



On the Partiality of Total War

Author(s): Paul K. Saint-Amour

Source: *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Winter 2014), pp. 420-449

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/674121>

Accessed: 07/01/2014 14:50

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The University of Chicago Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Critical Inquiry*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

On the Partiality of Total War

Paul K. Saint-Amour

Total war, by the standard definition, is a conflict from which nothing and no one is exempt: “a war to which all resources and the whole population are committed.”¹ In the eyes of the total war economy, everything and everyone appears as a productive factor. And because total war pits the belligerent energies of whole populations against one another, any member of an adversary’s population counts as a legitimate target. A discussion of total war that accepted the standard definition would need no other figure than that of the demographic mass committed to an all-out conflict—committed both as a subject embracing a cause and as an object pledged as a resource. This essay, in contrast, disturbs the standard definition by insisting on the spatial, temporal, and ideological *partialities* of total war as a historically emergent concept. Not, I should emphasize, as a historically emergent *phenomenon*: war that exempts no one from its domain seems to have been the norm rather than the anomaly in human

I would like to thank the following friends and interlocutors for their responses to this essay: Sarah Cole, David Eng, Nico Israel, Patrick Jagoda, Suvir Kaul, Pericles Lewis, Ania Loomba, W. J. T. Mitchell, Josephine Park, Kevin Platt, Padma Rangarajan, Emily Steiner, Emily Wilson, and the members of the Race and Empire group at the University of Pennsylvania. I am particularly grateful to Jed Esty and Eric Hayot for their long-term engagement with the book project from which this essay is drawn.

1. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “total war.” This standard definition of *total war* holds even in places where one might look for it to warp or splinter. While insisting on total war’s connection with capitalist investment, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari nonetheless keep to what I am calling a coherentist view of population and economy within the steady frame of the nation-state: “Total war is not only a war of annihilation but arises when annihilation takes as its ‘center’ not only the enemy army, or the enemy State, but the entire population and its economy” (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi, vol. 2 of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Hurley et al. [Minneapolis, 1987], p. 421).

Critical Inquiry 40 (Winter 2014)

© 2014 by The University of Chicago. 0093-1896/14/4002-0006\$10.00. All rights reserved.

history. But following the *concept* of total war back to its elaboration in the early twentieth century prompts a series of more focused questions. In contrast to what—and whose—concept of limited conflict is the new expression *total war* intelligible in this period as a nonredundancy? What are the local efficacies, and who are the beneficiaries, of total war's totality claims? Finally, what subjects, collectivities, and forms of military violence fall outside the bounds of limited war, total war, and the logic of their opposition? To pursue these questions, I argue, is to learn how the standard definition's aggressive coherency masks some of total war's other functions as a concept: its occlusions, its refigurings of space and time, its discriminations in apportioning permissible violence.

Relying as it does on the protagonism of "whole populations," the coherentist view of total war admits of no case studies, no exceptions, no better or worse exemplars. The counterportrait I offer here opens by setting aside this protagonism of the whole and trailing a particular figure into the fractured problem-space of the concept. That figure is L. E. O. Charlton (1879–1958), Royal Air Force officer, conscientious objector, and air-war prophet. The first section of the essay follows Charlton through a series of sites and practices too seldom linked in the historiography of total war: the European and US capital cities where interwar congresses tried unsuccessfully to create binding international laws of war; the violently policed colonial mandate in "peacetime," which gave the lie to the very categories on which international laws of war were to be based; and a wide array of places where world war was both remembered and anticipated. Trafficking among these sites, Charlton is exemplary in at least two senses: he *stands out* from his contemporaries in having objected strenuously to the bombing of colonial civilians outside the context of declared war; and he *typifies* the view of interwar military elites who declared that wars from now on would require the indiscriminate killing of civilians. Neither his exceptionality nor the rule it proved should be mistaken for a mere function of the other. Rather, the copresence of the two underscores how interwar military theory ontologized differences of time (wartime versus peacetime) and space (metropole versus colony) in licensing state violence and, more surprisingly, how adamantly the concept of total war disavowed those differences. Charlton's double exemplarity opens onto a broader

PAUL K. SAINT-AMOUR is associate professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania. He is the author of *The Copywrights: Intellectual Property and the Literary Imagination* (2003) and the editor of *Modernism and Copyright* (2011). He is currently completing a book, *Archive, Bomb, Civilian: Modernism in the Shadow of Total War*, from which the present essay is drawn.

discussion of total war as a concept less concerned with describing a new form or degree of violence than accomplishing the space-clearing work required as a pretext for intensified violence.

The Case of L. E. O. Charlton

When Lionel Charlton left London for the Persian Gulf in late 1922, his bags were laden with books. He would save Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, along with volumes of poetry and philosophy, for the months ahead in Baghdad. But on the P. & O. liner to Karachi, and then on a smaller ship to Basra, he passed many hours reading, as he later put it, "official handbooks on the country of his future sojourn—James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and *The Decay of Capitalist Civilization*, by Sidney and Beatrice Webb."² The flight from Basra to Baghdad enchanted him; he could see the Tigris and Euphrates in a single panoramic view, and the ruins of ancient cities reminded him of a child's sand drawings by the sea. The shipboard leisure, the engrossing desert overview, the warm greeting he received from his superior officer, John Salmond—all these seemed to augur well for his assignment as a Royal Air Force (RAF) senior air staff officer in the new British mandate of Iraq. His career was flourishing. Having served with distinction as an Army officer in the Boer War and flown for the Royal Flying Corps during World War I, he had spent three years in Washington, DC, with the British Embassy. Although he had watched with dismay as the 1921–22 Disarmament Conference foundered, he had succeeded at his work as air attaché. By exempting himself from social rounds, he had left himself plenty of time to read American poetry and history, William James, and Sigmund Freud; his readings in political theory had also contributed to his becoming a socialist, although he concealed his politics while he was in the RAF. And he had settled down with a lover, a young man with the Swiss Legation who had accompanied him back to London as his secretary and personal assistant and was now enrolled at the Polytechnic Institute while Charlton was in the Gulf.

The RAF had taken on sole military responsibility for the mandate in October 1922, having persuaded the cabinet that air control would be cheaper, more effective, more humane, and less controversial than ground occupation. Charlton's experience with two armed services in European and colonial conflicts seemed to suit him ideally to the project of colonial

2. L. E. O. Charlton, *Charlton* (London, 1931), p. 269; hereafter abbreviated C.

air policing in Iraq. But early on in his posting, while touring a hospital in the central Iraqi town of Diwaniya as part of a visit to a local chieftain, he experienced “something of a shock”; among the patients were victims of a recent punitive bombardment by the RAF. He recorded his reaction in his 1931 memoir *Charlton*, which he wrote, after the example of *The Education of Henry Adams*, in the third person:

It seemed to him a most cold-blooded proceeding and a grave reflection on the ends of justice, that at one moment people were so harmful as to deserve sudden and terrifying death, and the next so harmless that no expense was spared in patching up their injuries. He was aghast to learn on further inquiry that an air bomb in Iraq was, more or less, the equivalent of a police truncheon at home. It was a horrible idea and, in his private opinion, work in which no one with a moral standard should be asked to engage. In declared war or in the case of open rebellion no objection could possibly be advanced, but the indiscriminate bombing of a populace without power of selecting the real culprits, and with the liability of killing women and children, was the nearest thing to wanton slaughter which he had come across since the massacre at Dijon in 1914. But he was careful not to express himself too forcefully on the subject. [C, p. 271]

Eventually Charlton (fig. 1) did express himself to Salmond, saying, in reference to a planned air strike against an uncooperative sheik, that “direct action by aeroplanes on indirect information by unreliable informants . . . was a species of oppression which tended to render infamous the British name for fair dealing throughout the world.” But Salmond was unyielding, and after the raids killed a large number of civilians, Charlton asked to be relieved of his duties: “on grounds of conscience, he felt he could no longer subscribe to the bombing policy constantly so in force” (C, pp. 277–78). Under the pretence of official business, he was sent back to London, where Chief of the Air Staff Hugh “Boom” Trenchard informed him that there would be no inquiry into his request to leave Iraq and that, while he would never be reassigned to an overseas mandate, his future with the Air Force would be otherwise unimpaired. After a furlough at half-pay, Charlton spent several years preparing an Air Ministry report on how to expand the RAF to wartime strength; in 1928 a letter from the Air Ministry informed him he would no longer be promoted or reappointed.

Other RAF officers expressed misgivings to their superiors about the ethics of the bombing policy in Iraq, but Charlton was the only one of his generation to resign in protest, the only one to publish his criticism, which



FIGURE 1.

he did in an interwar memoir.³ His name has become synonymous with conscientious objection within military elites; observers during the second Gulf War were still debating which dissenting figure within the coalition

3. See David E. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force 1919–1939* (Manchester, 1990), p. 176; hereafter abbreviated *APCC*. This article is generally indebted to Omissi's archival research. I first learned of Charlton from Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, trans. Linda Haverty Rugg (New York, 2001), pp. 47–48. An invaluable resource for anyone interested in the relationships among aerial bombing, total war, and racism, Sven Lindqvist's book is also formally unusual; a series of 399 numbered sections arranged

forces could be considered that conflict's "21st-century Charlton."⁴ Yet for all that his reflections about Diwaniya express his outrage at the use of the bomb as a truncheon, they are also remarkable in what they accept: that "in declared war or in the case of open rebellion no objection could possibly be advanced" to the bombing of civilians. What seems to repel him morally is not the practice of bombing "with the liability of killing women and children" but the fact that the RAF employs it outside the legitimate context of declared war or open rebellion—that his fellow airmen have been terror-bombing the innocent during peacetime in order to discipline a resistant minority. Because Charlton is elliptical here—because he does not say exactly what is unobjectionable during declared war or open rebellion—we might read him as accepting the bombing of military but not civilian targets. Nonetheless, in several air-power books he wrote after completing *Charlton*, the projected mass death of civilians by bombardment is axiomatic. These works of the thirties describe the next war between the great powers as an "eliminating race" in which "the mechanical employment of using enemy cities as bomb dumps" will be central. In a 1938 volume, we find Charlton agreeing with former Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin that "the only possible rejoinder if enemy aircraft [kill] our women and children, [is] for us to kill theirs, preferably in greater quantity." But he adds, with chilling instrumentalism, that "it must be the right sort of women and children whom we kill"—that "small-town folk are no good at all, because they are not of much account in any case, and the vocal efforts of the insignificant can be disregarded," as against the greater tactical advantage of killing "more important sections of the community." Even his proposals for an international peace-keeping air force recommended endowing that agency with the deterrent power to deliver a devastating first strike against the cities of uncooperative powers. In peace-

chronologically, it offers readers twenty-two discrete, crisscrossing topical itineraries through those sections, some of these defying chronology. Total war's spatialization of time, explicit in the present article, I take to be implicit in the form of Lindqvist's study.

4. Bret Holman, "Twenty-First-Century Charlton?" 2 Dec. 2005, *Airminded: Air Power and British Society, 1908–1941 (Mostly)*, airminded.org/2005/12/02/21st-century-charlton/. In 2006, Mike Marqusee deplored the fact that a statue of Arthur Harris, who masterminded Britain's area bombing of German cities, still stood on London's Fleet Street but that there was no memorial in Britain to Charlton's conscientious objection; see Mike Marqusee, "Imperial Whitewash," *Guardian*, 31 July 2006, www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2006/jul/31/whitewashingtheempire. See also Richard Neville, "Merciless Savagery from the Sky: The Future of Bombing," www.richardneville.com.au/Satire/Satire200307.html

time, the threat of bombing would serve as a truncheon in the policing of nations.⁵

Charlton's air-power books bear remarkably little trace of the conscientious objection that ended his RAF career. It is as if, having left the Iraqi mandate behind, he had become an advocate and prophet of the very practices over which he had resigned his post there. A biographer might describe Charlton's air-power writings as attempts to recoup the military credibility his conscience had cost him or as evidence of his powers of emotional and ethical compartmentalization. But there is a third possibility: Charlton's conscientious objection and his air-power advocacy in fact twine around one another, and tracing their entanglement might help us to see the broader lattices of thought on which they both depend. His crucial caveat again: whereas the bombing of civilians was morally objectionable in peacetime police actions, "in declared war or in the case of open rebellion no objection could possibly be advanced." This formulation contains several articles of faith: colonial policing is emphatically not a state of war; a state of war can only be entered through a nation's declaration or through a subject people's "open rebellion" against imperial rule; and wartime and peacetime are absolutely distinct when it comes to civilian lives, which are to be gently policed in peace but forfeit in war. Without a doubt, Charlton's insistence on a gentler policing than bombardment set him apart from many of his RAF contemporaries. But with this exception, his conscientious objection left intact, and even relied on, a matrix of distinctions that was typical not only of RAF doctrine but also of military theory, imperial policy, and international law during the interwar years. This conceptual grid reserved the status of war for declared conflicts between nation-states, consigning state violence against colonial, mandate, and protectorate populations to the status of unlegislated, supposedly low-intensity conflict. By denying these same populations the right to declare war on the imperial nation-states that controlled them, it also denied them access to the protections accorded to states by international rules of warfare. The legal meaning of state violence in the colony was thus dissevered from the legal meaning of state-on-state violence in the metropole.

The remainder of this essay traces the political, institutional, and cultural formations by which a conscientious objector to violent colonial policing could also, and without especial psychosis, be a prophet of unbridled air war and an advocate of preemptively muscular air power. Although I will make forays into other interwar locales and national cultures,

5. Charlton, "The New Factor in Warfare," in Charlton, G. T. Garratt, and R. Fletcher, *The Air Defence of Great Britain* (Harmondsworth, 1938), p. 76.

my focus will be Britain and its empire during the 1920s and early 1930s. The period's metropolitan forecasts of the next war and its energetic prosecution of so-called small wars in the periphery have both been underexamined, as has the intimate connection between the two—between the future bombing of the metropolis and the present bombing of the hutment, kraal, and hinterland. My terminus will be the moment when the interdependence of these bombings became a more public matter: the Geneva Disarmament Conference of 1932–33, where the British delegation proposed abolishing all military air forces except those needed “for police purposes in certain outlying regions.”⁶ This was a move designed to preserve London, Europe's most vulnerable capital, from air raids in the future while maintaining the economies of peripheral bombing now. It said, let us wage provident air war abroad in the present while being safeguarded at home from the bombs of a future adversary; in bombing, let us not be bombed. Note how space and time lace up here, with the colony knotted into an active violence of the continuous present, the metropolis into a future or future-conditional violence, an absent or latent or imminent one. Because questions of extent are central to both imperialism and the concept of total war, I will consider how space is imagined in interwar military debates and practices; how air-power advocacy was based on a putative shift from wars of fronts to wars of areas; how the lexicons and theories of total war imagined empire in terms of concentric circles of permissible violence; and how law and imperial policy helped legitimize these concentricisms. But in addressing the relationships among total war, air power, and anticipation, and in linking total war with colonial policing, I will also be surveying temporalities in their capacity to give meaning to space. Some of these temporalities would partition space. Home is the space of the total war *to come*; abroad, the space of *ongoing* small wars. Others brought news of unlooked-for proximities; the colony now, insofar as it is the testing ground for techniques of state terror, is the future of the metropolis.

Charlton, the mandarin who recoiled at what he saw in the colonial proving ground, might have brought such news, but the ideological *cordons sanitaires* between police action and declared war, between the options of present imperial defense and the necessities of total war in the future, held firm in nearly all of his work. Surprisingly, though, where his dissent accepted and even reinforced these firewalls, the most zealous ad-

6. J. Ramsey MacDonald, “Draft Disarmament Convention Submitted to Conference,” 16 Mar. 1933, CAB 24/239, National Archives, discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/SearchUI/Details?uri=D7729591

vocates of air power walked through them in the course of their careers. Several key figures in colonial air policing during the interwar period went on to leadership positions in Bomber Command during World War II, presiding over the devastating area bombing of German cities. Data flows within the RAF, too, trace continuities that Charlton refused or failed to recognize. During the 1920s, statistical evaluations of the psychological effects of Great War city bombing were adduced in favor of “morale-bombing” in the Middle East, and the putative success of colonial air control was, in its turn, invoked in support of the “morale-effects” of a bomber offensive against Germany. Thus if we want to understand the partiality of total war doctrine, we need to attend not only to dissenting voices but also to the language of air-power advocacy and to the disjunction between that language and the interwar forces deployed in its name. Although Charlton now cedes the foreground to other figures and spectacles, we will continue to visit his ports of call: the experience and legacy of the Great War, the prophetic interwar doctrines of total war and air power, the evolving practices of colonial policing, and debates about international rules of warfare. Surveying these developments will allow us, too, to apprehend the 1920s as a postwar civil edifice marbled with two kinds of darker material: the prospect of a disastrous unrestrained war to come and the present-tense practice, in colonial spaces, of cognate “forms of frightfulness.”⁷

Of course this is only a partial account of European policies and attitudes with respect to conflict during the first interwar decade. The twenties also saw postwar military budget cuts and disarmament, developments in pacifist thought and action, and a series of international treaties whose signatories guaranteed existing borders, committed to arbitration, and appeared to relinquish war as a policy instrument. However, rather than attempt a panoramic portrait of Europe in the 1920s, I take a sustained look here at total war’s conceptual emergence and at its legal and political elaborations. By ascribing partiality to the concept of total war, I mean to call attention both to the constraints it imposed on what counts as war and to the ideological biases that informed and were enforced by those constraints—biases that denied colonial civilians even the fragile legal protections available to their European counterparts in declared war. Total war discourse, I suggest, was partial toward Eurocentric imperialist distinctions between center and periphery, peacetime and wartime. By cementing the latter distinction, it covered for the fact that forms of violence

7. Quoted in Charles Townshend, “Civilization and ‘Frightfulness’: Air Control in the Middle East between the Wars,” in *Warfare, Diplomacy, and Politics: Essays in Honour of A. J. P. Taylor*, ed. Chris Wrigley (London, 1986), p. 150; hereafter abbreviated “CF.”

forbidden in the metropole during peacetime were practiced in the colony, mandate, and protectorate, that the distinction between peace and war was a luxury of the center. At the same time, by predicting that civilians in the metropole would have no immunity in future wars, it contributed to the erosion of the very imperial geography (center versus periphery) that it seemed to shore up. My concern, then, is to describe an imperial military discourse that misrecognizes and misrepresents its view of totality as exhaustive even as it contains intimations of that view's partiality.⁸

Intimations of Totality

Total war has become a widespread, even an indispensable concept for military historians, students of war and culture, and theorists of peace, conflict, and sovereignty. Yet notwithstanding what I have called its standard definition, the expression has come to have a bewildering array of meanings. For some scholars, total war denotes a conflict in which the distinction between civilians and combatants is dissolved—the kind of conflict that negates civilian immunity through destructive technologies such as aerial bombing, poison gas, submarines, blockades, and nuclear and biological weapons. For others, total war means the industrial and ideological mobilization of entire populations by wartime governments; here the emphasis is not on how war is waged militarily but on the massive productive forces required to wage it and on their management through state bureaucracies, propaganda, and censorship. Other writers focus on total war's extreme goal—not just the defeat of an adversary but the unconditional surrender, collapse, or even extermination of an enemy civilization—and on the discourse of intolerable fundamental difference (for example, liberalism versus militarism, fascism versus communism) that underpins such extreme goals. And still others understand total war as entailing particular kinds and degrees of subordination—of the individual to the state or of civilian officials to a military dictatorship.

Some of these distinct definitions can be seen to interlock in powerful ways. Rule by military dictatorships may abet the mobilization of populations, for example, and qualms about targeting enemy civilians might be

8. I have attempted to understand these dynamics predominantly from the inside, as it were, rather than by tracing the individuals, movements, or discourses that opposed them in part because the latter approach has been undertaken by other scholars; see esp. *APCC*, pp. 107–32. One result of this immanent critique is that my own archive is decidedly partial, favoring the British case and, within it, the published and unpublished writings of military theorists, practitioners, and propagandists. Because my thesis is, in essence, that what gets coded as total in respect to total war is in fact a special case of the partial, I wish to be explicit about the necessary partiality of my own examples rather than attempting to project from them an insupportably total account.

assuaged by official war cultures that depict the enemy as subhuman. At the same time, the range of meanings clustered under the expression *total war* can be profoundly at odds with one another. It makes a great difference whether you ascribe the targeting of civilians to the rise of certain weapons technologies, to an exterminatory war of ideas, or to the emergence of a certain kind of state or military-industrial complex. Scholars who write of total war must choose between incompatible options—between viewing it, for instance, as an expanded conflict versus an intensified one—or they must content themselves with analytically weaker all-of-the-above arguments. As a concept, total war has become at once so comprehensive and so self-contradictory that even those who remain committed to it must repeatedly justify their use of the term.⁹

If its truck with totality makes the concept of total war rhetorically omnivorous, its retroactive historical appetite has been equally keen. Although the expression itself dates from the middle of World War I, historians have dubbed several earlier wars—the US Civil War and the French Revolution, to name only the most prominent examples—the first total war.¹⁰ That we now debate whether a given conflict was or was not a total war illustrates the positivist drift of the concept, a drift that seems to have been quickened rather than hindered by the concept's increasing vagueness, as if historians were rushing to plant a flag on melting ice. In what follows, I will refrain both from joining the argument about historical priority and from hewing to one definition over the rest. Instead, I want to return the doctrine of total war to the period and, even more importantly, the temporality or time attitude of its emergence. For although the discourse of total war has links to nineteenth-century war theory and to the First World War, it is at heart an *interwar* phenomenon and in two ways: chronologically because the idea of total war was elaborated and canonized between the world wars; and temporally because it results from that period's thoroughgoing sense of itself as an interval between two wars. As a concept, we might say, total war precipitates out of the front between two massive pressure systems: the memory of the Great War and the anticipation of the next

9. See, for instance, Roger Chickering, "Total War: The Use and Abuse of a Concept," in *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871–1914*, ed. Manfred F. Boemeke, Chickering, and Stig Förster (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 13–28, and David A. Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (Boston, 2007), pp. 8–9.

10. T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals* (New York, 1952), p. 3, opens with the claim that "the Civil War was the first of the modern total wars, and the American democracy was almost totally unready to fight it"; and Bell attributes "the fusion of politics and war that distinguishes modern 'total war'" after 1792 to "the intellectual transformations of the Enlightenment, followed by the political fermentation of 1789–92" (Bell, *The First Total War*, pp. 8, 9).

war, whose occurrence and greater severity were widely regarded, during the 1920s and 1930s, as unavoidable. Although that next war in whose shadow total war was first theorized is now many decades behind us, we are jerked back inside the interwar logic of total war's emergence every time we invoke the concept. For total war always designates a war to come, an asymptote that the *next* next war—which is often imagined now as the *final* next war—will approach more nearly.¹¹ Even the drive to identify the *first* total war might be understood as a historiographic symptom of total war doctrine's interwar formation; to locate the first total war in the past, decades or centuries before the concept's emergence, is to cancel a limit by claiming it was reached long ago, effectively warding off total war's defining imminence.

Although *total war* would appear to be a static designation, its function in the writing of history is a narrative one, and not just in contortionist claims that war is becoming “increasingly more total” during a given period.¹² As Roger Chickering has argued, total war now belongs to a stock historical script according to which war grows in extent and intensity until it “culminates in the self-transcendence of war in Auschwitz and Hiroshima—in a destructive achievement so consummate that it defies historical representation—whereupon the narrative falls into foreboding silence.” Chickering dubs this narrative “romantic” in its self-transcendence;¹³ one might characterize it, alternately, as a kind of *Bildung* or maturation story in which warfare comes of age along preestablished lines. Either way, this (teleological, often determinist) emplotment of a nation's growing capacity and willingness to wage total war tends to correspond additionally

11. It is tempting to argue that the asymptotic nature of total war—its role as an unreachable ideal type—is the concept's primary inheritance from the Prussian strategist Carl von Clausewitz, with whose notion of absolute war it is often conflated. But, for Clausewitz, absolute war was not a limit that real wars would approach in the future but a thought experiment, a hypothetical war that was unobstructed by chance, probability, political exigency, or moral restraint. Because Clausewitz viewed war in the real world as “a continuation of political activity by other means,” an absolute war that served no political rationale was by definition an abstraction. Even in the case of Napoleonic warfare, which Clausewitz identified as the closest thing to absolute war in his own time, “we must allow for natural inertia, for all the friction of its parts, for all the inconsistency, imprecision, and timidity of man” (Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret [Princeton, N.J., 1976], pp. 87, 580). Nor, for all that Clausewitz envisioned the total mobilization of the state's destructive power in the service of its political aims, does he seem to have imagined absolute war as entailing the slaughter of civilians. However, the frictions and inconsistencies in Clausewitz's exposition made it possible for late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century readers of his work to understand absolute war as an imminent, rather than a purely abstract, form of conflict.

12. This is Ian F. W. Beckett's description of warfare during the nineteenth century in “Total War,” in *War, Peace, and Social Change in Twentieth-Century Europe*, ed. Clive Emsley et al. (Milton Keynes, 1989), p. 28.

13. Pickering, “Total War,” p. 15.

to the plot of national development, as if the emergence of total war were a kind of shadow modernization narrative. A shadow Enlightenment narrative, too, insofar as civilian immunity in war is seen as an index of civilization, progress, and reason's triumph over barbarism.¹⁴ These stories have acquired so much momentum and familiarity that they are difficult to see as stories, much less to intervene in. And they efface and exclude a great deal. Even if we accept the premise that total wars have in fact taken place, we often find that the *less* modernized sides are the *more* fully mobilized, as in the case of the South in the US Civil War. The masterplot of total war deals badly with instances of restrained warfare in supposedly total theatres and shears off examples of extreme mobilization and civilian-killing in eras it considers too early. Its portrait of a national life completely subordinated to a war effort misses the persistence of the everyday during even the most unrestrained conflicts. In liquidating the distinction between soldier and civilian, it fails to recognize how those crucially gendered figures and the labor they perform remain segregated even in putatively total wars.¹⁵ And most saliently for the present essay, the narrative of total war has clung since its interwar elaboration to the fiction that war between imperial nation-states has nothing to do with colonial violence—and that colonies and protectorates, no matter how fully and coercively mobilized they are, cannot by definition declare or participate in total war because they are not yet nations, not yet autonomous, not yet modernized.

The expression *total war* appears to have been coined by the right-wing French editor Léon Daudet in March 1916, during the early weeks of the Battle of Verdun. That month, Daudet's journal *Action Française* carried his article "Une Guerre totale: Eux ou nous" (A Total War: Them or Us), which argued that the war now involved—and must involve—every element of national life and character. At the time, Daudet was less interested in theorizing an emergent form of warfare than in providing a rationale for extreme suspicion toward naturalized Germans: "every German living in

14. See, for example, Igor Primoratz's gloss on Eric Hobsbawm:

The idea of limited war in general, and of immunity of civilians (non-combatants) in war in particular, was seen as an outcome of a process of civilization and humanization of warfare that had its roots in ancient philosophical and religious thought, had evolved as a major tradition in philosophy and moral theology in the Middle Ages, and had been systematically developed by philosophers and political and legal thinkers of the modern age until it came to be recognized as one of the most important achievements of moral progress.

(Igor Primoratz, "Introduction," in *Civilian Immunity in War*, ed. Primoratz [Oxford, 2007], p. 2)

15. Here I am summing up the more expansive historiographic critique of total war in Chickering, "Total War," pp. 18–23.

France is necessarily a spy,” he wrote.¹⁶ Daudet’s follow-up book *La Guerre totale* (1918) was driven by a similar animus, this time against Louis Malvy, Joseph Caillaux, and other radical French advocates of a negotiated peace. But this time Daudet took the trouble to define his title phrase as “the extension of war . . . to political, economic, commercial, industrial, intellectual, juridical, and financial realms. It is no longer just armies that fight, it is also traditions, institutions, customs, laws, spirits, and above all banks.”¹⁷ For Daudet, with his blood-and-soil organicist view of the nation, modern warfare had become total partly in intensity, demanding that one extinguish rather than merely defeat the enemy. But it was the metaphors of *extent*—the claim that war must encompass every space, every civil system, every aspect of national life—that was uppermost in his definition of total war and would preoccupy military theorists for most of the interwar years.

Perhaps owing to its origin in French wartime political maneuvering, the expression *total war* would itself go virtually dormant for years.¹⁸ This dormancy during the 1920s and early 1930s allowed what became the doctrine of total war to lose most of its originary association with the integralist royalism and xenophobic nationalism of Daudet’s *Action Française*. But the concept of a totally mobilized and therefore totally targetable nation was widely adopted by military theorists after 1918. This was particularly true among the first theorists of air power, whose writings became the main proxy space where competing narratives about total war were debated and elaborated, under other aliases, during the interwar years.¹⁹

16. Léon Daudet, “Une Guerre totale: Eux ou nous,” *Action Française*, 11 Mar. 1916, n.p.

17. Daudet, *La Guerre totale* (Paris, 1918), p. 8; my trans. Speaking before the French legislature in November 1917, the new prime minister Georges Clemenceau called for “la guerre intégrale” (“integrated war”), a war in which citizens would share the privations of the soldiery and in which both the German adversary and left-wing French “appeasers” would be targeted with equal ferocity. See Clemenceau, speech to the Chamber of Deputies, 20 Nov. 1917; quoted in Marc Ferro, *The Great War: 1914–1918* (London, 1973), p. 199. Clemenceau’s “guerre intégrale” is sometimes translated as “total war” but seems to have had a more constrained meaning, serving the same political ends as Daudet’s “guerre totale” without making the same hyperbolic claims about war’s compass.

18. The expression’s best-known interwar revival took place in German general Erich Ludendorff’s *Der totale Krieg* (1935), which argued, contra Clausewitz, that the total mobilization of a nation’s resources in war required a military dictatorship. But total war had become safe, as it were, for air-power theory by 1931, when the French Douhetian strategist Camille Rougeron published “La Guerre totale et l’aviation,” *L’Illustration*, 12 Sept. 1931, pp. 30–32. Carl Schmitt’s writings take up the concept of total war explicitly in 1937 with his “Total Enemy, Total War, and Total State,” *Four Articles, 1931–1938*, trans. and ed. Simona Draghici (Washington, DC, 1999).

19. For additional discussion of 1920s air-power theory, particularly the anticipatory temporalities of Giulio Douhet’s work, see Paul Saint-Amour, “Air War Prophecy and Interwar Modernism,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 42, no. 2 (2005): 130–61.

Among the reasons for total war doctrine's displacement into air-power theory is their shared portrait of totality; the bomber's limitless target seemed to correspond perfectly, albeit from the other side of the bomb-sight, to the limitless mobilization advocated by Daudet. As proponents of an expensive, underfunded new military technology during a period of postwar disarmament, early air-power theorists also needed a hyperbolic promotional story, one that could conjure funding by making independent air forces sound synonymous with the future of warfare and national defense. Total war doctrine could supply both the hyperbole and the futurity. Despite having been coined to serve Daudet's immediate political agenda, the bald hyperbole of total war could only refer to a future in which the inarguably partial phenomena of the present moment—partial extent and intensity, partial mobilization, partial targeting—reached the limit of the total. Total war's futurity was inseparable, in other words, from its conceptual power; it was rhetorically inexhaustible in proportion as it never quite arrived, remaining something to be interminably called for or warded off rather than pointed to.²⁰ What's more, this inherent futurity aligned total war's temporality with that of aerial bombardment, a rapidly developing technique whose power to terrorize during the First World War had seemed to offer foreglimpses of a far more terrible future and whose psychological power lay principally in its coercive, panic-laden structure of anticipation.

National Totality and Colonial Air Control

One of the most prominent interwar air-power theorists was Brigadier General P. R. C. Groves, the British Air Ministry's director of flying operations in 1918 and later air advisor to the Council of the League of Nations. In spring 1922 Groves published two articles in the London *Times* that helped set the terms of public discourse about future warfare and spurred parliamentary debate and legislation.

A new fact and one of tremendous import has emerged as a result of the Great War; unless it is fully appreciated and taken into consideration practically, our whole expenditure on armaments must inevitably prove to be abortive. It is thus: *Owing to the development of aviation, war has altered in character. Hitherto primarily an affair of "fronts," it will henceforth be primarily an affair of "areas."* The increase in the range, carrying capacity, speed, and general efficiency of aircraft, together with the actual growth in their numbers and the

20. Even Joseph Goebbels's famous shriek "Wollt ihr den totalen Krieg?" (do you want total war?) at the Berlin Sportpalast rally in 1943 acknowledges the futurity of total war.

potentialities of production, implies that on the outbreak of war whole fleets of aircraft will be available for offensive purposes. Each side will at once strike at the heart and nerve centres of its opponent: at his dockyards, arsenals, munition factories, mobilization centres, and at those nerve ganglia of national *morale*—the great cities. The air raids of the past are no guide as to the nature of future aerial attack or even of that which could be delivered today.²¹

Groves's views were already shared by air-power theorists in a number of European states, but they had particular implications for an island nation. In observing that England "is at the end of her immunity as an island," Groves echoed a speech given on 15 March 1922 by Winston Churchill, who, like Groves, advocated a strong air force as the lone compensation for that loss of immunity.²² For Groves, however, the key metaphor for air power's compensatory deterrent role was not immunity but insurance, and the insured body was nothing less than the national totality that lay exposed to an adversary's bombers: "If the war, against which an expenditure on armaments is meant to be an insurance, should come, then London, Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow, the whole crowded North, every part, every dockyard, every arsenal, every naval and every military centre, will be as much in the front line as Ypres in the late war."²³

As an island nation, England supplies a specially legible instance of a general interwar case: the nation conceived by air-power theorists was a discrete entity unified both by the interlocking systems, structures, and forces that would constitute its war effort and by their collective targetability in the age of the bomber. As the proxy space for total war doctrine, in other words, air-power theory provided limitless occasions for representing the national totality. The common figures of "nerve centres," "heart," and "nerve ganglia" all participated in the emergent trope of an integrated national body whose geographical borders, war effort, and vulnerability were all coterminous.²⁴ Other idioms were used to describe the belligerent nation in the next war, all of them involving some fusion of totality, unity,

21. P. R. C. Groves, "The New Warfare," *Times* (London), 21 Mar. 1922; rpt. in Groves, *Our Future in the Air: A Survey of the Vital Question of British Air Power* (London, 1922), pp. 10–11.

22. See Franklyn Arthur Johnson, *Defence by Committee: The British Committee of Imperial Defence, 1885–1959* (London, 1960), p. 181.

23. Groves, *Our Future in the Air*, p. 48.

24. Charlton, whose experience in Iraq might have equipped him to see the limitations of the national body metaphor, went to unusual lengths to elaborate it, although without strict adherence to biology: "If Paris was the heart of France, these two selected areas [Lille, Lyon-Valence] were the right and left brain-lobes which directed her activities and co-ordinated her bodily control. That night they were paralysed, so that the heart of France went dead within her and the rest of her body lay numb" (Charlton, *War over England* [London, 1936], p. 229).

and fragility. Here is British air-power theorist Basil Liddell Hart in his influential *Paris; or, The Future of War* (1925):

A modern state is such a complex and interdependent fabric that it offers a target highly sensitive to a sudden and overwhelming blow from the air. We all know how great an upset in the daily life of the country is caused at the outset of a railway strike even. Business is disorganized by the delay of the mails and the tardy arrival of the staff, the shops are at a standstill without fresh supplies, the people feel lost without newspapers—rumours multiply, and the signs of panic and demoralization make their appearance. . . . Imagine for a moment London, Manchester, Birmingham, and half a dozen other great centres simultaneously attacked, the business localities and Fleet Street wrecked, Whitehall a heap of ruins, the slum districts maddened into the impulse to break loose and maraud, the railways cut, factories destroyed. Would not the general will to resist vanish, and what use would be the still determined fractions of the nation, without organization and central direction?²⁵

Liddell Hart's fantasia of the diorama conjures a model-train England whose complexity, interdependence, and total visibility are also the conditions of its vulnerability as target. Unsurprisingly, given Liddell Hart's far-right political sympathies, the wartime state's "organization and central direction" are the paramount goods here, the forces most imperiled by air war and the civil unrest it would unleash. In fact, Liddell Hart cannot imagine the national totality without invoking internal revolt, either as a peacetime railway strike or as an orgy of looting in the maddened slum districts on the heels of massive air strikes. It is as if the passage half remembered the origins of the phrase *total war* in Daudet's wartime campaign against French radicals, illustrating the fact that portraits of totality and interdependence are produced as much through the threat of internal resistance and dissent as by the prospect of attack from outside. Yet both constructions were compatible with the bodily projection of the national totality; Liddell Hart's Paris is the adversary who aims for a nation's Achilles' heel—its citizens' morale, where "a nation's nerve system, no longer covered by the flesh of its troops, is now laid bare to attack."²⁶

Whether it was constructed under the imaginative pressure of external

25. B. H. Liddell Hart, *Paris; or, The Future of War* (New York, 1925), pp. 41–42. Hugh Trenchard placed Liddell Hart's book on the RAF's list of recommended reading; see Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914–1945* (Princeton, N.J., 2004), p. 105.

26. Liddell Hart, *Paris; or, The Future of War*, pp. 36–37.

attack, internal revolt, or some combination of the two, the national totality portrayed by Liddell Hart, Groves, and other air-power advocates invariably ended at the borders of the state; concomitantly, the next war invoked by those writers referred exclusively to conflicts among modern nation-states. Because the violence wrought by those same powers in their colonies took place outside the boundaries of the national body, such violence went virtually unacknowledged by classical air-power theory and other forms of next-war discourse, including international law. When colonial campaigns were spoken of in other sectors of military theory and policy, they were either belittled as small wars or covered in a slew of euphemisms—*police actions*, *low-intensity conflicts*, *constabulary missions*, *pacification*, *colonial policing*—that denied them the status of war altogether. International law, for its part, would not allow anticolonial or national liberation movements the benefits of the laws of war until 1977.²⁷ But as historians of interwar British imperialism have begun to show, a number of classical air-power theorists were also architects and practitioners of colonial violence. While the likes of Hugh Trenchard, John Salmond, and Winston Churchill debated the probable course of air war in Europe's future, they were at the same time using the imperial periphery as a testing range for the bomber's efficiency, destructive power, and psychic coerciveness. A truly total conception of war would have insisted openly on the legal, ethical, political, and technological connections between European conflagration and colonial air control. But, instead, the ideologically partial concept of total war doubly effaced such connections—first, by setting them beyond the national limits of its totality claims and, second, by inviting this useful occlusion to be misrecognized as comprehensive portraiture. In turning now to 1920s colonial air control, I will look at a larger, transnational economy of injury, coercion, and administration through whose occultation the national totality was producible as a discrete body, integrated in both vulnerability and sovereignty.

For most of the Great War, British military aviation had taken shape as two structures ancillary to the army and navy, respectively: the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service. After the Zeppelin and Gotha raids on London in early 1917, widespread concern about England's inef-

27. The first Protocol Additional to the 1954 Geneva Convention, adopted on 8 June 1977, classifies "armed conflicts in which peoples are fighting against colonial domination and alien occupation and against racist regimes in the exercise of their right of self-determination" as international conflicts, stipulating that the victims of such conflicts are eligible for the Convention's legal protections for the victims of war ("Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts [Protocol 1]," article 1, §4).

fective air defense led to the creation of a single air force overseen by the new Air Ministry. Two months after the armistice, Churchill was appointed secretary of state for war and air with the expectation that he would preside over the postwar repartitioning of the RAF into its army and navy subsidiaries. During the early 1920s, increasing public demand for disarmament and reductions in military spending made the elimination of an expensive third agency seem attractive, but Churchill was a stubborn proponent of an independent air force. In 1919 and 1920, he and his new chief of air staff, Hugh Trenchard, began to step up RAF operations in the colonies, hoping to demonstrate that air power could efficiently and affordably contribute to "imperial defense." During those years, air raids were carried out against Dacca, Jalalabad, and Kabul in the Third Afghan War; against Enzeli in Iran; against demonstrators in the Punjab and an uprising in the Transjordan; against Mahsud and Wazir tribes along India's North West Frontier; and against the Dervish followers of the Mad Mullah, Mohammed bin Abdulla Hassan in Somaliland. The RAF claimed success in these operations, although many of its reports exaggerated the accuracy of air strikes, suppressed or failed to collect civilian casualty numbers, and underrepresented the extent to which tribal adversaries adapted to strafing and bombardment. By 1922 Churchill and Trenchard were no longer satisfied with a participatory role in colonial air policing. Instead, they proposed the RAF be put entirely in charge of military operations in Mesopotamia (Iraq), which Britain had acquired in 1920 by League of Nations mandate after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. According to the proposed air substitution, the costly and politically controversial prospect of a long-term occupation could be replaced by a vastly cheaper control-without-occupation from the air: fifty-one battalions of British and Indian ground troops would be replaced by eight or nine squadrons and a vastly reduced garrison, both under RAF control.

The prospect of air substitution in Iraq intensified the rivalry between the RAF and the Army as the two services competed for diminished postwar military funds. This competition took some strange shapes, including the War Office's assault on the RAF for the inhumanity of air policing. But the strangest interservice *mêlée* was routed through competing theories about whether bombing's effectiveness depended on the race and development of the bombed. In July 1922, shortly before Churchill took the air control scheme to the cabinet for approval, the Army's Staff College in Quetta, India hosted a conference on the future of colonial air policing. The presence of both Army and RAF personnel inflated the rhetorical stakes of the occasion, making it appear nothing less than a duel for the future of imperial defense. In his attempts to discredit the new doctrine of

air substitution, the Army's Staff College commandant, Major General Louis Vaughan, argued that whereas the sensitive nervous systems of Europeans made them keenly vulnerable to prolonged aerial bombardment, the "little sensitive psychology" of nonwhite tribesmen would permit them to adapt to bombing (quoted in *APCC*, p. 110). Against this view, Salmond—shortly to become Charlton's superior officer—insisted that "humanity was the same the world over" and that the population of Kabul would react to bombing just as the population of London had during the Great War. Vaughan had effectively declared the lessons of that war's strategic bombing irrelevant to the question of colonial policing, but Salmond's invocation of an undifferentiated humanity drew air control techniques explicitly under the aegis of total war (quoted in *APCC*, p. 110). He went on to delineate three universal phases of response to bombardment: first, panic, especially if it were an adversary's first experience of bombardment; next, indifference or contempt in the face of continued air attacks; and, finally, after sustained bombing, weariness and a longing for peace that would produce compliance with the bomber's demands.²⁸

The proponents of colonial air control were perfectly capable of adducing racialist pseudo-ethnographic arguments in favor of their policies. They claimed, for instance, that tribal adversaries were more susceptible to the spectacle of technologically advanced weapons, either because such adversaries feared what they could not understand or because "the more primitive the race is, the more it respects sheer power" (quoted in *APCC*, p. 110). They argued, too, that the very notion of noncombatant immunity had to be rethought in respect to Iraq, whose masculine warrior culture turned all males into combatants while devaluing women and children to the point where their deaths in raids should not much vex the British conscience.²⁹ But Salmond's position at Quetta was not an eccentric one. In its fundamentals it accorded with an internal Air Staff position paper on imperial defense that had been circulated the previous year:

It may be thought better, in view of the allegations of the "barbarity" of air attacks, to preserve appearances by formulating milder rules and by still nominally confining bombardment to targets which are

28. Salmond's three-stage schema seems to have become RAF doctrine. In December 1923, Wing Commander C. Edmonds told an audience at the Royal United Services Institution, "the shocks and interruptions, the inconvenience and indignity of it all, will tell in the end. The civilised nation will go through the same three phases as did the semi-civilised tribe: alarm, indifference, weariness; followed ultimately by compliance with our will" (C. H. K. Edmonds, "Air Strategy," *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution* 70 [May 1924]: 198).

29. See Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain's Covert Empire in the Middle East* (New York, 2008), pp. 249–50.

strictly military in character . . . to avoid emphasizing the truth that air warfare has made such restrictions obsolete and impossible. It may be some time until another war occurs and meanwhile the public may become educated as to the meaning of air power. [Quoted in "CF," p. 159]

The 1921 memo implies what Salmond avowed openly: the salient difference is not between how different populations ("European" versus "Arab," "civilized" versus "semi-civilized") react to air war but between air war and all previous forms of war.³⁰ Notice how this recognition ramifies differently for the two populations in question, however. The British public will need to be fed reassuring fictions about the nature of the air attacks its government is ordering in Iraq and to be incrementally "educated as to the meaning of air power"—an education that will be completed by the next, presumptively unbridled war. The tribal subjects of air policing, in contrast, will receive a shorter, sharper education in unrestricted air war, undergoing in policing operations what their British counterparts will have to wait for the next total war to experience. The emphasis on universality in Salmond's theory of aerial bombing masked the particularity of its application to the subjects of air policing. The more like us the tribes are, the theory said, the better argument we have for bombing them in peacetime, as we have just got through bombing Europeans in war.

The RAF's arguments prevailed when, in October 1922, the service commenced sole military control over Iraq with Salmond as air officer commanding. The ensuing ten years of air control over Iraq (whose mandate status ended when the country joined the League of Nations in 1932) provided an alternative to ground occupation at a fraction of the cost in soldiers' lives and pounds sterling, and US military theorists would invoke that decade while advocating the use of air power in "small wars" and evolving the doctrine of global reach—global power during the late twentieth century.³¹ Recognizing the controversial nature of police bombing, the RAF took great care to preserve appearances by limiting the release of details about its operations in Iraq. Trenchard ordered Salmond to with-

30. Here I am elaborating on Omissi's observation that Salmond's three-stage schema "radically reconstructed both the 'native' and 'European', eliminated their differences and gave maximum weight to the power of aerial attack" (*APCC*, p. 111).

31. See George C. Morris, "The Other Side of the COIN: Low-Technology Aircraft and Little Wars," *Airpower Journal* 5 (Spring 1991): 60; David J. Dean, "Air Power in Small Wars: The British Air Control Experience," *Air University Review* (July–Aug. 1983); and Kenneth J. Alnwick, "Perspectives on Air Power at the Low End of the Conflict Spectrum," *Air University Review* 35 (Mar.–Apr. 1984): 18–19. For a critical view of British air control's applicability to contemporary low-intensity areas (specifically, the Clinton administration's proposal to apply air power in Bosnia), see David Willard Parsons, "British Air Control: A Model for the Application of Air Power in Low-Intensity Conflict?" *Airpower Journal* 8 (Summer 1994): 28–39.

hold specifics about casualties and bomb tonnage because the news “that two tons of bombs have been dropped on some little village daily” might give “a wrong sense of proportion at home” (quoted in *APCC*, p. 163). The decision to forgo a formal inquiry into Charlton’s resignation was part of the same information management strategy.

Bombing Display

But appearances can be preserved through spectacle as much as through secrecy. The service’s semi-covert operations in the colonies and mandates were marketed to the British public once a year by an overt op at home: the RAF pageant at the Hendon Aerodrome in North London. This event aimed to make the public more air-minded by displaying the latest ordnance and techniques of the RAF, whose status as an independent agency was uncertain in 1920 when the first Hendon pageant took place. That one was watched by 40,000 people; by 1932, 170,000 paying spectators crowded inside the airfield enclosures for what had been rechristened Empire Air Day, with several hundred thousand others watching for free outside; *Flight* magazine claimed in 1927 that the pageant had eclipsed Ascot in social glamour (see *APCC*, p. 171).

The pageants of 1920 and 1921 culminated in staged attacks that echoed Great War scenarios, but the 1922 pageant (fig. 2) marked the advent of colonial air control by introducing a new climactic set piece: an “Eastern Drama” in which a British squadron destroyed a desert stronghold. This was a hundred-foot tower constructed of the wings of obsolete planes and defended by a group of airmen in tribal dress and with blackened faces, described in the pageant program as Wottnotts. After showing off forced landings and emergency repairs, the RAF planes destroyed the tower with incendiary bombs to the wild applause of the spectators (fig. 3).³² (Hold this surreal event in your mind—the mocked-up desert stronghold built out of scrapped Great War planes on the outskirts of the imperial metropolis; the costumed blackface pilots; the spectacularizing of imperial violence before a domestic audience—and ask yourself whether even Joyce’s *Ulysses*, published in the same year and described by Charlton, remember, as an “official handbook” to air-controlled Mesopotamia, contains anything as arresting, repellent, and hallucinatory as this Hendon pageant finale.) As unabashed as the “Eastern Drama” was in its imperial propagandizing, it stopped short of showing what planes and bombs could do to noncombatants. That was left until the 1927 pageant, in which the RAF bombed the inhabitants of “the Eastern village of Hunyadi Janos, in Ir-

32. Anon., “The R. A. F. Aerial Pageant,” *Flight*, 7 June 1922, p. 373.

ROYAL AIR FORCE
AERIAL
PAGEANT
 The London Aerodrome
HENDON
 Saturday, JUNE 24th
 3 to 6pm

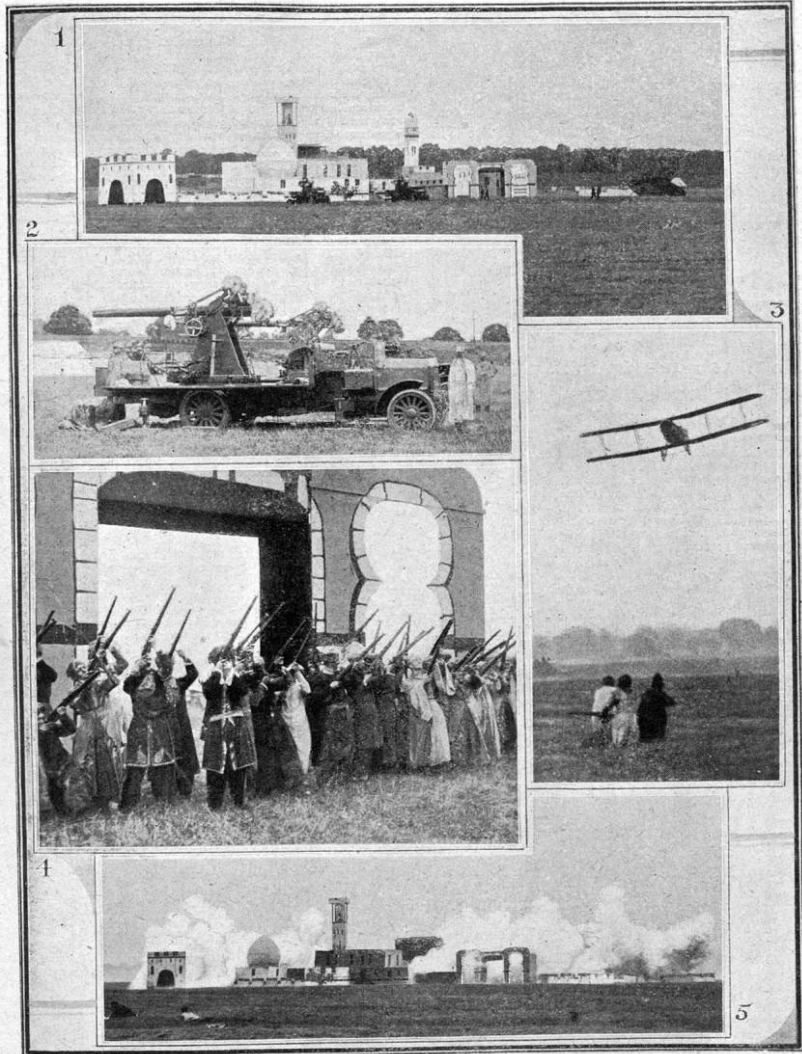
"BOMBING A DESERT STRONGHOLD"

TICKETS (NO TAX) 2/- 5/- 10/- BOXES (FOR 8) FROM 16. CARS 5/-

ADVANCE BOOKINGS | KEIFFE PROWSE & CO., LTD. AND ALL LIBRARIES -
 SEC. R.A.F. MEMORIAL FUND, 7, IDDESLEIGH HOUSE, CANTON ST. S.W. (LONDON)

The Aerial Pageant is The Royal Air Force Annual Training Display, and is in aid of the R.A.F. Memorial Fund.

FIGURE 2.



"Flight" Copyright

AN EASTERN DRAMA AT THE R.A.F. PAGEANT : 1. The "Wotnott" stronghold before the raid. 2. The enemy anti-aircraft battery. 3. A trio of "Wotnott" defenders potting at an attacking bomber. 4. Massed "Wotnotts" defending the stronghold from an aerial attack. 5. The stronghold in flames.

FIGURE 3.

questine” after rescuing a group of “white women and children” captives from their “pretty-coloured natives” in what was clearly a fantasy recuperation of the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857.³³

Given that internal RAF doctrine saw all people as one under bombardment, why did the service’s public spectacles during the 1920s insist so outlandishly on the whiteness of the bomber, the blackness of the bombed? As we have seen, Salmond’s conviction that “humanity was the same the world over” carried with it a tacit recognition that total air war, not race or culture or development, was the difference that mattered now; by the light of that recognition, the dividing line between colonial air control and unrestrained war was purely rhetorical. But while RAF officers acknowledged internally that their airmen in Iraq and other mandates and colonies were in training for the next total war, such an understanding could not be part of the service’s public self-portrait at home. It would have exposed a postwar public to two profoundly disquieting possibilities: British aviators overseas were routinely performing war crimes in peacetime; and the forms of airborne terror Britons had experienced only a few years before might be deployed against them by their own government in domestic policing.³⁴ As much as the Hendon pageants sought to awe and excite their audiences through displays of British air power, then, they were also exercises in mass reassurance, and the difference that underwrote that reassurance was race. Air masquerades of the 1920s that marked bombing victims as Eastern, tribal, primitive, and colored—and therefore as both more deserving of and less disturbed by bombardment—permitted white spectators to believe they were safe from both peacetime air policing at home and complicity in crimes of (undeclared) war abroad. And by racially sorting bomber from bombed, the pageants asserted an absolute difference between the service’s colonial operations and the white-on-white bombardments of the Great War. Under cover of these extrovert dramas, the RAF held to its unutterable brief: *hone the techniques of total war in colonial air control.*

Such performances were not limited to Hendon or even to England. In 1924, the Iraq specialist Gertrude Bell, one of Churchill’s chief advisors in

33. Anon., “The Eighth R. A. F. Display,” *Flight*, 7 July 1927, p. 460. Hunyadi János was a fifteenth-century military strategist who united Christian armies against Ottoman Muslims; his name was also borne by a laxative mineral water bottled at springs near Budapest. *Irquestine* is evidently a portmanteau of Iraq and Palestine.

34. Omissi reports that in May 1920, Churchill approved an Air Staff paper stipulating that airborne weapons not be used in Britain except in a state of declared war or if domestic rioters were using aircraft weapons. In a draft version of the paper, however, Trenchard had countenanced “a limited amount of bombing and machine gun fire” in order to quell violent workers’ uprisings in British population centers (quoted in *APCC*, p. 41).

the region, wrote to her father of her amazement at witnessing an RAF bombing demonstration—not her first—at Hinaidi. Complete with machine guns, firebombs, armored cars, an artificial village, and stage fugitives, the display Bell describes sounds like an etude for Hendon, although its mixed audience of British military forces, Iraqi leaders, European expatriates, and locals would have been differently interpellated by the spectacle.³⁵ In a sense, though, displays like these were redundant in the mandates and colonies; air control was itself a careful staging of force for the sake of impressing spectators with a sense of their vulnerability and visibility from the air. For control-without-occupation to work, the RAF needed to show Iraqis via actual, devastating air strikes (also known as bombing demonstrations) the dire consequences of rebellion or tax evasion. Once potential insurgents had witnessed or heard of these force displays, the theory went, they would become self-policing and pacified in response. Their quiescent state would then be maintained by a second kind of aerial theater. If, as an Air Staff paper put it, “the speed and range of aircraft makes [*sic*] it practicable to keep a whole country under more or less constant surveillance,” the crucial disciplinary effect of such patrols required that the planes be *seen* surveying: “from the ground every inhabitant of a village is under the impression that the occupant of an aeroplane is actually looking at *him* . . . establishing the impression that all their movements are being watched and reported.”³⁶ In essence, air substitution sought to turn the bombing demonstration and the reconnaissance overflight from discrete events into an architecture of social control.³⁷ Under RAF command, the Iraqi mandate was an armed and perennial Hendon pageant whose indigenous spectators were simply less insulated (whether by fake ordnance or by the reassurances of racial masquerade) than their

35. Bell’s account concludes, “I was tremendously impressed. It’s an amazingly relentless and terrible thing, war from the air” (Gertrude Bell, letter to H. B., 2 July 1924, Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University Library, www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/letter_details.php?letter_id=734).

36. Quoted in Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, p. 245. Satia’s gloss on this passage concludes that air control “was intended to work like the classic panopticon” (*ibid.*).

37. Parsons implicitly makes interwar colonial air control an antecedent of nuclear strategy by referring to the former as “colonial administration based on the deterrent effect of rapid worldwide force projection” (Parsons, “British Air Control”). Even more surprising is the embrace by Parsons, a USAF Captain, of a Foucaultian distinction between force and power, which enters his discussion through citations of historian Anthony Clayton. “Power, then, with the minimum actual use of force, was to be the keynote [of colonial rule],” writes Clayton. “Such power would by charisma produce the correct response from colonial peoples, who would choose to obey the orders of the system rather than be forced into so doing” (quoted in *ibid.*). Another way of putting this: a policy of threats and ultimata, buttressed by a few illustrative deployments of violent air power, could produce coercion without massive and expensive use of force. What Clayton calls “choos[ing] to obey,” one notes, is really a forcing through a weaponized anticipation.

British counterparts from the violent ramifications of what they were being shown.

Air war would henceforth be total for the bombed, then, but it would be total first for those on what military policy constructed as the periphery and with neither the publicity nor the scanty protections of declared war. The RAF's superficially nonracist argument that "humanity is the same the world over" underwrote the use of "forms of frightfulness"—diabolical weapons and terror techniques—against racially marked bodies in colonial spaces remote from the metropole.³⁸ Looking at the deployment of air power during the twenties, we can see permissible violence moving outward, like centrifuged molecules through a gel, in concentric rings from the imperial metropole. Over London there were civilian aircraft, skywriters promoting laundry detergent, motor oil, and newspapers, and the occasional mock dogfight exhibiting the RAF's capacity to defend the realm. Above England's northern industrial cities during the general strike of 1926, heavy bombers dropped government leaflets and state-approved newspapers by the ton (see *APCC*, p. 41). In Ireland during the Troubles, air attacks against the Irish Republican Army were permitted but only in rural areas and against combatants.³⁹ And in the remoter colonies, protectorates, and mandates, official protocols about advance warnings of bombardment were put in place tardily and often ignored; warning leaflets were dropped on largely nonliterate communities; and enemy and accidental casualties were reported vaguely if at all.

Conclusion

We have seen how the colonial policing displays at Hendon disavowed the continuity between those "forms of frightfulness" and the prospect of total air war in Europe. It was not until the early 1930s that this continuity would begin to find its way into public discourse. A decade after Charlton's arrival in Baghdad and the failure of the Hague Convention, the Geneva Disarmament Conference met with the aim of outlawing aerial bombard-

38. A December 1922 Air Staff memo on "Forms of Frightfulness" inventoried the RAF's means of "making life a burden" for Iraqi tribals. These means included delayed-action bombs to prevent villagers from going home under cover of darkness; phosphorous bombs; "crows' feet" for laming livestock; fear-inducing fireworks and whistling aerial darts; crude oil to poison water supplies; and an antecedent of napalm called liquid fire. Townshend observes of the memo, "there was no sign of discomfort at the adoption of an approach to warfare which had so recently caused the Germans to be branded as barbarians" ("CF," pp. 150–51).

39. On how RAF policies varied from one colony or mandate to another, see Roger A. Beaumont, "A New Lease on Empire: Air Policing, 1919–1939," *Aerospace Historian* 26 (June 1979): 84–90. On the RAF policy toward air strikes in Ireland, see "Use of Aeroplanes against Rebels," Air Section of the Public Record Office (London), AIR 6/806-1919, n.d.; quoted in Beaumont, "A New Lease on Empire," p. 90 n. 49.

ment and possibly abolishing military air forces altogether. The British delegates seem to have had a dual objective: to protect British cities, and particularly London, from bombing in a future world war while reserving the right to continue bombing their own colonies, mandates, and protectorates. After failing to achieve this through technicalities of sovereignty, the delegation proposed “the complete abolition of bombing from the air [except for police purposes in certain outlying regions].”⁴⁰ This double standard looked like an incidental byproduct of economics: colonial air control was cheaper than garrisons on the ground; aerial disarmament at home was cheaper than maintaining large air forces to defend Europe’s cities. But the budgetary rationale only thinly concealed the intimate causal link between bombed colonies and bomb-free capitals; a remote zone of permissible violence would provide a training ground and laboratory for the total air war that many military planners assumed would come to Europe regardless of the laws of war. When that war came, Britain would be prepared to treat its adversaries as it had long treated its colonies; by this logic, the colonial state of exception *was* the salvation of the capital. But the British delegates’ insistence on the colonial loophole opened them to widespread criticism and was an important factor in the conference’s failure to produce multilateral accords.⁴¹

L. E. O. Charlton’s conscientious objection and his air-power advocacy, together, shared the geography of the British delegates’ concern but with inverted attitudes; instead of promoting in the colonies what he dreaded in the metropole, he objected to the practice in peacetime colonial policing operations of what he thought inevitable in the war metropolis of the future. But where *Charlton* gave its author’s protest and resignation dramatic pride of place, his subsequent writings on air war would bear fading traces of that apostasy, consigning it, for example, to a feeble dependent clause: “The lesson was also learnt of air control in mandated territories,

40. Quoted in Uri Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber: The Fear of Air Attack and British Politics 1932–1939* (London, 1980), p. 38; the bracketed phrase is Bialer’s.

41. A 21 July 1933 letter to the *London Times* signed by the secretaries of thirteen women’s leagues and other organizations put it this way: “The nations are at last realizing the danger [of aerial bombardment] and are disposed to agree to its abolition, but the British Government, rather than be deprived of the right to use air bombing against a few predatory tribes, would appear to be willing to risk the destruction of civilization. The proposition seems scarcely believable, for whatever may be the technical advantages of such a procedure, they cannot surely be allowed to weigh against the good of humanity as a whole.” Note how even in this letter of protest the barrier between colonial bombing (“against a few predatory tribes”) and world war (“the destruction of civilization”) remains in place. Far from being objects of concern, the bombed tribes are deemed unworthy of risking the good of “humanity as a whole,” which is a byword for modernized Europe (quoted in Groves, *Behind the Smoke Screen* [London, 1934], pp. 322–23).

and extended to include the disciplining of tribesmen on the North-West Frontier of India, though the humanity or inhumanity of such a policy remains a highly debatable point to this day.⁴² Even that little equivocation would disappear with the onset of World War II; his triumphalist *Deeds That Held the Empire: By Air* (1940) would describe military aviation as “the cement of Empire, whereby the edifice is stayed” and the RAF’s bombing of tribal people as “a last resource, not with the avowed object of slaughtering the nomads, but to make them see the error of their ways by destroying their encampments after due notice has been given that aircraft will soon be on their heels.”⁴³ The onetime critic of colonial air policing had become its apologist and propagandist.

Yet for all that Charlton distanced himself from his conscientious objection, he never retracted *Charlton*. With its partial critique of total war’s partiality, that book bravely dissents from the peacetime application of a bombing policy—the intentional targeting of civilians—that it chillingly accepts in respect to the next declared war. In recent years, *Charlton* has informed the historiography of conscientious objection, global air power, and the Western projection of force in the Middle East.⁴⁴ In its day, it induced at least one reader—an anonymous reviewer for the magazine of the RAF, no less—to rethink colonial air control well before the Geneva Conference had opened the policy to public controversy:

The use of air bombs in Iraq has been discussed in Parliament, and the ordinary citizen felt quite satisfied by the answers given by the Air Minister, which were to the effect that this method of keeping the country in order was not only the most economical and efficient, but also the most merciful way of dealing with law-breakers. Air Commodore Charlton, writing with personal experience, challenges this comfortable view and arouses in us serious misgivings. Not unfrequently the ordinary Briton is inclined to think that a man who late in life becomes a Socialist and an opponent of ‘blood sports’ must have developed into what is popularly known as a ‘crank’. The passages in this book which deal with bombing in Iraq are not, however, written in the strain which one usually associates with the outpourings of a ‘crank.’ They make one feel that a further examination of the facts is desirable.⁴⁵

42. Charlton, *War from the Air: Past Present Future* (London, 1935), p. 76.

43. Charlton, *Deeds That Held the Empire: By Air* (London, 1940), pp. 2, 275.

44. See Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, pp. 47–48; Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, pp. 162, 250; and APCC, pp. 175–76.

45. Anon., “A Psycho-Analytical Autobiography,” review of *Charlton*, by Charlton, *Flight*, 6 Nov. 1931, p. 1116.

No twenty-first-century Charlton appeared during the second Gulf War. And so far none has emerged from within the US military to protest, with anything approaching Charlton's conscientious objection, the continued use of pilotless drones—Reapers, Predators, Global Hawks—over Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and a growing list of other states during a period of troop withdrawal and military budget cuts.⁴⁶ Such a dissident could provide some desperately needed information about this latest version of imperial force projection through air power: the degree to which the most “surgical” targeting repeatedly exceeds its remit and meanwhile grants the executive a tool that is monarchic in its lack of oversight and its immunity to due process. Where Charlton's career helps us trace the partiality of total war, his counterpart today might shed light on its twenty-first-century corollaries: the binding of so-called precision weapons into a network of virtually unlimited reach; the concentration, outside the context of declared war, of the executive's lethal prerogative; the totality of partial war.

46. A few figures within US military elites have criticized aspects of drone warfare. David Kilcullen, who served as counterinsurgency advisor to General David Petraeus from 2006 to 2008, and Andrew Exum, a US army officer in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2002 to 2004, wrote in 2009 that “expanding or even just continuing the drone war is a mistake,” likening the drone strategy to “the ‘air control’ methods employed by the British in what are now the Pakistani tribal areas in the 1920s. The historical resonance of the British effort encourages people in the tribal areas to see the drone attacks as a continuation of colonial-era policies” (David Kilcullen and Andrew McDonald Exum, “Death from Above: Outrage down Below,” op-ed, *New York Times*, 16 May 2009). In 2013, James E. Cartwright, a retired US general and former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, expressed concern that drone strikes were doing more to exacerbate extremism than to reduce it. See Mark Mazzetti and Scott Shane, “As New Drone Policy Is Weighed, Few Practical Effects Are Seen,” *New York Times*, 22 Mar. 2013, p. A11. Neither case comes close to either the performative power of Charlton's resignation or the extent of Charlton's whistle-blowing.