Drone Wars and the Death of the Warrior Culture

By Dr. John Bruni

War is long known as the height of all human follies. The 20th Century was arguably the bloodiest in the history of mankind. Whether the Cold War (1947-1991) can be counted as a 'world war' in its own right remains a point of controversy for future historians, but for this exercise we assume that it is, so let's look at the figures.

- World War I (1914-18) claimed an estimated 38 million lives. Total world population at the start of this conflict, approximately 1.8 billion.

- World War II (1939-45) claimed a total of 60 million lives. Total world population at the start of this conflict, approximately 2.3 billion.

- The Cold War (1947-91), ostensibly a complex global war fought to contain communism (if viewed from Washington & Moscow), interlinked with a war designed to liberate peoples oppressed by the remnants of European colonialism (if viewed from various European, African and Asian capitals) claimed a total of 90 million lives. Total world population at the start of this conflict, approximately 2.5 billion.

These overarching, intense global conflicts each transformed the nature of politics and society, and profoundly altered the international balance of power. World War I drew the United States into Europe as an

active 'interested party' in European affairs and, through President Woodrow Wilson's 'anti-imperial' policies, opened the way to national self-determination for European people under the yoke of the empires of the Central Powers – Germany, Austria-Hungary & Ottoman Turkey.

World War II saw the extinguishment of Fascism as a neo-imperial ideology; the exhaustion of European military power, and the proliferation of national self-

determination to non-European people under the yoke of the empires of the Allied powers – Great Britain, France, Portugal, Belgium and the Netherlands. It also left most of Eastern Europe under Soviet occupation, giving Moscow enormous strategic reach and power.

The Cold War saw the unravelling of the

remainder of Europe's overseas empires; the American dominance over Western Europe through the anti-communist military alliance, NATO; the establishment of Israel in the Middle East; the rise of new regional centres of power (such as Beijing, New Delhi & Brasilia), ending with the successful containment and collapse of Soviet-led international communism.

Each of these bloody steps of 20th Century organised violence ushered in new technologies that epitomized the way sanctioned killing was conducted. World War I saw the introduction of fixed wing combat aircraft, the main battle tank and the submarine and dreadnought. World War II saw the introduction of radar, the jet and rocket engine to power aircraft and ballistic missiles, the use of aircraft carriers, punctuated by the use of the atomic bomb. The Cold War refined and proliferated many of the World War II derived military

technologies with special mention going to

atomic and thermonuclear weapons mounted on ballistic missiles of all different shapes and sizes. The near-monopoly of Washington and Moscow regarding their ability to destroy all life on Earth, prevented both the US and the USSR from launching a major war in the critical theatres of Central Europe and Northeast Asia.

Added together, the 20th Century saw the deliberate killing of some 188 million people in some of the most appalling conditions. And while those claiming to fight the good fight, that is, the fight against tyranny and injustice, did what they could to defend freedom and liberty as they understood it to be, there were certainly times when they could have suspended their own ethical and moral judgements on the use of force in order to achieve the 'knock-
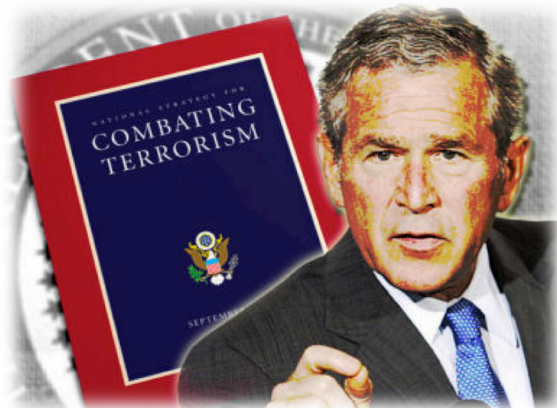
out blow' to their opponent. Take for example the oft-quoted Allied atrocities of World War II – the fire-bombings of Dresden and of Japan's major cities.

But as military technology progresses, especially in space through the advent of military surveillance, communication and navigation satellites and the use of miniaturised computers, less military personnel and combat platforms are required to achieve tactical and strategic success on the battlefield. This means that the size of military forces can be reduced without necessarily undermining their ability to prosecute military operations wherever required. Arguably, the zenith of this philosophy took place in the US military under the charge of President George W. Bush's controversial Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld. Rumsfeld believed that new military technology would allow the US to conduct sweeping global operations, including ambitious 'regime change' operations, without the need for masses of manpower or heavy equipment. The dethronement of the Taliban/Al Qaeda from their seat of power in Afghanistan in response to the 9/11 attacks, was testament to this theory – a theory that would be repeated in more disastrous ways in 2003 in Iraq, and as a consequence of 'mission creep', in Afghanistan from 2002 onwards.

Over the past decade, the first decade of the 21st Century, we have witnessed the emergence of a new round of over-arching global conflict dubbed by the Bush administration as the 'War on Terror' or, in certain circles, as the 'Long War'.

- The Long War (2001 -) according to conservative, open source information in three distinct theatres of combat: Afghanistan (2001 -); Iraq (2003-11) and Pakistan 2001 -) so far has claimed an estimated 245,733 lives.[1] Total world population at the start of this conflict, approximately 6.1 billion.

This too can be claimed to be a war of international or global reach, though far less intense and arguably far less coherent than the wars of the last century. Quintessentially it is a war between American ideas of liberty and freedom, pitted against the more

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[1] This figure **_does not_** include the lives lost in covert and minor operations conducted in other theatres of combat such as – the Arabian Peninsula, the Horn of Africa, Central Asia and Southeast Asia.

reactionary elements claiming to speak on behalf of Muslims 'oppressed' or offended by Western norms and strategic interests. While most wars are to some degree asymmetric in that neither party to a conflict is equipped, armed and trained entirely in the same way, the War on Terror saw the most powerful state in the world, the US, matched up against one of the least powerful non-state actors – al Qaeda, a global jihadist group. The diffuse nature of this non-state threat and the method it chose to fight American and allied forces, essentially eliminated the need for force-on-force parity. Al Qaeda, by simply holding out against constant American military pressure, gave the group strategic and political significance and, perversely, a form of legitimacy. As al Qaeda maintained itself in spite of American and allied onslaughts, other groups from North Africa to Southeast Asia, and unrelated to al Qaeda, laid claim to some connection to the outlawed terrorist outfit to be seen to be part of a wider anti-American/anti-Western conspiracy. This was their version of a local recruitment drive. With the al Qaeda banner springing up all over the place, American military planners sought to contain this 'global threat' by establishing a number of new bases, and roping in new allies to help fight these hydra-like jihadists. And, as this war progressed, in true American style, much effort was placed in finding new technologies to assist this campaign – most important being unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), also known as drones.

There is a long history attached to the use of remote control aircraft as a means of war fighting and surveillance of enemy dispositions, however, it is not this article's intention to trace the drones' chequered history. Other people have done this quite successfully, especially the recent work by American author Annie Jacobsen, in her latest publication – 'Area 51'. Suffice to say that in today's world expending human life – even the life of a professional soldier in defence of freedom/liberty, or a national interest considered critical to the homeland, is waning in currency. In a post-ideological age, the time-honoured embodiment of the profession of arms represented by the soldier, sailor and airman, the last bastions of traditional patriotism and honour, are gradually becoming anachronisms. The

advent of effective war by remote control, executed by drone operators safely ensconced in command and control facilities hundreds or even thousands of kilometres from an enemy state, terrorist training ground or area of operations, conducting 'targeted assassinations' with the aim to cut off the 'head of the snake', is replacing the skilled fighter/bomber pilot. A surgical strike by a drone, however, is far messier

than most imagine. It opens up a minefield of legal and political implications that have yet to fully play out on the international stage. For example, who is responsible when a remote control mission goes awry and people outside of the mission specification

are accidently killed? As far as we know from open sources, there are some 7,000 unmanned aerial vehicles in US service alone, conducting the monotonous task of monitoring empty stretches of terrain, waiting for terrorist members to slip up and reveal their positions. A 'drone war' is currently being waged by the US government against the 'frenemy'[2] state Pakistan over that country's troublesome Waziristan region, an area where remnant al Qaeda fighters fled after the US October-December 2001 'regime change' phase of the Afghan war. This drone war has crippled US diplomacy with Islamabad without bringing remnant al Qaeda or resurgent Taliban to heel, (both groups accused of using this remote area of Pakistan as a

staging base for their anti-ISAF[3] operations in Afghanistan). The broken states of Yemen and Somalia are also under the constant gaze of US drones awaiting terrorist and pirate leaders to reveal themselves to a fusillade of Hellfire missiles or an assortment of laser-guided bombs. A confirmed enemy state like Iran cannot move units of its elite Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) or conventional military anywhere without these movements being spied in detail by the constellation of American satellite over-flights or over-flights by Predator, Sentinel and Reaper UAVs. To America's advantage, this technology is an incredible leap forward. The next obvious phase will be the deployment of semi-autonomous robots that can drive, sail and fly anywhere and eliminate targets with impunity. Fewer and fewer US service personnel will be killed in the line of duty. However, there will always be those few unlucky enough to cop the occasional strike from a terrorist or insurgent militiaman. The flipside to this technological imbalance will be an increased targeting of Western civilian populations by anti-American/anti-Western forces. This can explain the multi-billion dollar investments by the US and many of its allies in homeland security.

So, what does this mean for the future of warfare? Well, the optimists are convinced that the 21st Century will be a time that is far less bloody than the 20th Century. Military technology is certainly far more accurate

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[2] 'Frenemy' as defined by Dictionary.com as: "a person or group that is friendly toward another because the relationship brings benefits, but harbors feelings of resentment or rivalry: *Clearly, turning the competition into frenemies is good for your business.*"

[3] ISAF is the acronym for the US-led International Security Assistance Force

and discriminating. Terrorist or insurgent leaders can be targeted and eliminated with a high degree of certainty with little collateral damage to people or property. The current global financial crisis will see many Western military forces cut in size and the latest US Strategic Guidance (January 2012) announced by US President Barak Obama is indicative that this trend will be long-term (turf wars and likely fight-backs by recalcitrant Pentagon empire-builders and their political allies notwithstanding)

But if this highly technological warfare is the shape of things to come, why have we not yet seen 'mission accomplished' in Afghanistan? Why has disorder reined supreme in Yemen and Somalia? Could it be that technology is simply a tool of statecraft and war, not the 'cure-all' for conflict? Ironically, as the ebb and flow of combat on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan has shown, even terrorists and insurgents can adapt to the new modes of combat by implementing their own crude but effective version of technological warfare – the remote detonation of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). And, are we in the West culturally attuned to the fact that for every son and daughter killed by a 'beast of Kandahar', in cultures that have carried forward the idea of vendetta in-extremis, another generation is raised to hate Americans and the people who are allied to them.

So where do we go from here?

The wars of the future will be ones where 'eye-to-eye' combat is gone. Where death can be meted out by commands issued across vast distances; where military personnel are trained primarily to support remotely guided platforms as opposed to being trained for close-quarter combat. Military casualties may be fewer, and there will be less emphasis placed on deploying 'boots on the ground'. But since recorded history, war has been as much about killing as it has been about emotionally empathising with a concept or an idea. Was an Emperor, King, Caliph, Pope, Prince or President worth the ultimate sacrifice? Was a social or philosophical construct? If we let machines act on our behalf in defence of our homelands, how do we assess when to deploy them for things we do not hold dear since we have long forgotten what made them dear to us in the first place? Popular apathy, coupled to the dispassionate deployment of semi-automated or automated weapons systems, allow governments to exercise almost unrestrained power. Why?

Because no one will care about a robotic craft that gets blown up while defending an oil well in Saudi Arabia, a pipeline in Nigeria or contesting prohibited airspace of an enemy state. In a case of software or hardware malfunction, no one in the West will care whether a village of innocents is burnt to the ground, a hospital mistaken as

an enemy command post or a kindergarten mistaken as a terrorist weapons cache. All that people in the free world may still care about is that none of its people got hurt. This attitude will eventually erode our already flagging sense of moral or ethical responsibility on issues of war and peace. The rebirth of the once defeated Fascist idea of never-ending warfare will become a reality as under-developed, non-Western victims of this essentially racist, anti-human and anti-humanist policy becomes wedded to our sense of superiority and survival.

Following Images Accessed 10/01/2012

World War I, Battle of the Somme:
http://www.toptenz.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Battle-of-the-Somme-534x400.jpg

Allied leaders of World War II from left to right, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt & Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin:
http://questgarden.com/63/29/3/080328182742/images/leaders.jpg

Cold War confrontation map:
http://spruce.flint.umich.edu/~ellisjs/Map%2028.2%20Cold%20War%20Confrontation.jpg

Nuclear explosion:
http://www.oasisllc.com/abgx/images/explosion_day.jpg

Bush & the Global War on Terror:
http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_qYsD4xBz3-M/ScpElvBp8wI/AAAAAAAABEw/44VcBgm2sbA/s400/War+on+Terror.jpg

Rumsfeld:
http://media.mlive.com/elections_impact/photo/9344808-large.jpg

Drone operator:

http://defense-update.com/images/UNIVERSAL-CONTROL-S.jpg

Reaper UAV in southern Afghanistan:
http://static.guim.co.uk/sys-images/Guardian/About/General/2010/2/7/1265558344660/A-Reaper-drone-in-souther-001.jpg

American military robot:
http://resources2.news.com.au/images/2008/02/27/va123729399930307/Foster-Miller-war-robots-AFP-5910450.jpg