



Introduction

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If war is the scourge of humanity, the killing of the helpless is its worst manifestation. The deaths of thousands, even millions, of young servicemen are mourned but accepted. But the deaths of even a few women, children, or elderly people can provoke outrage when they die at the hands of soldiers. The cry from time immemorial has been that such killings are pointless, vicious, immoral, atrocious. Ethical prescription and international law alike have condemned the evil and sought to restrict it if they could not eliminate it altogether. And yet the killing of the helpless has been a hallmark of warfare throughout the centuries, and never more so than during the one just ended.

“Helpless” is a term chosen with care. Although the title of this book employs a more common word whose current meaning seems clear, “civilians” is arguably ambiguous and, in any case, altogether anachronistic when applied much earlier than the late Middle Ages. Another expression, “innocent,” is even less satisfactory. Who is innocent? In the bitter annals of atrocity even infants have been denied this quality. John Chivington, the colonel responsible for the Sand Creek Massacre, is reported to have authorized the killing of Cheyenne and Arapaho babies with the curt observation, “Nits make lice.”¹

A third possibility, “noncombatant,” comes closer to the mark, but like civilian and innocent it can be contested. Is a worker in a munitions factory truly a noncombatant? A farmer whose grain fields help feed an army? An educator whose teachings legitimize and help to perpetuate a hated regime? Then too, strictly speaking, the term “noncombatant” also encompasses military personnel (e.g., chaplains and prisoners of war) whose exemption from violent harm derives mainly from military convention, not moral imperative.

The language of war is inherently politicized, and no portion more than the language used to refer to its victims. In this respect, a recent

mass killing of American men, women, and children is instructive. In the hours after an explosion shattered the Alfred P. Murrah federal office building in Oklahoma City in April 1994, no one knew the perpetrator's identity. It was quickly established that a massive car bomb had detonated at curbside, but who had planted it? Early speculation centered on Islamic resistance groups, which would have made the bombing an act of terrorism. In such a case, by American standards, the bombing would have been a criminal act with political overtones. By the standards of many in the Middle East, it would have been a military strike against an aggressive, imperialistic, and intolerable American regime. Eventually, it transpired that the perpetrator was a disturbed ex-soldier whose motive appeared to be revenge against a despised "big government."

In each case, the victims were helpless. They had scant ability to protect themselves; indeed, they died without even knowing what had killed them. But were they innocent, or civilians, or noncombatants? Middle America regarded them as innocent victims as a matter of course. Surely these fathers, wives, and toddlers were *murdered*. A terrorist organization, on the other hand, might well have regarded them as "civilians," a term that does not necessarily connote inviolability but does strongly imply recognition that their killing was an act of war, not criminal homicide. And within the tortured mind of Timothy McVeigh, most of the dead were not innocent, civilians, or noncombatants but rather agents of an enemy government.

In such moral terrain the truth gets slippery. Who shall make distinctions concerning who may legitimately be butchered and who may not? Perhaps such distinctions should not even be made. "Kill them all, let God sort them out," is not merely a callous T-shirt logo. All too often, it has been the way in which soldiers and governments have actually operated.²

This book is about occasions in which soldiers and governments have deliberately attacked the helpless. It is concerned less with the legitimacy of such attacks than the reasons they occurred, the objectives sought, and the measures taken or eschewed. The shelves of libraries groan beneath the weight of works that address the legal or ethical aspects of such attacks. But in such works the attacks themselves are usually treated in general terms or viewed so thoroughly through the lens of morality that their actual motives and conduct escape close

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examination. We hope that a sustained appraisal of several specific attacks will contribute to a better understanding of a phenomenon that is melancholy to contemplate but unlikely to disappear.

In popular imagination, perceptions about the history of attacks upon civilians—we will use the word for the sake of convenience, despite its pitfalls—fall into three patterns. Some employ a whiggish interpretation that depicts a gradual journey toward enlightenment. Defeated populations were once killed or enslaved as a matter of course, the argument runs; today such treatment is rare and widely condemned. Others, taking their cue from the killing fields of Babi Yar, Cambodia, and Bosnia, see instead a descent into darkness. War was once a contest between chivalrous, brightly uniformed soldiers; now the killing of civilians is routine. (And, in truth, it was common for twentieth-century warfare to kill more civilians than soldiers.) Still others see war as a constant: always savage, always merciless. They nod agreement with William T. Sherman's famous dictum, "War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it."³

But none of these broad-brush characterizations can survive much scrutiny. The whiggish interpretation holds well enough when one contemplates the 1991 Gulf War, with its much-ballyhooed barrage of U.S. smart munitions that scrupulously avoided civilian killing. It fares more poorly when one turns to American search-and-destroy missions in Vietnam, and of course collapses altogether when one considers the atomic immolations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The reverse of the whig interpretation is similarly flawed. The twentieth century has seen the most vicious atrocities that mass politics, ideological fervor, and perverted technologies can offer, but it has also seen the most impressive steps to codify restraints on war. The notion of war as uniform horror, for its part, is simply absurd. Some wars kill many civilians, others almost none. Often the killing of civilians is regretted and minimized where possible. At other times the killing of civilians is in fact the principal objective.

Are historians then condemned merely to comment on attacks upon civilians? Could it be that discerning and articulating patterns is impossible? We think not. When the essays in this volume were originally presented at the Ohio State University in November 1993, presenters and audience were repeatedly struck by intriguing parallels and

contrasts. The patterns were not simple, nor did they repeat themselves in each case study, but they were nevertheless evident.

The first pattern is that forbearance toward the helpless has always been instrumental rather than absolute. The crude version of noncombatant immunity in biblical times stemmed mainly from what might be called the “plunder principle.” Conquerors viewed the noncombatant component of the enemy as valuable booty. The war code of the ancient Hebrews required that an enemy city that refused to surrender be besieged. Once captured, the males were to be killed, but “the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof,” were to be taken and used.⁴ In the eighteenth century, a desire for maximal control over one’s army, coupled with an interest in extracting supplies from an enemy countryside as smoothly as possible, contributed to comparatively mild treatment of enemy noncombatants. Armies on the march found it easier to eat if the local population cooperated by bringing them food. Indiscriminate violence against the common people only jeopardized that cooperation: as Marshal Villars explained to the army he led into Germany in 1707, “[M]y friends . . . if you burn, if you make the people run away, you will starve.”⁵ The risk of retaliation too has often encouraged the fighters of one side to spare the enemy’s population so as to encourage equal restraint on the other side.

The second pattern emerges from the first. If the decision to spare civilians is generally instrumental, the decision to attack them is equally so. Such a recourse tends to occur when direct military action against the enemy regime seems unavailing. The conditions may vary. Sometimes the attacking army lacks the ability to achieve victory exclusively on the battlefield, as the Union army discovered during the American Civil War. Sometimes the enemy refuses to cooperate. In the early stages of the Peloponnesian War, for example, the Athenians took refuge behind their walls, relied on their naval superiority to carry the war to Sparta, and refused to face the stronger Spartan army in open combat. This strategy prompted the Spartans to turn their violence against the Attic countryside, devastating the land, burning houses, and chopping down olive trees in an attempt to force the Athenian phalanx into battle.

Sometimes in order to reach the enemy army on advantageous terms, an attacker cannot rely on its own supplies and must extract

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them from the countryside, with greater or less brutality depending on the discipline of its soldiers and the political costs it is willing to pay. This introduces a third pattern. As with other aspects of war, attacks on civilians can be usefully seen as negotiations, albeit of a rather nasty kind. “The power to hurt is bargaining power,” political scientist Thomas Schelling has observed. “To exploit it is diplomacy — vicious diplomacy, but diplomacy.”⁶ These implicit negotiations are not merely with the enemy regime but also with the enemy people, with “bystanders” who will be influenced by what is done or avoided, and often with one’s own soldiers.

The stance toward the enemy regime is obvious: see, we have hurt you, and we will hurt you more if you do not change your policies to accommodate us. In that respect, although the medium is different, the message is similar to what is communicated through action against the regime’s military forces.

Toward the civilians under attack the message is slightly more subtle but easy to discern: see, your regime cannot protect you, so accept our rule. This is the classic rationale for attacks on civilians in areas under revolt. It was also evident in the *chevauchées* of the Hundred Years’ War, when the English kings coerced the peasants of the contested French provinces to accept their claim to rule. A variant of this has become more prevalent since the rise of mass politics: see, your regime cannot protect you, so pressure your regime to accept our terms. General Sherman made this statement explicitly (though not altogether seriously) when he expelled the population of Atlanta. British planners employed it as a rationale for the area bombing of Germany during the World War II.⁷

Attacks on civilians are often conducted with an eye to their effect not only upon the enemy regime and people but also upon “bystander” regimes and peoples likely to be influenced by it. The most extreme cases of violence against noncombatants have often revolved around such considerations as strategic precedent, especially when applied to siege warfare. Until quite recently, it was permissible under the laws of war to put a besieged city to the sack if the garrison prolonged resistance until its defenses were stormed. The avowed objective was to encourage other besieged cities to abandon their defense before a final, expensive assault became necessary. Yet even here attackers have

chosen to modulate the violence against civilians, depending on how they wished to influence “bystander” communities.

Two examples from the Peloponnesian War will serve to illustrate. During that conflict, the Athenians threatened the complete destruction of Melos if its people dared to resist the army that besieged it. When the city resisted anyway and was at last overcome, every Melian adult male was executed. The women and children for their part were sold into slavery. The objective, however, was less to punish Melos than to instruct those who were watching. The policy of frightfulness (as the Greek historian Thucydides has the ambassadors explain to the Melians) would serve to terrify other *poleis* that might consider rebellion against the Athenian Empire. A more moderate policy can be equally calculated for effect. In the case of Mytilene, a genuine rebel against Athenian authority (rather than a would-be neutral like Melos), the Athenian assembly initially decreed a genocidal punishment but then reconsidered, electing to execute “only” some one thousand men who had led the rebellion. In this case, it was argued that a harsher treatment would only encourage other rebellious cities to resist to the last.

Attacks on civilians can indeed backfire in just such a fashion. Especially in modern times, they may exert a powerful effect on the climate of opinion within the community of nations (though not, alas, as powerful as one might wish). During the Gulf War, therefore, the United States scrupulously avoided killing civilians for fear it would jeopardize the fragile Arab coalition and probably undercut support for the war at home. Ruthless dictatorships deny or soft-pedal their own killings for much the same reasons. For regimes that do resort to attacks on civilians the consequences can be serious. The massacres committed by Ottoman troops in Bulgaria in 1876, eloquently documented by a London journalist who saw the grisly aftermath, caused the British government to reverse its contention that the Ottoman suppression of the Bulgarian uprising was justified, and indeed forced it to abandon temporarily its long-held commitment to the preservation of the Ottoman Empire.⁸ Similarly, American opinion toward imperial Germany grew more negative as a result of Germany’s callous adoption of unrestricted submarine warfare in 1915 and 1917, with fateful consequences.

Implicit negotiations may also occur between the attacking regime

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and its own soldiers. From medieval times through the early eighteenth century, European monarchs often could not pay or supply their troops on a sustained basis. To obtain their continued service, they were obliged to permit these troops to make up for shortfalls by pillaging the civilians around them—not just enemy civilians but also the monarch’s own subjects—through what historian John A. Lynn has termed a “tax of violence.”⁹ The greater risks entailed in the storming of a city rather than protracted siege operations resulted in a tacit bargain by which troops enjoyed the right, in such cases, to sack the city once captured. Even in instances where a given regime has no policy interest in harming civilians, its attitude toward soldiers who assault or steal from civilians sends a powerful signal concerning what behaviors will be permitted or punished. During the American Civil War, Union commanders often indulged acts of petty theft but reacted strongly to reports of rape or murder, with the result that such acts were rare. During the Vietnam War, by contrast, official injunctions to observe the laws of war and respect Vietnamese civilians were usually sandwiched between other routine information given to arriving soldiers by a bored lieutenant temporarily detailed for such duty. The unofficial message thus communicated eclipsed the official policy and, coupled with the American “search-and-destroy” tactic, helped set the stage for atrocities like My Lai.

Finally, attacks on civilians are strongly conditioned by cultural and ideological assumptions. The most obvious cultural assumption is that such attacks are morally dubious at best. Within the Western tradition, this belief is one of long standing, albeit replete with exceptions and qualifications. This is not the place for a history of noncombatant immunity, but a few general points should be made. First, the basic concept flows from the notion that noncombatant enemies, by definition, are enemies who make no resistance; therefore, it is pointless to kill them. Second, historically this proscription has applied mainly to the subjects of a sovereign state. Subjects of an area in rebellion have enjoyed no such immunity. Unless they actively distance themselves from the rebellion (and sometimes not even then), they are often killed and not infrequently killed in as fiercely gruesome a fashion as possible. Such treatment was and is justified by its deterrent effect. As Sir John Fastolf wrote in the fifteenth century, “traitors and rebels must needs [be subjected to] another manner of war, a sharper and

more cruel type of war” than that directed against a “natural” enemy; otherwise, rebellion would become endemic.¹⁰ In other words, hard treatment of rebels—like the harsh penalties directed at recalcitrant defenders of a fortified place captured by assault—is intended at least as much to deter as to punish.¹¹ The belief that more rigorous measures are permissible to suppress rebellion than to fight an external war has remained important down to this day.

The principal qualification to the rule against killing civilians occurs in the context of military necessity. In some instances, if military operations are to be conducted effectively some civilian deaths are unavoidable. Even a “surgical” air strike against a military installation may well result in bombs missing the target and striking women and children instead. If a massive, sustained aerial campaign against an enemy’s economic base or transportation net seems required, civilian casualties can easily climb into the thousands. How can military necessity be squared with the prohibition against killing noncombatants? Some would argue that, for all practical purposes, the effort is seldom made, that noncombatant immunity contracts as perceptions of military necessity expand. “It is patently obvious,” one critic declared during the renewed Cold War atmosphere of the early Reagan years, “that military necessity has been elevated to an end to itself. How else can one explain the ‘scenarios’ of defense analysts who describe the way in which millions will die if the superpowers resort to nuclear warfare, while they ignore the condition of the human race in the aftermath?”¹²

But this is a rather despairing view. It is more accurate to suggest that at least some of the world’s armed forces recognize and respect the tension between military necessity and noncombatant immunity. Their solution, imperfect but surely far better than nothing, is to achieve the military objective through the most discriminating, proportional use of force possible, even (ideally) at the acceptance of greater risks than required by a purely military calculation. Thus, a strategic bridge may be bombed in a fashion that requires greater danger to the attacking pilots in order to reduce the chance of injury to civilians on the ground. An enemy machine gun nest may be reduced by infantry assault rather than artillery bombardment because of the proximity of civilians.

The immediate reason such costs are accepted may vary. Often the political price of a more callous policy seems too high. Somewhat more rarely, it is judged too dishonorable, too damaging to morale, or

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too dangerous to the psychological well-being of servicemen to permit them to kill civilians when it is avoidable. But ultimately, the reason flows from a strong cultural perception that the killing of civilians is wrong, a perception embraced by the community of nations or by the people back home if not universally by the servicemen in combat.

The proscription against the killing of civilians is strongest, of course, when their full humanity is evident. It erodes rapidly when that humanity is denied. Usually, the denial occurs on religious, ideological, or racial grounds. Within the Christian tradition, the Crusades are the best-known example of a denial of full humanity made on religious grounds, but there are many others. The heretical Albigensian “Cathars,” for example, were ruthlessly exterminated despite the fact that they were pacifists.¹³ The sectarian strife between Catholics and Protestants during the Wars of Religion and the Thirty Years’ War sparked atrocities of legendary proportions. Ideology, the modern secular variant of religion, can produce similar results. Ideological fury guided revolutionary France in its brutal suppression of the Vendée; it spurred Nazi Germany not only to an aggressive war in western Europe but to a far more horrific, anti-Bolshevik crusade in the Soviet Union. And it underlay the shocking “autogenocide” of the Pol Pot regime against its own people. Racial prejudice, for its part, produces a mindset in which it becomes easy to see one’s adversaries as little better than animals.

In each of these cases, the implicit argument is not only that these “others” do not deserve mercy but also that they pose a threat so elemental that mercy is foolish. If heresy is permitted to survive, the argument runs, it will inevitably spread, ultimately overwhelming orthodoxy. The danger from an ideological foe is similar: his mind contains a bacillus; left alone, it can infect others. Forbearance to savages, for its part, will be interpreted as weakness and only spur further acts of barbarity—and in any event, savages are beyond redemption. Still worse, the survival of a racial enemy—except on terms the victor utterly controls—leaves open the possibility of racial pollution. It is no accident that the rhetoric of race hatred is strongly laced with fears of seduction and rape.

The instrumental nature of civilian immunity, the equally instrumental nature of resort to civilian attack, the reality of such attacks as a negotiation on multiple levels, and the role of belief systems in

inhibiting or encouraging such attacks: such are the basic patterns that shape the fate of civilians in the path of war. As is perhaps evident by now, these four patterns are interwoven, not discrete. How they have influenced and reacted upon one another at various times and places is the central subject of this book. Each essay takes a certain slice of history, from the Peloponnesian War to Operation Desert Storm; examines how prevalent the use of military force against civilians was at that time; and then proceeds to weigh the various elements that encouraged or limited violence directed against noncombatants and their property.

Paul A. Rahe opens the discussion with a penetrating analysis of attacks on noncombatants during the Peloponnesian War (431 to 404 B.C.) and the way in which the great historian of that conflict, Thucydides, depicted the moral calculus involved. Debunking the superficial view that Thucydides was a “realist” contemptuous of ethics in war, Rahe demonstrates the richness and complexity of his extended treatments of the arguments deployed by the belligerents to justify harshness or forbearance toward the peoples under their power. The desire to gain support by magnanimity as well as deter by ruthlessness is evident in the debates on Mytilene, Melos, and many others. Considerations of justice, necessity, and honor were debated and weighed. Thucydides represents such concerns as authentic: human beings are indeed capable of governing themselves in rational and enlightened ways. But, as Rahe observes, Thucydides also finds that such conduct is rare, especially under the stress of war. Justice and calculated statecraft all too often collapse in the face of haste, unreason, and shortsightedness.

Underscoring this point is Clifford J. Rogers’s appraisal of the English *chevauchées* during the Hundred Years’ War (1337–1453). That conflict, so extended and so ruthlessly fought on both sides, affords countless examples of the employment of violence against civilians as an instrument of political intercourse. The *chevauchées*—army-sized mounted raids inaugurated by King Edward III—were intended as messages to both the French monarch and the peasantry. To the king, the message was in essence an ultimatum: give the English what they want or suffer the consequences. To the French peasantry, it was a demonstration of their king’s inability to perform the first duty of a monarch, the protection of his subjects, and was thus a goad for

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them to repudiate his authority. These messages were conveyed at the strategic level, where military actions and political goals were directly related, but similar negotiations took place at much lower levels as well, in the context of individual sieges, campaigns, or garrisoning operations. As at Melos in the Peloponnesian War, in the Hundred Years' War the threat of total destruction was often employed to persuade a besieged town or fortress to surrender quickly. Similarly, garrisons, *routiers*, and armies on campaign alike used it to compel the local population to purchase safety with contributions of cash or supplies.

Most of the case studies in this book concentrate on war against noncombatants as, at one level or another, a particularly harsh form of politics, where the goal of the action is persuasion or coercion. John A. Lynn's essay on the devastation of the Palatinate (1688–1689) reminds us that such destruction has material as well as psychological objectives, and sometimes the former are more desired than the latter. By systematically razing the cities and towns of the Palatine region (present-day western Germany), Louis XIV and his advisers hoped not to instill terror but to impede invasion by creating an artificial desert along the eastern frontier of France. In the short term, the tactic may have worked. In the long run, however, its psychological impact outweighed the purely military advantage gained. Rather than forestalling war, the ruined cities of the Palatinate confirmed European fears of the Sun King's hegemonic designs and pushed his rivals into fighting, and fighting hard, to contain him.

The Palatinate and neighboring German territory witnessed additional depredations in the 1790s. Despite a sincere wish to liberate Europe from the weight of absolute monarchy, the armies of revolutionary France probably did more harm to the people of Germany than the troops of Louis XIV had done in the preceding century. Certainly, they were responsible for more pillage and abuse—though fortunately not outright murder—than even the ferocious *chevaucheurs* of Edward III. Yet, as T. C. W. Blanning explains in “Liberation or Occupation?”, this magnified level of depredation was not due to any principle of revolutionary strategy. On the contrary, the new French regime began its campaigns intent on waging war in a new style explicitly aimed at sparing the enemy population, whom it regarded as prospective allies in the crusade for *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. This luminous hope collapsed for one simple reason: like the armies of the Hundred

Years' War, the soldiers of the Revolution relied heavily on local provisioning for their food supplies. Further, the French armies of the 1790s were huge—far larger than even the Sun King's impressive hosts. Though commanders often tried to keep coercion to a minimum, the imbalance between the supplies required by famished soldiers and the available surplus meant that the requisitioners demanded more than civilians would willingly sell. Instead, they resisted and that in turn brought retribution.

Material circumstances thus imposed a dissonance between revolutionary ideals and actions. Since the army's material needs could not be met without coercion, enlightened ideology gave way to expedience. The "Edict of Fraternity," which contemplated cordial relations between the armies and the civilians in their midst, was revoked. The erstwhile "brothers in liberty" were denigrated, even dehumanized, until they seemed wretches who deserved their miserable fate. But the material gains of this harsh policy came at a high cost to French aspirations of carrying revolutionary fervor into other lands. As in the Palatinate, the heavy hand on the civilian population created unwelcome consequences.

At the outset of the American Civil War, the Union army held the same friendly intentions toward the Southern white population as had the French revolutionary armies toward the common people of western Europe. Believing that most Southern whites had been hoodwinked into secession by a slaveholding political elite, many Northern public officials thought that a program of forbearance would reassure the wayward Southerners and detach them from the Confederate government. This "conciliatory policy" remained the dominant Union stance for the first fifteen months of the conflict. Even during its heyday, however, it came under significant pressure because of the inability of some Federal commanders to feed their troops via regular supply lines. Moreover, foraging operations—both authorized and freelance—partly eclipsed the message of conciliation, as did Union military interference (much of it unintended) with the institution of slavery. Eventually, the logistical imperative to secure supplies from the countryside, and the corollary need to deny those supplies to the enemy, led to a "hard war" policy in which Union forces systematically attacked the Confederate war economy, including railroads, factories, crops, and livestock. These attacks, argues Mark Grimsley, inau-

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gured a new *chevauchée*. However, unlike the English version during the Hundred Years' War, this one did not degenerate into unrestrained murder, rape, and devastation. Rather, the Union hard war was characterized by a striking mixture of severity and restraint, discriminating and roughly proportionate in both intent and practice.

In this respect, Grimsley continues, U.S. military policy toward Southern whites bore little resemblance to white America's final wars with Native America. Although many Civil War commanders commanded forces on the western plains, they did not simply transfer tactics learned in 1861–1865 to those Indians who refused to accept life on the reservations. The measures used against Native Americans were far more sweeping, indiscriminate, and brutal—a war of cultural if not literal annihilation born of racism and expedience. White Americans largely embraced the common Anglo-Saxon notion of the era that they were the highest expression of civilization and therefore had a claim to hegemony over the other peoples of the world.

Appalling as it was, however, the United States's subjugation of the American Indian was not without moments of decency, pathos, and regret. Not so the less sentimental strain of “social Darwinism” that emerged in Germany. Warriors from the classical Greeks onward had recognized claims of morality, however imperfectly observed. As Holger Herwig argues, from 1871 onward the Germans increasingly did not.

The twentieth century has witnessed the most horrific attacks on civilians, attacks made possible by new technologies of mass destruction, by exterminationist ideologies, and—as Herwig demonstrates in his essay—by a sheer willingness to divorce military operations from any political or ethical context. Simply put, the German military from the late nineteenth century onward exalted a “blinkered professionalism” that consistently overlooked the political illogic and strategic impracticality of what it was asked to do. They plunged into both World Wars I and II with a fanatical belief in the ability of operational art to overcome all difficulties. As the seriousness of their strategic predicament became more evident, they readily took up any cudgel—the use of poison gas, unrestricted submarine warfare, or terror bombing—that seemed in the short run militarily efficacious, however questionable from a moral perspective. They dealt with moral questions by simply ignoring them.

Worse, the German officer corps eagerly embraced the aggressive, expansionist policies of their political masters in *both* world wars. This was not an officer corps honorably defending the German state and waging a “clean war,” whatever the darker aspirations of a Kaiser Wilhelm II or a Hitler. It was an officer corps all too ready to accept an ideological program of conquest and extermination, all too ready to embrace a *Weltanschauung* based on the inevitability of struggle and the false dichotomy of world power or decline. World War I both deepened existing ideological trends and added new dimensions. Beginning with the cavalier sacrifice of Belgian neutrality on the altar of military expedience, it ended with German plans to annex or control European Russia. World War II continued and extended this pattern. The German military not only made no protest against Hitler’s war of aggression, it actively supported its racial war against the “Jewish-Bolshevik bacilli” in the Soviet Union and played a substantial role in the execution or enslavement of Jews, Soviet civilians, and prisoners of war. “Barbarossa,” Herwig writes, “perhaps the greatest *chevauchée* in history, ended in senseless and meaningless destruction as ends in themselves.”

It is all too easy for the sheer scale of violence against civilians on the Eastern Front—an estimated ten million Soviet civilians perished during the war—to overwhelm its nuances and complexities.¹⁴ Truman O. Anderson rectifies this tendency with a close analysis of the destruction of the Ukrainian village of Yeline in the winter of 1942, as German and Hungarian forces fought to eradicate partisan activity in its vicinity. Anderson makes two main observations. First, although three hundred civilians likely perished during the Yeline operation, the German program was actually somewhat less severe than in other areas like Belarus, probably because Nazi ideology deemed Ukrainians a slightly more advanced form of *Untermenschen* than their Russian counterparts. Second, he reminds us how easily civilians in the path of war may be caught between two fires: the villagers of Yeline paid the price for partisan resistance whether they supported it or not.

If the Third Reich was responsible for “the greatest *chevauchée* in history,” it is fair to add that World War II witnessed an aerial *chevauchée* as well. Proponents of airpower actually championed destruction of population centers as a virtue, arguing that it would break an enemy society’s will to fight more quickly and, in the long run,

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less bloodily than a protracted ground struggle like that on the Western Front during World War I. Moreover, unlike previous epochs, in which killing on a massive scale required more effort rather than less, it was actually easier to employ strategic bombers indiscriminately than to attempt precision methods. Britain's Royal Air Force yielded to this view in early 1941, after a review of its bombing effectiveness revealed that most of the tonnage dropped on Germany to date had not landed within five miles of its intended target. But Americans resisted this conclusion, doggedly adhering to a doctrine of daylight precision bombing as not only the most effective but also, in the words of air commander James Doolittle, "the most ethical way to go." Like the Union armies during the Civil War, the U.S. Army Air Forces sought to channel their destructive energies against the enemy's war resources and to avoid indiscriminate strikes against his civilian population.

Such a policy, as Conrad C. Crane ably points out, not only required a pinpoint accuracy difficult to achieve, but also existed in tension with a harsher program that championed the efficacy of a sweeping aerial assault that would shatter military and civilian morale. Although a number of American air planners resisted the concept—a staff officer dismissed one such proposal as "the same old baby-killing plan dressed up in a new kimono"—in the closing months of World War II the United States flirted ever more seriously with it and finally, for all practical purposes, embraced it. Although after the war the U.S. Air Force preferred to recall its precision-bombing campaign over Europe, the fire bombing of Tokyo and the atomic immolation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (as well as complicity in the Dresden raid) left a much more disturbing legacy.

Even so, precision bombing remained an American ideal during the post-1945 era. The so-called surgical air strike became a cherished means to punish an enemy regime without harming the innocent. This goal became even more important in the politically charged atmosphere of the Cold War, when concerns loomed large not only about the disapproval of other countries but also of one's own people. At its worst, this bomber-as-scalpel brand of warfare could generate such absurdities as the rules of engagement during the Vietnam War. Yet even with the most exacting restrictions on airmen, for an air force equipped with "iron bombs" this degree of accuracy was tough to achieve. The advent of precision-guided munitions in 1972 offered

the prospect of finally realizing this long-beloved dream, and the 1991 Gulf War—Operation Desert Storm—delivered the chance to make it reality.

In some respects, argues Williamson Murray, the American air campaign against Iraq exhibited a sophistication in operational planning unmatched in previous conflicts. Armed with a new generation of stealth fighter-bombers, “smart” bombs, and cruise missiles that could see terrain as accurately as the human eye, the U.S. Air Force (and its coalition counterparts) destroyed Iraq’s air defense capability practically overnight and inflicted severe damage to key command and communications targets, including the Iraqi electric power grid. The objective of the campaign was almost identical to that of the *chevauchée*—a demonstration of the Ba‘thist regime’s inability to protect its population that would, in turn, promote a coup d’état removing Saddam Hussein from power (assuming the air strikes did not, by happy “chance,” kill the Iraqi dictator outright). At the same time, however, American planners perceived a powerful need to avoid significant civilian casualties that might explode the fragile coalition and dissolve domestic political support for Desert Storm. Precision-guided munitions offered the hope of squaring the circle, but, as events would demonstrate, aerial bombardment was still more butcher knife than scalpel.

That reality struck home on 13 February 1991, when an estimated 314 civilians perished after two laser-guided “smart bombs” found the Al Firdos bunker in downtown Baghdad.¹⁵ Here was just the sort of public relations disaster that planners feared, and the coalition promptly suspended further attacks on command and communications facilities in the Iraqi capital. Ironically, Murray notes, those who died in the bunker were not ordinary Iraqi citizens, who had little or no access to air raid shelters, but rather family members of high-ranking Ba‘thist officials. If a coup against Saddam Hussein were to materialize anywhere, it would have to come from this quarter. Yet coalition air commanders shied from further strikes against this elite segment of the population, even as B-52s rained devastation on thousands of hapless conscripts in the Kuwaiti desert.

The nine essays that follow are far from providing a continuous narrative history of attacks on noncombatants as an instrument of policy, for that is not the purpose of this book. We hope instead that the in-depth case studies presented here will allow the reader to develop a

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sounder comprehension of the issue's complexities than would be possible from a survey approach. If this volume demonstrates anything it is that resort to such attacks proceeds from different motives, has varying purposes, and is encouraged or inhibited by a number of factors. Ethical concerns are seldom controlling, but they are rarely absent altogether. And the fact that the claims of morality have persisted, even in the melancholy episodes explored herein, is one of the few hopes available to civilians in the path of war.

Notes

1. Quoted in Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (New York, 1970), 90.
2. The roots of this phrase go back to a famous statement by the papal legate Arnold Amalric in 1209. Just before the besieged city of Beziers was to be stormed and sacked, Almaric was asked how soldiers might distinguish between the heretics who had prompted the attack and the orthodox believers who might be within the walls. "Kill them all! God will know his own!" Amalric is said to have responded. See Richard Shelly Hartigan, *The Forgotten Victim: A History of the Civilian* (Chicago, 1982), 112.
3. William T. Sherman, *Memoirs*, 2 vols. (reprint ed.; Westport CT, 1972 [1875]), 2:126.
4. Deuteronomy, 20:13–14. However, even the limited mercy described in this passage was not allowed to the Hittites, Amorites, and other peoples living in the lands the Hebrews were to inhabit themselves.
5. Claude Villars, *Mémoires du Maréchal de Villars*, ed. Charles de Vogüé; 6 vols. (Paris, 1887), 2:229–30. Cf. Christopher Duffy, *The Military Experience in the Age of Reason* (New York, 1988), 13.
6. Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, 1966), 2.
7. Sherman, *Memoirs*, 2:126; Barrie Paskins and Michael Dockrill, *The Ethics of War* (London, 1979), 35–36.
8. Misha Glenny, "Why the Balkans Are So Violent," *New York Review of Books* (19 September 1996), 34–36.
9. "How War Fed War: The Tax of Violence and Contributions during the Grand Siècle," *Journal of Modern History* 65, no. 2 (June 1993): 286–310.
10. John Fastolf, in *Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Wars of the English in France: During the Reign of Henry the Sixth*, ed. Joseph Stevenson, 2 vols. in 3 (London, 1861–64), 2:580: "traitours and rebellis must nedis have anothere manere of werre, and more sharpe and more cruelle werre than a naturelle and anioen ennemye; or els be liklines in proces of tyme no manere of man,

ner tounes, ner countries shalle rekenene shame to be traitours nere to rebelle causeles ayens theire souveryen lorde and ligeaunce at alle tymes aftere theire owne wilfulle [disob]ediens.”

11. Cf. the Earl of Salisbury’s letter excerpted in Rogers’s article, this volume.

12. Hartigan, *The Forgotten Victim*, 9.

13. This was often the result of a siege pressed to the assault stage, where for reasons of strategic precedent one might expect this result regardless of heresy. However, the need to deter long defense of fortified places does not explain the burning of four hundred Cathars after the fall of Lavaur or the massacre of all the townspeople at Marmande *after the towns had surrendered*. J. R. Strayer, *The Albigensian Crusade* (New York, 1971), 79–80, 118.

14. The estimate of Soviet civilian loss is drawn from J. M. Winter, “Demography of the War,” in *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, ed. I. C. B. Dear and M. R. D. Foot (Oxford, 1995), 290.

15. Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990–1991* (Princeton NJ, 1993), 326.