

# Retributive Warfare: Mistaking Killing and Revenge for Justice

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Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

*Much is being written both for and against America's use of drones to assassinate those whom Americans consider to be anti-American combatants. Although there is no doubt on which side the moral arguments lie, what's being written strikes me as nugatory. Pious platitudes, legalistic niceties, and sophisticated rationalizations appear to be written by the guilty to convince themselves that they are not the people evil to the marrow that they are, and the dying and the dead couldn't care less. To them, being killed by a bullet or a bomb fired from an AK-47 or a drone makes no difference whatsoever. Dead is dead. Death cannot be sanitized by pronouncements.*

The so called advantages of using drones to kill are undeniable; so are the disadvantages. Arguing about these is futile. The fundamental question is not about the advantages or disadvantages of the means, it is about the rightness or wrongness of the end. In the end, what good does killing do?

Although no one seems to have noted it, I find it interesting that so many of Al-Qaeda's "senior commanders" were killed by drones while Osama bin Laden, once located and identified, was not. Why? Was it because killing by drone is too unreliable to be trusted for the task? In fact, killing from the air is always unreliable. During World War II, American pilots often mistakenly attacked American instead of German positions. In Paths of death and glory, Charles Whiting quoted people as having said, "American pilots are idiots.

This has happened so often that maybe the US should rethink the whole 'flying' thing. Obviously they can't do it worth a damn," and the American Ninth Air Force, which flew out of England, was nicknamed the American Luftwaffe because it regularly mistakenly bombed American troops in Normandy. Just imagine the propaganda catastrophe that would have resulted if a drone had been used and missed or killed bin Laden's wives and children but not him. The entire rationale for the drone program would have been shattered. So as good as drones are, there were not good enough for Osama bin Laden.

Air weapons, as the Germans refer to them, have always been oversold. Their effectiveness has never been established. The military impact of air raids has been the subject of decades of controversy. In World War II, RAF Bomber Command destroyed a significant portion of Nazi Germany's industry, many German cities including Cologne and Dresden, and caused the deaths of up to 600,000 civilians. The stated aim of the offensive was to break the morale of the German working class and it failed miserably.

The indiscriminate nature of the bombing, the heavy civilian casualties and damage stiffened German resistance. Even the effect of Bomber Command's attacks on industrial production was not major, as little as 3% in some years. This lack of success is generally

admitted even though Bomber Command was undeniably massively destructive. Many believe that the bombing of Dresden, when the war was essentially over and which killed 25,000 people, symbolizes the ruthlessness and pointlessness of bombing campaigns. Numerous people, including military officials alive at the time, also questioned the need to atom bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki since it was obvious that Japan had been completely defeated by then. The goal of those bombings was merely the utter destruction of two cities and more than 150,000 civilian lives. Although never admitted, the goal was merely retribution.

The American bombing of Hanoi during the Vietnamese War was similarly ineffective. As with the people of London during the Blitz in World War II, the more America bombed the North, the more the resolve of the people grew. More to the point, the two bombing campaigns against the North resulted from the realization that the war was not being won, and they failed to have any notable effect on the war's progress. Olof Palme, the Prime Minister of Sweden, compared the bombing to a number of historical atrocities including the bombing of Guernica, the massacres of Oradour-sur-Glane, Babi Yar, Katyn, Lidice, and Sharpeville, and the extermination of Jews and other groups at Treblinka.

Bombing has no function in wars of conquest. Bombers cannot be used to hold territory, but they can destroy everything in it. Air weapons are clearly only destructive. And the destruction clearly has only one function. Although America's military claims that American war is waged to destroy the enemy's ability to resist, the real purpose of war from the air is to punish those who dare to resist American ambitions. It is meant merely to punish, to destroy and kill, and the killing of civilians has always been an element of wars of plunder. The lesson air war tries to teach is, Resist Uncle Sam at your peril! But consider this:

In the fourteenth century, a Mongol called Amir Timur conquered a vast empire that stretched from Russia to India and from the Mediterranean to Mongolia. The purpose of his conquests was merely to pillage and plunder. He is remembered in history as a brutal barbarian who razed cities and put entire populations to death, using the victims' skulls to build grisly towers and pyramids. The rulers of Europe trembled at the idea that Timur's hordes were at their borders and sent embassies hoping to avoid attacks. In Western history, he is known as Tamerlane.

No essential difference separates the actions of Tamerlane from those of Britain's Bomber Command or American air wars. Western civilization today uses air weapons as Tamerlane used swords to intimidate and punish those who have the audacity to defy it. In cultures whose goal is plunder, human life has no value. Plunder is more valuable than life. The progress of Western Civilization stalled in the 14th century. Today our plundering elite still live in it.

So arguing over the rightness or wrongness of the use of drones is meaningless. Drones are not evil; killing is! As long as ordinary people acquiesce in the killing carried out by their governments, if drones aren't used, some other instruments of murder will be.

Ordinary people living in the West and perhaps everywhere are generally of the opinion that government exists for their benefit and security. Nothing could be further from the truth. Ordinary people exist merely to carry out the aims of governments. Now it is being claimed that the aim of government is to preserve life by killing, and most of us are dumb enough to believe it. How else can you explain the American government's willingness to send more than 4,000 young Americans to their deaths and the maiming of tens of thousands more to

avenge the deaths of fewer than 3,000?

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