live will be discussed in the next section as it examines the rationale for killing in drone warfare.

6.2. Pre-emptive Killing

A military drone strike, an execution carried out by the state, is at first sight a clear manifestation of the sovereign's right to take life. Individuals seemingly breach the laws of the sovereign. Therefore, the sovereign may do justice by killing these individuals. However, like the previous section demonstrated, the targets of drone warfare present a different type of threat. They constitute a threat to the population that is continuously emerging but has yet to materialise. That is why this section examines how drone strikes are rationalised biopolitically as the necessary means to pre-empt or prevent the emerging threats from materialising.

Again, the natural starting point for our discussion lies in the US because the clearest and most elaborative defence for drone strikes has been articulated by Obama and his Security Advisor, Brennan. In the first public announcement of the US policy on targeted killing in 2012, Brennan explained the rationale behind drone strikes: "In order to prevent terrorist attacks on the United States and to save American lives, the United States Government conducts targeted strikes against specific al-Qaida terrorists, sometimes using remotely piloted aircraft, often referred to publicly as drones."[199] The rationale is clear: the US targets suspected al-Qaida terrorsts to prevent attacks on the US in order to save American lives.

This biopolitical rationale of killing to make live was later reaffirmed by Obama. On May 23, 2013, in a talk at the National Defense University, he claimed: "dozens of highly skilled al Qaeda commanders, trainers, bomb makers and operatives have been taken off the battlefield. Plots have been disrupted that would have targeted international aviation, U.S.

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[197] Giorgo Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life Drone* (trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 83.

[198] Mbembe, 16.

[199] Brennan, counterterrorism speech, 2012.

transit systems, European cities and our troops in Afghanistan. Simply put, these strikes have saved lives."[200] The biopolitical notion of saving lives was also discussed in chapter five. But this time, the saving of lives specifically requires killing.

The objective of drone strikes is therefore not to do justice or to punish individuals for the acts they have committed. Like Brennan stresses: "lethal action [is not] about punishing terrorists for past crimes; we are not seeking vengeance…so it's not as though we're, you know, sort of judge and jury on, again, their involvement in past activities."[201] Similarly, Obama claimed: "America does not take strikes to punish individuals." On the contrary, drone strikes are carried out "because they are necessary to mitigate an actual ongoing threat, to stop plots, prevent future attacks, and to save American lives."[202]

Thus, in the words of Foucault, "the enemies who have to be done away with are not adversaries in the political sense of the term; they are threats, either external or internal, to the population and for the population."[203] Killing, in the system of biopower, is therefore only acceptable "if it results not in a victory over political adversaries, but in the elimination of the biological threat to and the improvement of the species or race."[204]

Similar to the US, Israel adopts this biopolitical rationale to justify targeted killings. In fact, Israel has used this justification long before it appeared in the US. In 2004, Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs wrote: "The targeting of terrorists focuses not on the public role of the individual, but on the role played by them in the murder of innocent civilians, and has as its goal not political motives but the saving of life."[205] Israel thus refutes the claim that drone strikes are killing political adversaries. Rather, they are killing enemies to prevent them from attacking Israelis.

In Israel, the biopolitical rationale of prevention and pre-emption is even visible in the naming of the policy of targeted killing. Israeli media and government officials employ the Hebrew term sikul memukad ("חסימה ממוקדת"), which translates as "focused pre-emption" or

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[200] Obama, "Remarks by the President at the National Defense University," 2013.

[201] Brennan, counterterrorism speech, 2012.

[202] Obama, "Remarks by the President at the National Defense University," 2013.

[203] Foucault, Society Must Be Defended, 256.

[204] Ibid.

[205] "Targeting Terrorists-Legal Aspects," Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, last modified March 22, 2004, https://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/aboutisrael/state/law/pages/targeting%20terrorists%20-%20legal%20aspects%20-%20march%202004.aspx.

"focused obstruction", to describe such assassinations or executions carried out by the state.[206] In an article entitled "The Logic of Israel's Targeted Killing", Gal Luft, a former IDF lieutenant, presents Israel's rationale of pre-emption by the analogy of fighting car accidents. He writes:

> Fighting terror is like fighting car accidents: one can count the casualties but not those whose lives were spared by prevention. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Israelis go about their lives without knowing that they are unhurt because their murderers met their fate before they got the chance to carry out their diabolical missions. This silent multitude is the testament to the policy's success.[207]

By comparing fighting terror with fighting car accidents, Luft disassociates the notion of killing from lethal drone strikes. Instead, killing suspected members of Hamas simply becomes an issue of effectiveness; the more enemies are killed, the more Israelis are saved. In accordance with this rationale, Palestinians who are killed by pre-emptive strikes are described by the IDF and Israeli media as "terrorists who have blood on their hands" and "ticking bombs" who are about to explode in a "mega terrorist attack".[208] As such, they present, in biopolitical terms, an imminent and existential threat to the population, reflecting the discourse of absolute enmity. To support this biopolitical rationale of pre-emption, the IDF regularly releases drone footage on YouTube, which allegedly shows how the IDF pre-empts terror attacks by striking "terrorist infrastructures", "terrorist weaponry" or "terror targets".[209] With the video's the IDF attempts to demonstrate that the designated targets are indeed planning violent attacks against Israel.

Finally, UK the discourse of prevention and pre-emption is centred around the perceived threat posed by ISIS. As mentioned, ISIS is considered an absolute existential threat to the UK. Therefore, former Prime Minister David Cameron stated: "The question is this: do we work with our allies to degrade and destroy this threat and do we go after these terrorists in their heartlands, from where they are plotting to kill British people? Or do we sit back and wait for them to attack us?"[210] Cameron's defence of British drone strikes in the "terrorists' heartlands" reveals the spatio-temporal logic of the biopolitical threat: one has to strike pre-emptively in the "ungoverned spaces" that are Syria and Iraq before the threat materialises.

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[206] Neve Gordon, "Rationalising extra-judicial executions: the Israeli press and the legitimisation of abuse," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 8, no. 3 (2004): 317.

[207] Gal Luft, "The Logic of Israel's Targeted Killing," *Middle East Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (2003): 3.

[208] Weizman, 245.

[209] "Israel Air Force Precision Strike on Qassam Rocket Launcher," Israel Defense Forces, YouTube, December 21, 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6U2ZQ0EhN4.

[210] Patrick Wintour and Nicholas Watt, "David Cameron: it is Britain's duty to attack Isis in Syria," *Guardian,* December 2, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/dec/02/david-cameron-syria-debate-isis-britains-duty.

The most well-known example of a British pre-emptive drone strike, is the strike that killed the 21-year-old British citizen, Reyaad Khan, alongside his Belgium brother Ruhul Amin in Syria on August 21, 2015.[211] Cameron admitted to Parliament that the drone strike marked "a new departure" as this was the first time "that a British asset has been used to conduct a strike in a country where we are not involved in a war." [212] Despite the fact that the British Parliament had not authorized the use of force in Syria, Cameron argued that the drone strike was legitimate because the targets presented an "imminent threat" to British citizens.[213]

Shortly after the strike against Reyaad Khan, British Defence Secretary, Michael Fallon, said that "the government is prepared to carry out further drone strikes against British jihadis in Syria."[214] While he added, "there are other terrorists involved in other plots that may come to fruition over the next few weeks and months and we wouldn't hesitate to take similar action again."[215] Gavin Williamson, Fallon's successor as Secretary of Defence, even argued that British ISIS fighters should all be eliminated by drone strikes as "they are going to inflict more and more harm on our country."[216] So again, the biophysical elimination of this enemy is required to secure life.

6.4. Conclusion

One of the most controversial aspect of drone warfare is the targeting and killing of insurgent suspects across the Middle East and North Africa. This practice of targeted assassinations is illiberal because it violates the fundamental right to life. Nevertheless, it has been embraced by the US, Israel and to a lesser extent by the UK as a legitimate tactic of government. Hence, this chapter raised the question: how are liberal democracies rationalising lethal drone strikes?

This chapter demonstrated that rather than presenting lethal drone strikes as executions carried out in the name of the sovereign power of the law, the US, Israel and the UK present

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[211] Ben Quinn, "Briton Reyaad Khan believed killed in air strike on Islamic State in Syria," *The Guardian.*

[212] "Syria: Refugees and Counter-terrorism," House of Commons Hansard Debates, September 7, 2015, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm150907/debtext/150907-0001.htm.

[213] "Syria: Refugees and Counter-terrorism," House of Commons Hansard Debates.

[214] Frances Perraudin, Patrick Wintour and Nicholas Watt, "UK prepared to carry out more drone strikes against British jihadis, says Fallon," *Guardian,* September 8, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/08/uk-would-not-hesitate-to-carry-out-more-strikes-against-british-jihadis.

[215] Perraudin, Wintour, Watt, "UK prepared to carry out more drone strikes," *Guardian.*

[216] David Willets, "New Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson wages war on British IS fighters, promises to be tough on North Korea and to support our forces heroes," *Sun,* November 13, 2017, https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/4907445/new-defence-secretary-gavin-williamson-interview/.

lethal drone strikes as the necessary means to prevent or pre-empt imminent threats from materialising. This rationale takes life as its referent object and the saving of lives as its objective. That is why, I argued that drone strikes are rationalised through a biopolitical logic of killing to make life live. Indeed, the rationality behind lethal drone strikes is that they save the lives of Americans, Israelis and Britons by pre-emptively killing suspects of terrorism.

However, before these individuals can be "justifiably" killed, they first have to be constructed as existential threats to the population. Hence, the first section of this chapter examined how existential threats are constructed by drawing binaries between the "liberal" Self and the "illiberal" Other. This construction is reflected in the discourse of absolute enmity. Following Foucault and Mbembe, I argued that these discourses reflect the two functions of racism. That is: (i) to divide people up in accordance with their biological properties and; (ii) to establish a positive relationship between killing the Other and preserving the Self (the more Others are killed, the more the Selves will live). The next chapter examines the rationality behind identifying, locating and targeting the threats, which I call the production of killable bodies.

7. Producing Killable Bodies

One of the key distinguishing characteristics of drone warfare is that it targets individuals rather than armies. Chapter six demonstrated that that these individuals are not targeted based on the crimes they have committed, but because of the presumed threat they pose to the life of the Self. However, the question remains how drone warfare is used to anticipate, identify, locate and target these continuously emerging threats. In other words, how does liberal drone warfare produce killable bodies?

This chapter takes up this question by examining the rationales behind the two key methodologies that are used by liberal democracies to anticipate, identify and locate threats: (i) the pattern of life analysis and (ii) the disposition matrix. First, the US-maintained disposition matrix is a database that contains files of information on all suspects of terrorism. Second, the US conducts pattern of life analyses of potential suspects to detect behaviour that it associates with "terrorist activity" through the use of drone surveillance and metadata. The pattern of life analysis and the disposition matrix generate the data which provides the bureaucratic rationale for targeting people.

To conceptualise the methodologies used to produce killable bodies, I draw on Dillon and Reid's discussion of the informationalisation of life as well as Mbembe's discussion of necropolitics. While Dillon and Reid see the informationalisation of life predominantly as a biopolitical endeavour, I argue that the informationalisation of life in the context of drone warfare also reflects a necropolitical rationale. This necropolitical rationale is reflected in the objectification and dehumanisation of the Other through the use of metadata and drone surveillance. Most importantly, I illustrate this necropolitical rationale by examining one particular case of a US drone strike that killed 23 people in the Afghan province of Uruzgan.

As discussed in the methodology, this chapter takes a different perspective than chapters five and six as it examines the internal rationales that shape the drone warfare of liberal democracies rather than the external rationales, which were discussed in chapters five and six. While studying the internal rationales for killing is critical to understand how liberal democracies rationalise drone warfare, it bears one disadvantage: they are confidential and therefore difficult to access.

Fortunately, over the past decade, various whistle-blowers from the US intelligence community have leaked documents exposing the inner workings of the US drone campaigns in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. This does not apply to Israeli or UK drone warfare

However, there is evidence that the UK and other liberal democracies are complicit in the US disposition matrix.

7.1. Pattern of Life Analysis

Drone warfare targets two types of suspects: suspects whose identities are known and suspects whose identities are unknown. The first group of people, the suspects whose identities are known, are targeted in so-called "personality strikes" – a strike based on the identity of an individual. Examples of this include the strikes on Ahmad Al-Jabri in Gaza and Reyaad Khan in Syria, which were mentioned in chapter six. In Israel, personality strikes comprise the majority of drone strikes.[217]

The second group of people, the suspects who identities are unknown, are not targeted on the basis of their identity, but on the basis of their behaviour, their so-called "pattern of life" or "signature". Individuals who bear a pattern of life or signature that is associated with "terrorist activity" are killed in what is referred to as a "signature strike".[218] There are few reports indicating that Israel carries out signature strikes on a regular basis.[219] The UK even explicitly denies that it carries out such strikes. The US, on the other hand, carries out signature strikes across the Middle East and Africa. In fact, the majority of US drone strikes target unknown individuals based on their "pattern of life".[220] This section examines the rationale behind the pattern of life analysis.

To conduct a pattern of life analysis, the US military relies on two sources of information: signals intelligence collected from electronic devices and video feeds and thermal imagery collected by drones. The first source of information, signals intelligence, is used to establish a digital pattern of life of potential suspects. Signals intelligence is defined by the US military as "intelligence derived from communications, electronic, and foreign instrumentation signals" and includes data and metadata derived from mobile phone calls, emails, geolocational data, social media and other internet data.[221] This raw data is converted by a quantitative tool

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[217] Dobbing and Cole, *Israel and the Drone Wars,* 10.

[218] Lauren Wilcox, "Embodying algorithmic war: Gender, race, and the posthuman in drone warfare," *Security Dialogue* 48, no.1 (2017): 16.

[219] Saif, Atef Abu. "Sleepless in Gaza: Israeli drone war on the Gaza Strip." Ramallah: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Regional Office Palestine, 2014), 23–24.

[220] "Small Footprint Operations 2/13," The Drone Papers, *Intercept,* October 15, 2015, https://theintercept.com/document/2015/10/14/small-footprint-operations-2-13/#page-1.

[221] US Department of State, "Joint Publication 1-02 Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms," July 2007, 500.

called "link analysis" that measures "the number of direct interactions between individuals, or 'nodes'" within a wider network of insurgents.[222] By analysing these interactions between potential suspects, the US military establishes a pattern of life.

So how should we understand this digital pattern of life analysis? The reliance on signals intelligence and quantitative tools reveal that a pattern of life analysis is really a pattern of information analysis. Naturally, it is a biopolitical tool as it takes life as its referent object. However, life is not only just defined biologically but also by the information it represents. Hence, the pattern of life analysis exemplifies what Dillon and Reid have called the informationalisation of life or the reduction of life into code.

Furthermore, life is not only informationalised but also quantified by the digital pattern of life analysis. Again, following Dillon and Reid, this can be understood as a way to render live measurable, calculable and ultimately predictable.[223] Indeed, the assumption is that if an individual contacts other suspects in a certain space and time, (s)he is more likely to present a danger to the US. As such, the digital pattern of life analysis provides the rationale for a pre-emptive strike. Finally, the digital pattern of life analysis objectifies the enemy by "rigorously excluding the very subjects who were in communication, as well as the undecidability of language as such; excising everything of significance in relation to the production and circulation of 'meaning'."[224] This objectification of the enemy will also be examined as a necropolitical tool of power in section 7.3.

The second source of information for the pattern of life analysis is provided by drone surveillance. In addition to the hundreds of thousands of hours' worth of video feeds, the drone also produces thermal imageries of suspects to detect abnormalities or the movement of suspects at night, when many of the ISTAR missions are conducted. The thermal imagery produces a "heat signature" of the potential target, which according to philosopher, Joseph Pugliese, "works to reduce the targeted human body to an anonymous heat-emitting entity that merely radiates signs of life."[225] In other words, the heat signature reduces human life to its

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[222] Gareth Porter, "How McChrystal and Petraeus Built an Indiscriminate 'Killing Machine'," *Truthout,* September 26, 2011, http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/3588-how-mcchrystal- and-petraeus-built-an-indiscriminate-killing-machine.

[223] Dillon and Reid, 72.

[224] Ibid., 62.

[225] Joseph Pugliese, *State Violence and the Execution of Law: Biopolitcal Caesurae of Torture*, *Black Sites, Drones* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 193.

biological properties. Indeed, the imageries from drones are used to provide the biological pattern of life of a suspect.

The pattern of life analysis thus reduces life to measurable code and to certain biological properties such as bodily temperature. It is in this combination of the digital and the biological that we can see, yet again, the influence of cybernetics on drone warfare. This is epitomised by the drone itself as it is not only used to provide surveillance, but also for gathering signals intelligence. Drones are equipped with "virtual base-tower transceivers", which create "a fake cell phone tower that can force a targeted person's device to lock onto the NSA's [National Security Agency] receiver without their knowledge."[226] Hence, the drone reduces life to code and to its biological properties before the operator ultimately decides on killing "it". The next sections continuous the discussion of how suspects are profiled through the disposition matrix.

7.2. Disposition Matrix

Before an individual is selected to be killed by a US Predator or Reaper drone, (s)he appears on one of the US "kill lists" or "terror watchlists" as they are called. These watchlists vary in size and importance. The largest watchlist, the US Terrorist Screening Database, contains over 680,000 suspects of terrorism from countries across the globe. Yet, the most instrumental database for "finding, fixing and finishing" targets, has been the "disposition matrix", which was introduced by Brennan in 2010.[227] The White House's disposition matrix merges a variety of watchlists maintained by the CIA, the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), the National Security Agency (NSA) and the Pentagon.[228] The result is "a single, continually evolving database in which biographies, locations, known associates and affiliated organizations are all catalogued. So are strategies for taking targets down, including extradition requests, capture operations and drone patrols."[229]

The disposition matrix is instrumental in the pattern of life analysis as it processes all data on suspects collected through signals intelligence and human intelligence.[230] The data,

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[226] Jeremy Scahill and Glenn Greenwald, "The NSA's Secret Role in the U.S. Assassination Program," *Intercept,* February 10, 2014, https://theintercept.com/2014/02/10/the-nsas-secret-role/. Under "Western" laws this is most probably unconstitutional.

[227] Ian G. R. Shaw, "Predator Empire: The Geopolitics of US Drone Warfare," *Geopolitics* 18, no. 3 (2013): 536.

[228] Shaw, "Predator Empire," 536.

[229] Greg Miller, "Plan for hunting terrorists signals U.S. intends to keep adding names to kill lists," *Washington Post,* October 23, 2012, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/plan-for-hunting-terrorists-signals-us-intends-to-keep-adding-names-to-kill-lists.

[230] Human intelligence is defined as "a category of intelligence derived from information collected and provided by human sources." AAP-6 (2004) - NATO Glossary of terms and definitions.

varying in size from small to big data, and in form, both structured and unstructured data, can be searched systematically using complex data mining algorithms.[231] This enables the profiling of suspects based on their pattern of life, which Mireille Hildebrandt defines as: "the use of algorithms or other techniques to create, discover or construct knowledge from huge sets of data."[232] The underlying rationale here is that suspicious behaviour of suspected insurgents cannot be predicted on the basis of a linear and causal methodology, but instead follows a non-linear pattern.[233]

The idea behind the discovery approach is therefore "to collect and aggregate as much data as possible, in order to mine them for relevant patterns that allow the profiler to anticipate future behaviours."[234] Thus, the information in the disposition matrix is not simply the aggregation of all individual bits of data, information, communication and so forth. Rather, the database produces knowledge by (re)combining the bits of data and searching for patterns. This is similar to the observation made by Dillon and Reid on the workings of data analytics in the informationalisation of life: "The mode of relation not only differentiates components; it also combines and re-combines them in novel ways to produce new forms. In effect, it continuously demands the re-engineering of components themselves."[235]

One may notice that the UK and Israel are largely missing in the discussion of the pattern of life analysis and the Disposition Matrix. While the majority of intelligence that is processed through the Disposition Matrix is provided by the US, various reports have indicated that its allies, including the UK, the Netherlands, Italy and Germany, have provided critical intelligence on suspects that were later targeted by US drone strikes.[236] For example, in 2016, the Intercept reported how the Yorkshire based RAF Menwith Hill plays a vital role in the US drone

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[231] Jutta Weber, "Keep adding. On kill lists, drone warfare and the politics of databases," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 1 (2016): 109.

[232] Mireille Hildebrandt, "Defining Profiling: A New Type of Knowledge?" In *Profiling the European Citizen: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives,* eds. Mireille Hildebrandt, Serge Gutwirth (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 17.

[233] Weber, "Keep adding," 109–110.

[234] Serge Gutwirth and Mireille Hildebrandt, "Some caveats on profiling" In *Data Protection in a Profiled World,* eds. Serge Gutwirth, Yves Poullet and Paul de Hert (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), 7.

[235] Dillon and Reid, 76.

[236] Amnesty International, *Deadly Assistance: The Role of European States in US Drone Strikes* (London: Amnesty International, 2018), 5.

programme by collecting more than 300 million emails and phone calls *per day* of potential suspects, through the use of surveillance technology.[237]

In addition, the German Ramtein Air Base is used extensively to transmit signals intelligence including geolocational data collected by US drones in the Middle East and North Africa to the US ground control facilities in Creech Air Force Base in Nevada.[238] Furthermore, Amnesty International reported that the Netherlands has shared 1.8 million metadata records of telephone conversations from suspected al-Shabaab members in Somalia, which were used to find and fix targets for US drone strikes.[239] These are just a few examples of a vast US-coordinated network of global intelligence, which is processed through the Disposition Matrix.

Most importantly, these examples demonstrate that liberal democracies across the globe have embraced the biostrategic logic of measuring and predicting emerging threats based on probability analysis. It should be noted that these methodologies, as they are discussed in this chapter, are not unique to the Disposition Matrix or the pattern of life analysis. Rather, it is part of the larger dimension of network-centric warfare, which in turn is part of the "distanced, computer-centric approach of the RMA"[240] The idea behind network-centric warfare was first articulated by US Vice Admiral Cebrowskias and John Garstka in 1998. They argued that network-centric warfare "translates information superiority into combat power by effectively linking knowledgeable entities in the battle-space."[241]

7.3. Patterns of Death

So far, my discussion has focussed on how life is informationalised through the pattern of life analysis and the disposition matrix. As discussed, Dillon and Reid understand the informationalisation of life as the contemporary function of biopolitics in the liberal way of

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[237] Ryan Gallagher, "Inside Menwith Hill: The NSA's British Base at the Heart of U.S. Targeted Killing," *Intercept,* September 6, 2016, www.theintercept. com/2016/09/06/nsa-menwith-hill-targeted-killing-surveillance/. Documents from the British Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), which were provided to The Guardian by Edward Snowden in 2016, revealed that British signals intelligence from Menwith Hill had facilitated a drone strike in Yemen in March 2012. The drone strike killed five men, including four alleged members from al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and one 60-year old man, while badly injuring nine civilians, including six children.

[238] Amnesty International, *Deadly Assistance: The Role of European States in US Drone Strikes* (London: Amnesty International, 2018), 6–7.

[239] Ibid., 7.

[240] Oliver C. Belcher, "The afterlives of counterinsurgency: Postcolonialism, military social science, and Afghanistan 2006-2012" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2014), 51.

[241] Vice Admiral Arthur K. Cebrowski and John J. Garstka quoted in Colonel Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Zenith Press, 2006), 7.

war. Taking life as its referent object, the pattern of life analysis seems indeed a biopolitical technique of power. However, the pattern of life analysis produces death rather than life. It determines who is disposable and who is not. Therefore, I argue that the pattern of life analysis should be seen as a necropolitical technique of power.

In 2015, the Intercept obtained an internal classified study of the Pentagon evaluating the targeting process of the US drone campaigns in Yemen and Somalia in 2011 and 2012. The study outlines a two-steps-to-kill procedure: "step one 'Developing a target' to 'Authorization of a target,' and step two, 'Authorizing' to 'Actioning'."[242] During the first step from developing a target to authorisation, a portrait is created of a suspect and the threat that person poses on the basis of his or her pattern of life, "pulling it together in a condensed format known as a 'baseball card'". This information is then "bundled with operational information and packaged in 'target information folder' to be staffed up to higher echelons for action."[243]

Once a target is constructed, the target information folder becomes a death warrant.[244] What was once a pattern of life is turned into a pattern of death soon to be killed by a drone strike. In fact, the Pentagon study showed that in 75 percent of all so-called "capture/kill" operations the suspect was killed by a drone strike rather than captured. Killing a minimum of 293 people, including 55 civilians, in Yemen alone between 2011 and 2012.[245] Indeed, former US head of the Defence Intelligence Agency, Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, affirmed: "The drone campaign right now really is only about killing. When you hear the phrase 'capture/kill,' capture is actually a misnomer. In the drone strategy that we have, 'capture' is a lower case 'c.' We don't capture people anymore."[246]

The rationale behind this lethal bureaucracy, as discussed in chapter six, is to pre-emptively kill individuals who pose an imminent threat to the US. However, the pattern of life analysis designed to "develop a target" reveals a necropolitical mode of power, one that exposes entire populations to death. This necropolitical rationale is inscribed in the two sources of information that comprises the pattern of life analysis: the digital and the biological pattern of

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[242] Cora Currier, "The Kill Chain: The Lethal Bureaucracy Behind Obama's Drone War," *Intercept,* October 15, 2015, https://theintercept.com/drone-papers/the-kill-chain/.

[243] Currier, "The Kill Chain: The Lethal Bureaucracy Behind Obama's Drone War," *Intercept.*

[244] Jeremy Scahill, "The Assassination Complex: Secret Military Documents Expose the Inner Workings of Obama's Drone Wars," *Intercept,* October 15, 2015, https://theintercept.com/drone-papers/the-assassination-complex/.

[245] Currier, "The Kill Chain," *Intercept.*

[246] Jeremy Scahill, "Find, Fix, Finish," *Intercept,* October 15, 2015, https://theintercept.com/drone-papers/find-fix-finish/.

life. As the text below demonstrates, both the digital and the biological pattern of life analyses produce targetable bodies by dehumanising the Other.

7.3.1. Digital Pattern of Death

> "Metadata absolutely tell you everything about somebody's life. If you have enough metadata, you don't really need content" (NSA General Counsel Stewart Baker).[247]

As mentioned, a digital pattern of life is established using a quantitative tool called link-analysis that analyses "the number of phone calls to or visits made to an existing JPEL [Joint Prioritized Effects List] target or to other numbers in touch with that target."[248] Consequently, Weber observes, "the more often somebody contacts a suspect, the more suspicious the person becomes – even though s/he might be a cousin or a friend who is not part of any so-called terrorist network."[249]

"The inevitable result," journalist Gareth Porter remarks, "is that more numbers of phones held by civilian noncombatants show up on the charts of insurgent networks. If the phone records show multiple links to numbers already on the "kill/capture" list, the individual is likely to be added to the list."[250] Former BBC correspondent, Kate Clark, has documented in detail how link-analysis has led to the deaths of civilians in Afghanistan.[251] To take one example. Zabet Amanullah, a former Taliban commander who became a human rights activist in 2003, was killed by a drone strike in September 2010, because he was mistaken for Muhammad Amin, an actual Taliban governor who had spoken to Amanullah on the phone. In addition, the drone strike deliberately killed nine Afghan election campaigners due of their phone contacts with Amanullah.[252] This exemplifies the killing based on information about humans instead of the humans themselves.

The link analysis methodology thus establishes what Porter calls "guilt by association".[253] Besides the clear violation of humanitarian law, this rationale reveals the necropolitical dimension of the pattern of life analysis as the Other is mathematicised and

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[247] Wilcox, "Embodying algorithmic war," 16.

[248] Porter, "How McChrystal and Petraeus Built an Indiscriminate 'Killing Machine'." 2011.

[249] Weber, "Keep adding," 111.

[250] Porter, 2011.

[251] Kate Clark, *The Takhar attack: Targeted killings and the parallel worlds of US intelligence and Afghanistan* (Afghanistan Analyst Network, 2011).

[252] Clark, *The Takhar attack*, 29.

[253] Porter, 2011.

objectified through the quantitative approach of link-analysis. Mbembe describes this as: "the becoming-object of the human being; or the subordination of everything to impersonal logic and to the reign of calculability and instrumental rationality."[254] In other words, the rationale for killing is based on an objectified notion of the Other, on the code (s)he represents. As the former director of both the CIA and the NSA, General Michael Hayden, said: "We kill people based on metadata."[255]

The objectification provides for an impersonal and dehumanised Other. Indeed, a former analysist from the US intelligence community told the Intercept, "they [the targeted communities] have no rights. They have no dignity. They have **no humanity** [bold included] to themselves. They're just a 'selector' [a piece of code linked usually linked to a phone number or email address] to an analyst."[256] Indeed, drone pilot, Michael Haas, reaffirmed: "Ever step on ants and never give it another thought? That's what you are made to think of the targets – as just black blobs on a screen."[257] This reflects Mbembe's observation that "in the eyes of the conqueror, savage life is just another form of animal life."[258]

7.3.2. Biological Pattern of Death

As discussed, the biological pattern of life of a suspect is established on the basis of heat imagery and video feeds transmitted in real time by drones to the pilot and the sensor operators. Usually flying at an altitude of three to four miles, the drone imagery reduces the people beneath its gaze to blobs on the screen of the drone crew. Therefore, enemies are identified on the basis of their presumed gender, size, movement and behaviour such as praying. As a result, drone surveillance contributes to the creation of binary constructions between "Us" and "Them", which Foucault and Mbembe referred to as a biological caesura.

The necropolitical rationale inscribed in this biological pattern of life analysis is evidenced unambiguously in a drone strike on a group of two dozen civilians in the Afghan province Uruzgan. As demonstrated, and further exemplified below, the drones and their operators persistently work to dehumanise the targeted communities living under drones as they

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[254] Mbembe, 18.

[255] "Deadly Assistance," *Amnesty*, 18.

[256] Scahill, "The Assassination Complex," *Intercept*.

[257] Ed Pilkington, "Life as a drone operator: 'Ever step on ants and never give it another thought?" *Guardian,* November 19, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/18/life-as-a-drone-pilot-creech-air-force-base-nevada.

[258] Mbembe, 24.

determine who bears a dangerous pattern of life. On February 21, 2010, two hellfire missiles struck two of the three vehicles carrying the Afghan families, killing between 16 and 23 people, including two boys of three and four, while maiming several others.[259] The strike was widely reported as a horrific mistake by the US military.[260] Yet, the transcripts of cockpit and radio conversations among the drone crew and sensor operator reveal a conscious attempt to construe the Afghan civilians as targetable Taliban fighters.

The Predator drone picked up the vehicles when they appeared in the vicinity of some US special forces at 5 AM. During a period of some four and a half hours, the Predator crew scrutinised the vehicles and the Afghans, looking for evidence to support a strike.[261] At 5:15 AM, the Predator pilot asked the camera operator to zoom in on one of the Afghans. "Is that a rifle?", he asked. "Maybe just a warm spot from where he was sitting," the camera operator replied as he referred to infrared imagery. The camera operator said: "Can't really tell right now, but it does look like an object." Clearly disappointed, the pilot replied: "I was hoping we could make a rifle out."[262] Just half an hour later at 5:30 AM, both the camera operator and the pilot of the Predator agreed they saw one of the Afghans carrying a weapon.

However, the ground force commander required more information. "Sounds like they need more than possible" the camera operator told the drone pilot. For the camera operator and the drone pilot the case was clear cut: these were Taliban fighters on their way to target US special forces. They saw their analysis confirmed when several of the Afghans appeared to be praying after the vehicles halted at 6:15 AM. By now, the Predator crew was convinced the Afghans were Taliban men. Indeed, the camera operator said: "This is definitely it, this is their force. Praying? I mean, seriously, that's what they do." The crew's intelligence coordinator concluded: "They're going to do something nefarious."[263]

Yet, the authorisation to strike was further complicated when the sensor operator in Florida had spotted at least one and possibly two children in the group. Immediately the drone pilot replied: "at least one child... Really? assisting the MAM [military-aged-male], uh, that means he's guilty." Clearly frustrated, the pilot added: "Why didn't he say 'possible' child?

[259] David S. Cloud, "Anatomy of an Afghan war tragedy," *Los Angeles Times,* April 10, 2011, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2011-apr-10-la-fg-afghanistan-drone-20110410-story.html.

[260] "Drone crew criticized in Afghan strike," *CNN,* May 29, 2010, http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/05/29/us.afghan.civilian.deaths/index.html.

[261] Cloud, "Anatomy of an Afghan war tragedy," *Los Angeles Times*.

[262] Ibid.

[263] Ibid.

Why are they so quick to call kids but not to call a rifle."[264] The crew rushed to redefine the children as adolescents. Contrary to a toddler or a child, a teen or adolescent, dubiously defined by the drone crew as a person between the age of seven and thirteen, could be classified as a "military-aged-male" – a MAM in US military terminology. Indeed, the drone pilot claimed: "Twelve or 13 years old with a weapon is just as dangerous."[265] Ultimately, the change from "possible children" to "possible adolescents" proofed sufficient to target the vehicles.

This exchange between the drone crew, the sensor and ground command, reveals the necropolitical rationale for targeting people in US drone warfare. When the group of Afghans unknowingly approached US special forces, their pattern of life became a pattern of death. Their very movement established guilt, making them liable for putting to death. In addition, the Predator crew treated the fact that the Afghans were praying as the ultimate evidence of their Taliban affiliation and their "nefarious" intentions. This ascription of racist stereotypes to the Other is exemplary of necropolitics. The report "Living Under Drones" has documented how this racist approach of the US drone crews terrorises targeted communities in Waziristan, Pakistan. As Safdar Dawar states: "…if we're praying, we're worried that maybe one person who is standing with us praying is wanted. So, wherever we are, we have this fear of drones."[266]

Furthermore, the necropolitical targeting rationality is exemplified in the classification of Afghan military-aged-males as dangerous. With the phrase "assisting the MAM, uh, that means he's guilty," the Predator pilot deemed an entire Afghan population of military-aged-males "guilty" and therefore liable to be killed. Indeed, the US military treats all Afghan military-aged-males as unlawful combatants unless exonerating evidence appears post-mortem.[267] In this particular case the US military of course admitted that innocent civilians had been killed due to the overwhelming evidence including testimonies from survivors. However, in the majority of cases when civilians are killed by drone strikes, the US military refers to them as "enemy killed in action" (IKIA).[268]

Many of these unintentionally killed "enemies" lived in the heavily targeted Hindu Kush along the Afghan north-eastern border with Pakistan. According to the Intercept, the US killed more than 200 IKIA in this area as part of operation "Haymaker" between 2011 and 2013.

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[264] Ibid.

[265] Ibid.

[266] Quoted in Espinoza, "State terrorism: orientalism and the drone programme." 386.

[267] Scahill, "The Assassination Complex," *Intercept*.

[268] Ibid.

During one five-month period in 2013, nearly 90 percent of all people killed in signature drone strikes were not the intended targets.[269] Consequently, the Hindu Kush became, in the words of Mbembe, the land of the "living dead", where an entire population of Afghan military-aged-males are deemed disposable by the US military.

Finally, the exchange reveals that children are simply redefined to fit the pre-established categories of the US military. This last argument was also made by Allinson who argued that the "elision of children into 'adolescents,' followed by the deadly missile launch, illustrates precisely that drawing of a 'biological caesura' of which Mbembe writes."[270] Likewise, children who appear on the screens of drone crews are called "terrorists in training" or "fun-sized terrorists".[271] Hence, in the necropolitical targeting rationale of US drone warfare, only women and toddlers are considered non-threatening life. As to women, apparently gender is explicitly a determinant as well. This confirms with the patriarchal societal constructs of the gender roles of men (perceived as a potential threat) and women (not perceived as threats).

7.4. Conclusion

While the chapter six examined the external rationality of lethal drone strikes, this chapter examined the internal rationalities of drone warfare. Specifically, this chapter examined how US drone warfare constructs killable bodies through the disposition matrix and on the basis of a pattern of life analysis. Drawing on signals intelligence and metadata from the phone records and email and internet traffic of suspects, the pattern of life analysis and the disposition matrix reduce life to quantitative data. Hence, I argued that they exemplify the informationalisation of life in drone warfare.

The rationale behind the pattern of life analysis and the disposition matrix is to predict where and when threats emerge based on metadata and surveillance feeds. This form of risk management appears to reflect a biopolitical rationale of pre-emptive action because it seeks to identify, locate and target "terrorists" before they can do harm. However, the final section demonstrated that digital and biological pattern of life analyses do not reflect a biopolitical rationale of preserving life, but rather a necropolitical rationale of exposing whole populations

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[269] Scahill

[270] Allinson, "The Necropolitics of Drones," 123.

[271] Ed Pilkington, "Life as a drone operator: 'Ever step on ants and never give it another thought?," *Guardian,* November 19, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/18/life-as-a-drone-pilot-creech-air-force-base-nevada.

to death. This necropolitical rationale was illustrated in the discussion of the digital and biological pattern of life analyses.

First, the digital pattern of life analysis objectifies and dehumanises suspects of terrorism as their life is reduced to metadata. By this rationale, anyone who is in direct or indirect contact with a known or unknown terrorist suspect is liable for putting to death. Second, the biological pattern of life analysis also objectifies and dehumanises people. But this time through the heat imagery and the video feeds from the drone, which are used to detect "dangerous" behaviour. Usually flying at an altitude of three to four miles, the drone imagery reduces the people beneath its gaze to blobs on the screen of the drone operator. As such, drone surveillance creates binary constructions between "Us" and "Them", what Foucault and Mbembe call a biological caesura.

To illustrate the necropolitical rationale inscribed in this biological pattern of life analysis, I examined one particular drone strike that killed a group of nearly two dozen Afghan civilians in Uruzgan. The exchanges between the Predator drone crew and the sensor operator revealed how the group of Afghans were systematically dehumanised on the basis of the video feeds from the drone. For instance, the Predator crew associated praying with behaviour of the Taliban. Furthermore, all individuals, including children, who could be classified as military-aged-males were treated as enemy combatants. Through this discourse of racism all Afghan military-aged-males become acceptable targets.

8. Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis is to understand the paradox of liberalism and drone warfare – that is, the seeming contradiction between the illiberal nature of drone warfare and the liberal rationale for war. Therefore, this thesis raised the research question: How are liberal democracies rationalising drone warfare? To examine the rationalities of drone warfare, I raised three sub-question: First, chapter five raised the sub-question: How are liberal democracies rationalising drone warfare through a discourse of humanitarianism? Second, chapter six raised the sub-question: How are liberal democracies rationalising lethal drone strikes? Third, chapter seven raised the sub-question: how does liberal drone warfare produce killable bodies? These sub-questions are answered in sections 8.1., 8.2. and 8.3. of the conclusion. Finally, section 8.4. responds to the research question and suggests some areas for future research.

8.1. Humanitarian Warfare

Chapter five examined how drone warfare is presented as humanitarian by the US, Israel and the UK. The discourses that present drone warfare as the most humane type of warfare are biopolitical because they take human life as their referent object and the preservation of human life as their objective. All three countries and virtually all the examined public documents, statements and speeches preached this biopolitical rationale of preserving life, albeit the emphasis on whose lives require saving varied per country.

The first section discussed how the turn to drones responds to the idea among liberal democracies to engage in riskless wars, where the lives of soldiers have to be preserved at all costs.[272] The second section demonstrated how the cooperation between drones and their operators is presented as saving civilian lives. Finally, the third section discussed how drone warfare is presented as humanitarian through a discourse of life-saving precision. Most notably, the US presents drone operators as surgeons who remove the "cancerous tumours" that are called al-Qaida with "surgical precision" in order to save civilian lives.

I criticised the discourses of humanitarian warfare because they obfuscate the reality of drone warfare. By focusing on the technological capabilities of the drone and the moral conduct of the operator, liberal democracies ignore the impact of drones on the targeted communities.

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[272] Frank Sauer and Niklas Schörnig, "Killer drones: The 'silver bullet' of democratic warfare?" *Security Dialogue* 43, no. 4 (2012): 369–370.

For example, the claim of surgical precision is contradicted by the impact radius of hellfire missiles that destroy anything within a fifteen-meter radius.

8.2. Killing to Make Life Live

While chapter five discussed the humanitarian rationale for drone warfare, chapter six, discussed the rationale for killing in drone warfare. Taking biopolitics as my starting point, I assumed that liberal governments require a discourse of racism to exercise their sovereign right to kill. Hence, the first section examined how the US, Israel and the UK construct the targets of drone warfare as terrorists. Drawing on Foucault and Mbembe, I argued that these countries construct a biological caesura between the populations worthy of life and the populations worthy of death. This division between populations is created through the construction of binaries between Self and Other. While the "liberal" Self is presented as "life-preserving", the "illiberal" Other is presented as "death-producing".

Similarly, the spaces of the West and the East are juxtaposed against each other. On the one hand, the "West" reflects peace, stability and order, while on the other hand, the "ungoverned" spaces of the East are deemed "pre-modern", "tribal" and the "breeding grounds" for terrorism. In addition to the construction of binaries, liberal democracies construct the "terrorist enemy" as an existential threat to humanity. This rationale of absolute enmity rests on the idea that the Other poses as Mbembe argues, "a mortal threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen my potential to life and security."[273] In other words, to preserve "our way of live", it is necessary to kill the Other.

In drone warfare, this Other may refer to al-Qaida, Hamas or ISIS, but also to anyone associated with "terrorist activity". Most importantly, drone warfare targets those who are becoming a threat. Thus, the rationale for killing in drone warfare is based on pre-emption. Rather than executing people based on the crimes they have committed; drone strikes are carried out to pre-empt or prevent future attacks. This corresponds with Foucault's observation that killing in the system of biopower is only acceptable "if it results not in a victory over political adversaries, but in the elimination of the biological threat to and the improvement of the species or race."[274]

In line with the central argument of this thesis, I contended that this rationale of pre-emption corresponds to the liberal rational for warfare which aims to emancipate the species

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[273] Ibid., 18.

[274] Society Must Be Defended, 256.

from war by pre-emptively neutralising emerging threats to the population. Indeed, Dillon and Reid argued: "the real focus of biopolitics – the schwerpunkt of its war on life to emancipate life from war – is the future. It is not so much what life currently is, as what life may become."[275]

8.3. Producing Killable Bodies

In the final chapter of this thesis, I turned from the external rationales for drone warfare, as discussed in chapters five and six, to the internal rationales for drone warfare. Specifically, I examined how drone warfare anticipates, identifies and locates emerging threats to the population. In US drone warfare this process is referred to as find, fix, finish, or simply as "developing" targets. Hence, to understand the discourses and practices that drive this process, I raised the question: how does liberal drone warfare produce killable bodies?

The chapter examined the rationales behind two particular techniques of government that are used by the US military to "develop" targets for drone strikes: the disposition matrix and the pattern of life analysis. I argued that the disposition matrix and the pattern of life analysis objectify and dehumanise people by reducing their lives, their very humanity, to blobs on the screen of an operator or to codes and bits of data on "terror watchlists". As such the disposition matrix and the pattern of life analysis reflect the informationalisation of life in drone warfare. The rationale behind these technologies of government is based on an epistemology of empiricism and positivism that seeks to render life measurable, calculable and predictable by reducing it to its biological or digital properties. In line with chapter six, I contended that this form of risk management reflects a biopolitical rationale of pre-emptive action as it seeks to anticipate, identify, locate and target emerging threats before they can materialise.

However, a close examination of the digital and biological pattern of life analyses revealed that the rationale for "developing" targets is not only biopolitical but also necropolitical. In fact, rather than preserving lives, the digital and biological pattern of life analyses render entire populations liable for putting to death. First, the digital pattern of life analysis deems anyone guilty of "terrorist activity" who contacts other suspects via phone or email. Second, the biological pattern of life analysis, conducted through drone surveillance, deems individuals guilty of "terrorist activity" based on their movements and proximity to other suspects, their gender, age and even their religious rituals. Thus, the objectifying imagery from

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[275] Dillon and Reid, *The Liberal Way of War,* 148.

the drone defines, as Mbembe writes: "who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not."[276]

The drone strike that killed a group of nearly two dozen Afghan civilians, including women and children, evidenced this necropolitical rationale unambiguously. I demonstrated how the Predator drone crew relied on surveillance imagery from the drone to fit the group of Afghans within a predetermined category of military-aged-males based on their movement and appearance, their presumed gender, age and religious rituals. Once the Afghans were defined as military-aged-males they constituted acceptable targets, in accordance with US military doctrine. While the Uruzgan strike is only one example among hundreds of US drone strikes, it documents in great detail how targets are produced by the US military. Most importantly, the digital and biological pattern of life analysis reveal that the informationalisation of life in drone warfare is not just biopolitical but also necropolitical.

8.4. Final Conclusions and Future Research

In conclusion, this thesis demonstrated that liberal democracies rationalise drone warfare by presenting it as life-preserving. Thus, in agreement with Foucault and Dillon and Reid, I argued that the rationales for drone warfare are biopolitical because they claim to preserve human life by monitoring and controlling populations and by pre-emptively killing those who are deemed threatening to human life. Hence, the rationales for drone warfare are not contradictory to liberalism but follow logically from the liberal rationality of war.

However, I demonstrated that the rationales for drone warfare are not only biopolitical but also necropolitical. The necropolitical rationale is reflected in the objectifying and dehumanising US process of finding fixing and finishing people that I called the production of killable bodies. Instead of claiming to preserve human life, this racist process renders acceptable the putting to death of entire populations living under drones. Therefore, I conclude that the liberal rationale for drone warfare is both biopolitical and necropolitical. Indeed, this thesis demonstrated that the power over life and the power over death are two sides of the same coin.

Finally, there are some areas of future research that would contribute to the debate on the rationalities of drone warfare. While this thesis has focused on the rationalities of liberal democracies, the concepts of biopolitics and necropolitics can also be applied to the drone warfare of non-liberal democracies such as Turkey and China.[277] It would be interesting to

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[276] Mbembe, 27.

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compare the rationalities of drone warfare between more authoritarian regimes and self-identified liberal democracies. Another area for future research could investigate the relationship between the rationalities of liberal drone warfare and the rationalities of modern warfare in general.

Appendix 1

What Israel Does to Protect Its Civilians

✓ **Prepares the Home Front**
Sirens provide warning, and homes have bomb shelters or protected rooms.

✓ **Activates the Iron Dome**
The Iron Dome intercepts rockets that are flying toward Israeli population centers.

✓ **Carries out preventive strikes**
The IDF targets underground rocket launchers and terrorists who are preparing attacks.

What Hamas Does to Endanger Its Civilians

✗ **Builds bunkers and tunnels only for its fighters**
Gaza has a network of tunnels under residential areas, but only Hamas terrorists can access them.

✗ **Uses civilian buildings for military purposes**
Hamas fires rockets from schools, stores weapons in mosques, and plans attacks from houses.

✗ **Urges residents to ignore Israel's warnings**
The IDF warned civilians to move away from Hamas sites for their own safety. Hamas told them to stay put.

**The IDF safeguards Israeli civilians.
Hamas hides behind Palestinian civilians.**

ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES

This slide demonstrates how the IDF construes binaries between the "life-preserving" Self and the "death-producing" (Hamas).[278]

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[278] "How is the IDF Minimizing Harm to Civilians in Gaza?" IDF.

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