Killing for Show:

Photography, War and the Media in Vietnam and Iraq

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Part IV. Murder

Figure 1: Larry Burrows, Field of Death, 1963. Viet Cong soldiers, trapped and shot down in the Delta, lie dead on a nearby shore beside their flag, while captured comrades huddle in defeat.

Chapter 11: Killing Regimes

Killing for show requires some delicacy. The state and its military want to demonstrate their power, efficiency and bravery, along with the clear moral purpose of their mission, without appearing to glory over-much in the slaughter and destruction that is the necessary accompaniment.[1] Corpses must be piled up for the cameras without besmirching the nobility of the cause.

[1] One of Assistant Secretary of Defense James McNaughton's objectives for the Vietnam War was 'To emerge from crisis without unacceptable taint from methods used.' See John Tirman, *The Deaths of Others: The Fate of Civilians in America's Wars*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011, p. 143.

Larry Burrows' *Life* photograph of the aftermath of an operation against the NLF is finely balanced on the turning of that opposition. Corpses of young men that the caption claims are 'Viet Cong soldiers' are laid out on a muddy shore. Nearby are a group of huddled prisoners. One of the killers—an ARVN soldier—is framed to occupy an edge of the foreground, while further back US advisors look on nonchalantly. A small group of old weapons and an NLF flag—most likely a prop brought along for the occasion—are also shown off. As was usual in these operations, the corpses outnumber the weapons. As Robert McNamara commented flatly: 'the VC/NVA apparently lose only one sixth as many weapons as people, suggesting that possibly many of the killed are unarmed porters or by-standers.'[2]

This image is plainly the result of a photo-op laid on by the military to show the war being won. Along with other elements in Burrows' signal picture story of 1963, his first colour reporting of the war, it is framed by *Life*'s editorial statement that supports US involvement in the war against 'Communist guerrillas'. Though it says that the struggle will not be easy, quick or cheap, it ends with Kennedy's claim that matters in Vietnam may be improving.[3]

Progress is measured here—as it was throughout the war—by counting corpses. In Vietnam, the tension between propaganda and slaughter was particularly acute because of this grim accountancy. Many of *Life*'s readers may well have believed what the caption implied—that the men were the owners of the weapons—but guns were often paired with corpses after the fact. Burrows' muted colours de-glamorize the scene of 'victory', suggesting its tawdry and brutal air in the barefoot and semi-naked bodies lying in the mud.

Similar scenes were taken during the invasion of Iraq, though rarely published at the time. The victory there was not supposed to be against shadowy, rarely seen guerrilla forces but against the large and heavily armoured divisions of a dictatorship. So the equivalent picture would be of roads lined with burning vehicles, or graveyards of Iraqi armour (fig. 91).

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[2] Gravel Edition, *The Pentagon Papers*, Beacon Press, Boston 1975, vol. IV, p. 371; the remark is much quoted; see, for example, Noam Chomsky, *For Reasons of State*, The New Press, New York 2003, p. 83.
[3] Larry Burrows, 'We Wade Deeper into Jungle War', *Life*, vol. 54, no. 4, 25 January 1963, p. 21.

Figure 2: Bruno Stevens, Baghdad, 12 June 2003. Iraqi military equipment litters the plain as far as the eye can see.

We have seen that sometimes images from the two wars looked alike, and that photojournalists in Iraq sometimes sought to echo the power of earlier images. Yet any similarity masks a deep divide between the types of killing carried out in each. In Vietnam, it was of two main types: the attempt to destroy all developed life in large areas of the North through the bombing of towns and cities, bleeding the state's ability to produce able-bodied men and women for war, and to break their will to fight. In the South, a determined and sustained campaign of genocide was waged against the peasantry who were either forced into the cities or into concentration camps by bombing, shelling and search-and-destroy missions, or were killed in those operations. In Iraq, the campaign was first a focused effort to destroy the military and state apparatus, but once that had produced widespread resistance to foreign occupation, it concentrated on fostering sectarian conflict to set the opposition at each others' throats. It also prioritised protecting US forces at any cost to the surrounding civilian population, while guarding the oil industry and Coalition enclaves, and in a few cases setting out to obliterate urban centres of resistance.

These different forms of killing reflected the utterly divergent situations in each place. In Vietnam, the political situation, at least initially, was fairly simple: the vast majority of the

population (80 per cent on polling) wanted a reunified country under the government of Ho Chi Minh.[4] The Geneva Accords, which had temporarily divided the country, had laid out provisions for elections that would bring to power a new government of the reunified nation. The US and the South Vietnamese dictatorship could hardly allow them to take place, given the probable result.[5]

Most people also opposed the corrupt and violent dictatorship kept in power by US money and force. Its supporters were mostly found among the colonial layer of Catholic Vietnamese that had been cultivated and protected by the French.[6] The peasantry were almost unanimously opposed to the dictatorship because it was an opponent of land reform, which the NLF implemented in the large areas in the South that they controlled, leading to a doubling or tripling of farm incomes.[7] Since the peasantry sustained the NLF, one way to stall the guerrilla war was to destroy those people and their way of life.[8]

Iraq, a nation fabricated from various Ottoman provinces under British mandate in 1920, and since held together by patronage, bribery and violence in a vastly complex tribal, class, ethnic, religious and political patchwork, presented a very different problem.[9] The successes of its secular nationalism, which had brought many people wealth and comfort, and had led most to identify first and foremost as Iraqis, and to extensive intermarriage across religious divides, had been put under severe pressure by decades of war and punitive sanctions. Here, the pattern of killing was quite distinct. While insouciant about Iraqi deaths, the US regime had no reason to mount a genocidal campaign, or indeed the means to sustain it, or enough control over the global media to stage-manage it without consequence.

What is more, while the term 'terrorist' was freely used for both, the enemy were utterly distinct in each case: in Vietnam, a disciplined, unified, politically aware opponent, which—with few exceptions—tested its actions against integrated political, media and military calculations. In Iraq, the resistance comprised many local groups, fissured by the myriad divisions of Iraqi society.

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[4] While of course there were many class, religious, ethnic and other divisions, this broad front against colonialism had been the aim of the Viet Minh, who prioritised achieving unity across such divides. See Vo Nguyen Giap, 'Vietnamese Victory: Dien Bien Phu', in Gettleman et al, *Vietnam and America*, p. 54.

[5] This was Eisenhower's own admission. See Fall, *Viet-Nam Witness*, p. 76; Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, Heinemann, London 1963, p. 372.

[6] See Mark Philip Bradley, *Vietnam at War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, p. 13, 85.

[7] Bradley, *Vietnam at War*, p. 96; Kolko, *Anatomy of a War*, pp. 92-5.

[8] Jonathan Schell notes that US military men were fond of quoting Mao's dictum that guerrillas are fish and the people water, arguing that 'they could catch the fish only by drying up the water.' Schell, *The Military Half*, pp. 70-1; see also Hallin, *The 'Uncensored' War*, p. 152; Turse, *Kill Anything*, p. 65.

[9] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000; the introduction notes the continual tension between state power and the aims of the particular group that wields it. See pp. 4-6 for an overview.

Taken together, it had no clear leadership, strategy, ideology or organisation. Its groups were informal, shifting, provisional and extremely adaptable.[10] So, in attempting to get a hold on the regimes of killing in each conflict, and the extent to which they were and could be represented, they must be sharply divided by type.

Bombing Vietnam

In Vietnam, a remarkable panoply of military technologies was used in a war of attrition against the enemy, the people, farm animals, crops and the land itself in a gigantic outpouring of destruction. Bernard Fall, who had long experience of the country and the failed French campaign, was held in horrified fascination by the sheer scale of the US war, in the realisation that the behemoth had the means, and perhaps the will, to destroy Vietnam rather than 'lose' it.[11]

The most important of these aspects was bombing, of both North and South. By the time of the cease-fire in January 1973, the US had dropped on Vietnam (which is a good deal smaller than Japan) triple the tonnage of the bombs dropped on Europe, Asia and Africa in the Second World War.[12] Or, as Westmoreland put it, in barbarous language, talking of B-52 strikes in the Khe Sanh area: 'Without question the amount of firepower put on that piece of real estate exceeded anything that has been seen before in history by manyfold.'[13] Much the same could be said of the wider 'real estate' of the country as a whole. The technological war promised absolute dominance, in a fantasy of instant and overwhelming force that foreshadowed the RMA. As Westmoreland boasted to Congress in 1969:

> Enemy forces will be located, tracked and targeted almost instantaneously through the use of data links, computer-assisted intelligence evaluation, and automated fire control. […] I see battlefields or combat areas that are under 24-hour real time surveillance of all types. I see battlefields on which we can destroy almost anything we locate through

[10] Burke, *The 9/11 Wars*, p. 128; drawing on Bruce Hoffman's work for RAND, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq*, June 2004.
[11] Fall, *Viet-Nam Witness*, pp. 295-306. See also Bernard B. Fall, 'This Isn't Munich, It's Spain', *Ramparts*, vol. 4, no. 8, December 1965, pp. 28-9.
[12] Karnow, *Vietnam*, pp. 430-1.
[13] Westmoreland quoted in US Air Force Fact Sheet 'B 52 in South East Asia', Secretary of the Air Force Office of Information, Washington, DC 1968, p. 3.

> instant communications and the almost instantaneous application of highly lethal firepower.[14]

This aspect of the war was not extensively depicted in photographs, and when it was, it was often from the point of view of the bombers.

Figure 3: Larry Burrows, Vietnamese Air Force American-made T-28s flying out of Da Nang; one pilot American, the other Vietnamese, watch as napalm dropped from a third plane explodes. South Vietnam, 1962.

Among photographers, Burrows was unusual in realising the importance of bombing, and was clearly enamoured with the spectacle of speed, blast and fire. He courted the United States Air Force (USAF) which, delighted with the attention, gave him extraordinary access to its operations.[15] On Burrows' colour film, traces of that apparatus of mass killing appear in all of their garish glory: the rocket trails, the orange of the napalm burst, the stark bright clouds of white phosphorus set against a multitude of greens.

[14] Westmoreland quoted in Nguyen Khac Vien, *Tradition and Revolution in Vietnam*, trans. Linda Yarr/ Jayne Werner/ Tran Tuong Nhu, Indochina Resource Center, Berkeley n.d, p. 4.
[15] See Larry Burrows, 'The Air War', pp. 44-57.

From a Cold War perspective, civilian suffering caused by the bombing was 'regrettable' but 'inevitable' and so 'tragic', the sacrifice that had to be made for a virtuous and necessary war. This is how Burrows' examination of the bombing war was presented in *Life*, which reported without comment the US military line that all precautions were being taken to avoid civilian casualties.[16] The bombing was rarely covered photographically by the Western press from the ground in either North or South Vietnam, for obvious reasons—but this was an omission of the most distinguishing feature of the conflict, for never had such force been applied against a guerrilla army or its support in a Third World state.

Very few Western journalists visited the North, which was heavily bombed. In March 1965, Johnson initiated 'Rolling Thunder', a massive and continuous bombing campaign that would last three years, delivered from fighter-bombers and B-52s, using napalm and cluster bombs as well as high explosives. The explicit aim was to cause as much damage and as many casualties as possible in an effort to 'discomfort' the Hanoi leadership.[17] The use of cluster bombs against civilian areas has no other purpose than to kill and maim people with a blizzard of pellets and flechettes. In no sense can the carpet-bombing of a B-52 strike, which approaches the destructive magnitude of a tactical nuclear weapon, be described as a discriminate use of force. Six planes would fly in formation, each carrying twenty tons of bombs, dropping them from 30,000 feet, destroying everything in a 'box' over half a mile wide and two miles long.[18]

An inhabitant of one of the most frequently bombed areas of North Vietnam, quoted by Stanley Karnow, tells of a USAF strike on his village:

> The bombing started at about eight o'clock in the morning and lasted for hours. At the first sound of explosions, we rushed into the tunnels, but not everyone made it. During a pause in the attack, some of us climbed out to see what we could do, and the scene was terrifying. Bodies had been torn to pieces—limbs hanging from the trees or scattered around the ground. Then the bombing began again, this time with napalm, and the village went up in flames. The napalm hit me, and I must have gone crazy. I felt as if I were burning all over, like charcoal, and I lost consciousness. Comrades took me to the hospital, and my wounds didn't begin to heal until six months later. More than two

[16] Tom Flaherty, 'Unprecedented Tactics, Maligned but Effective', *Life*, vol. 61, no. 11, 9 September 1966, pp. 58A-59.
[17] As stated in a memo to the President by Maxwell Taylor, *Pentagon Papers*, III, p. 356; quoted in Tirman, *Deaths of Others*, p. 142. The bombing campaign against the North went through various official phases, which are outlined in Pape, *Bombing to Win*, ch. 6. The actual practice departed greatly from these official aims and strategies.
[18] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, p. 618.

> hundred people died in the raid, including my mother, my sister-in-law and three nephews. They were buried alive when their tunnel collapsed.[19]

The bombing was systematic and often repeated. One witness of the effects on the North stated:

> […] urban civilisation had been erased in a region containing one-third or about six million of the North's population. […] Across the whole landscape, journeying far from the highway, not a single habitable brick edifice could be seen: the schools, hospitals and administrative buildings that had certainly once existed were now, just like the factories, just so many heaps of rubble.[20]

At Ha Tinh a record was kept of the bombing raids: between 1965 and 1968: there were over 25,000 of them, equivalent to a strike every hour-and-a-half for 1,500 days. The first raid in March 1965 had targeted the secondary school (which had 750 students) and the municipal hospital, which carried clear Red Cross markings.[21]

In the light of this 'strategy', it is no accident that the notorious architect of the firebombing attacks on Japanese cities in the Second World War, which obliterated virtually every urban centre in the country, also had a hand in this programme of mass murder: Curtis LeMay, in charge of the air force at this time, was a firm believer in the efficacy of 'old-fashioned, unrelieved bombing'.[22]

Although the North Vietnamese were very serious about civil defence, the US air offensive probably killed 100,000 people (definitive figures are hard to come by for reasons that will soon be apparent). They extensively photographed the bombing campaign. These images covered three main aspects of the subject: the extent of the destruction, and its targeting of civilian areas; civil defence; and finally anti-aircraft defence and its results. The last category included photographs of downed enemy aircraft and captured pilots, along with the effective mobilisation of anti-aircraft fire, which involved many thousands of people (most of them women), using a range of weapons from rifles upwards (fig. 94).

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[19] Karnow, *Vietnam*, p. 472.
[20] Michael Maclear, *Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War*, Thames/ Methuen, London 1981, p. 334. There are eerie reminiscences here of very similar accounts given of the destruction of Korea by US shelling and bombing. See Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, pp. 91-2. And of the treatment of areas of the South: see Arthur Westing, 'Sifting the Ashes of Quang Tri', *New York Times*, 29 September 1973; quoted in Turse, *Kill Anything*, p. 81; see also p. 106.
[21] Maclear, *Vietnam*, p. 335.
[22] Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, p. 489. Halberstam notes that LeMay and others wanted even heavier bombing. On Japanese casualties of the strategic bombing campaign, see Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, p. 55.

Two main constraints held the US back from LeMay's ambition to bomb Vietnam back to the Stone Age: the fear that their actions might bring the Soviet Union or China directly into the war; and the considerable losses of aircraft and crew to North Vietnamese anti-aircraft action.[23] Indeed, in 1967 Congress was informed that the economic cost of the downed aircraft exceeded that of the damage that they had inflicted.[24] Even the B-52s, the height of US bombing technology, delivering their loads from the stratosphere, were not immune, and many were lost.[25] The anti-aircraft crews were, unsurprisingly, seen as unalloyed heroes in their perilous actions against such indiscriminate killers, and their photographic depiction clearly reflected this, once again in a compact that mixed elements of Socialist Realism and French humanism.

Figure 4: Doan Cong Tinh, Militia with US plane debris, Hanoi suburbs, 1972.

[23] For this notorious ambition, see Curtis LeMay with MacKinley Kantor, *Mission With LeMay: My Story,* Doubleday, New York 1965, p. 565; LeMay later attempted to deny that he had said this, although it appeared in his own autobiography!

[24] Cecil B. Currey, *Victory at Any Cost: The Genius of Viet Nam's Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap*, Aurum Press, London 1997, pp. 252-3.

[25] The actual figures are lost in propagandistic claim and counter-claim, in particular because it is hard to know how many B-52s were brought down by enemy action, but even the Pentagon admitted to losing twenty-one, and the real figure was probably higher. On B-52 losses during the assaults on Hanoi and Haiphong in 1972, see See John Schlight, *A War too Long: The USAF in Southeast Asia 1961–1975*, Air Force History and Museums Program 1996, Washington, DC 1996, pp. 98-9.

Mary McCarthy described how Western viewers, when exposed to North Vietnamese propaganda in film, photographs, paintings and plays, easily got bored:

> it was understandable for a Westerner (especially one who is not very fond of movies) to suffer a loss of affect and then immediately feel ashamed, to look around, for instance, restlessly in a projection room during a sentimental sequence—the heroine was leaving her father to risk her life standing guard over a delayed-action bomb—and find a Vietnamese girl silently weeping in the next seat.'[26]

What appeared propagandistic to Westerners was seen as the dramatisation of actual events to Vietnamese who had experienced such things. Reinforcing the effect, the films spliced documentary footage into their stories. The North Vietnamese' defence of their land, McCarthy wrote, 'has the quality of an epic, i.e., of a work of art surpassing the dimensions of realism.'[27] This was in part because of the drama of the struggle against the mightiest power on earth, which hardly allowed for the grubby and mundane details of a Balzac to flourish, or indeed of his satirical Vietnamese equivalents; and in part due to the mechanisms of North Vietnamese censorship, which cleansed the culture of countervailing material.[28]

If some of these images seem forced to Western eyes, it is because those eyes are steeped in news values that favour a naturalism signalled by casual framing, and which are formed by the social alienation continually cultivated by the technologies of individual consumption, hierarchy and competition. Communist Vietnam stood at the polar opposite of such a regime of alienated consumption, being an impoverished war economy in which one's very survival depended, moment to moment, on the solidarity of others. It is little wonder that the effect of these pictures appears as either too overtly heroic or calmly classical, in their staging of figures across well-composed backgrounds, while their depiction of social solidarity seems impossibly idealised.

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[26] Mary McCarthy, *Hanoi*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1968, p. 97. Similar points are made in Harrison E. Salisbury, *Behind the Lines—Hanoi, December 23, 1966—January 7, 1967*, Secker & Warburg, London 1967, p. 139, who also notes that it was for the most part 'a teen-age war'.

[27] McCarthy, *Hanoi*, pp. 98-9.

[28] A famous example of Vietnamese satire in the colonial period is Vu Trong Phung, *Dumb Luck*, trans. Nguyen Nguyet Cam/ Peter Zinoman, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 2002; the frustrations of the educated with the simple, conformist culture demanded by the authorities is well expressed in Xuan Vu's account in Chanoff/ Doan, *Portrait of the Enemy*, pp. 74-84.

Figure 5: Chu Chi Thanh, Quang Trach, Quang Binh Province, 1969: hero of anti-aircraft forces, Nguyen Thi Xuan.

The anti-colonial revolution had mobilised people, who came to believe in its ideals, and were ready to make extraordinary personal sacrifices in its defence. These motives and feelings are expressed, with great power and self-awareness, in the diary of a young NLF activist and medical worker, Dang Thuy Tram, who struggled continually not only with the vast force applied against her district and medical base by the Americal Division in Quang Ngai province (one of the most heavily bombed and shelled areas of the war, much of it a free-fire zone) but also with herself, constantly striving to work harder, to be a better comrade and Communist. She writes:

> I am still a soldier in this struggle. The enemy comes, firing intensely. Still I smile and calmly go into the shelter. The enemy attacks our base. Even the nights on evasion maneuvers when I must sleep in the forest, I keep my smile. I keep it blooming even when gunships and HU-1As launch rockets down on my head… And yet, when I think of my family, of the dear ones in both parts of the country, I crumble. My heart aches, and tears fill my eyes.

> It is because my heart has been baked in the fire of war, but is still weak? It is acceptable for a revolutionary to be like this? I remember Lenin's words: 'A revolutionary has the most sentimental heart.' This is me.[29]

In the hideous conditions in which she had to live and work, the diaries show that she was sustained by the effort to unite the country, by Communist ideology, and above all by intense friendships with her comrades. There was no room for cynicism in any of this.

Figure 6: Lam Hong, Thong Nat, Nam Ha Province, September 1972: Luong Toan, 84, walks through the rubble following US bombing of the city.

[29] Dang Thuy Tram, *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace*, trans. Andrew X. Pham, Rider, London 2007, pp. 212-13. The diary was a surprise success in Vietnam, bringing to life a conflict described in dry, official language. See the introduction to the book by Frances Fitzgerald, p. xviii. The moves to a market economy in Vietnam produced a literary questioning of the war, in a series of works more suited to Western consumption. See, for example, Linh Dinh, ed., *Night, Again: Contemporary Fiction from Vietnam*, 7 Stories Press, New York 1996; Bao Ninh, *The Sorrow of War*, trans. Frank Palmos/ Vo Bang Thanh/ Phan Thanh Hao/ Katerina Pierce, Secker & Warburg, London 1993; Duong Thu Huong, *Novel Without a Name*, Phan Huy Duong/ Nina McPherson trans., London, Picador 1995.

The making and circulation of photography were a part of the war effort, and the results were not seen as autonomous news. Lam Hong's photograph of an old man standing amid the ruins of his home, destroyed by bombing, is a straightforward example: the target was plainly civilian housing, and this point is driven home by the frail man, well past military age, with his basket and cane. He is obviously aware of being photographed, and is cunningly placed so that various struts in the wreckage point towards him, and the lines of the roof centre on his head. The square frame of the medium format film (probably shot from the waist with a twin lens reflex) is used to build a quiet, subtle composition, suggesting suffering but also resilience.[30] So the social relations of which the image is a record and a performance are an overt collaboration of photographer, subject and publishers for that end.[31]

Figure 7: Van Bao, Haiphong, 1972. Le Van Ba's entire family who lived in Thuong Ly were killed in B-52 bombing.

[30] Such cameras, of which the best-known was the Rolleiflex, were much used in Vietnam as they had been among humanist photographers in France.
[31] On these collaborative relations in very different settings, see Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, Zone Books, New York 2008.

There is another strand to this photography, centred on horrific images of the civilian victims of the bombing raids. Photographers sometimes took explicit pictures of the effects of bombing—corpses half interred by rubble, wounded children, and portraits of those traumatised by repeated attacks and the deaths of loved ones. On his visit to Hanoi, Harrison Salisbury describes seeing many pictures of such atrocities in exhibitions, along with those from the battlefield, displayed for propaganda purposes.[32] They had a clear political effect. As one NVA Colonel put it of similar images taken in the South:

> We had seen pictures of the South Vietnamese people being beaten, arrested, and tortured. We had seen documentary movies of Ngo Dinh Diem's cruel suppression of the Buddhists, of people being shocked with electricity and women being raped. These pictures had built up our rage and our determination to liberate the South.[33]

After the war, many horrific photographs were displayed in the museums of the conflict, as documents of US war crimes (though many of these displays have since been toned down as Vietnam came to an accommodation with the capitalist powers).[34]

Many North Vietnamese directly experienced the horrors of the bombing, and for those who did not, the display of such pictures reinforced all that they were hearing from other people and the press. At the same time, there was ambivalence about them, which is the obverse of that in the killing for show effect: the enemy's barbarity and the suffering it caused had to be displayed but not at the cost of undermining morale. Even Vu Ba's celebrated photograph of a girl searching amid burning houses for her mother (fig. 183) was controversial because it appeared to show desperation rather than defiance, and was banned for a time.[35]

The New York Times' Harrison Salisbury was the first correspondent from a major US paper to travel to North Vietnam.[36] His reports, published in December 1966 and January 1967, on the large-scale bombing of civilian targets directly challenged US government claims about the precision of the bombing, its military efficacy, and its avoidance of civilian areas.[37] Widespread

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[32] Salisbury, *Behind the Lines*, p. 146. Some such photographs are reproduced in Bao Cuu Chien Binh Viet Nam, *Memorial of a Glorious Time*, pp. 33, 72, 146-7.
[33] Huong Van Ba interviewed in Chanoff/ Doan, *Portrait of the Enemy*, p. 155.
[34] See Page, *Derailed*, p. 26.
[35] Chauvel, *Ceux du Nord*, n.p., section on Vu Ba.
[36] For his account of getting permission, see Salisbury, *Behind the Lines*, pp. 5-9.
[37] Salisbury wrote no less than eight long articles for *the New York Times*, along with many shorter dispatches, and were prominently published over a period of three weeks. They included Harrison E. Salisbury, 'A Visitor to Hanoi Inspects Damage Laid to US Raids', *New York Times,* 25 December 1966; 'US Raids Batter 2 Towns; Supply Route Is Little Hurt', *New York Times,* 27 December 1966. See Mark Atwood Lawrence, 'Mission Intolerable: Harrison Salisbury's Trip to Hanoi and the Limits of Dissent against the Vietnam War', *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 75, no. 3, August 2006, p. 435.

vilification of the reporter followed, orchestrated by the Johnson administration, which assigned hundreds of Pentagon researchers to rebut his stories line by line.[38] In a highly unusual move, the Pulitzer Prize Board (composed mostly of publishers) went against the wishes of its jury and blocked Salisbury's proposed award. The Pentagon and more remarkably many other newspapers implied that Salisbury was guilty of treason, and even likened him to Lord Haw-Haw, the Nazi propagandist who made radio broadcasts to Britain in the Second World War, and was later hanged.[39]

The well-known Magnum photographer Marc Riboud also visited the North, though only after a year of effort and through a lucky personal contact.[40] His subsequent book attempted to give a complete view of life there, with sections on the countryside, factories, soldiers, schools, leadership and other issues.[41] Riboud did give prominence to the bombing—indeed it is the subject of the first main section in his book—including photographs of the bombing of Haiphong, and the extensive devastation of civilian areas. He also covered resistance, with portraits of a fighter ace, gunnery, a surface-to-air missile, and downed US airplanes.[42] Riboud held back from covering the worst of what he could see. On being taken to see damage by US bombers after a raid from which Riboud himself had narrowly escaped, he commented: 'I found it all rather overwhelming and was not inclined to take any photographs.'[43] Indeed, Philippe Devillers' text in Riboud's book is more telling than the photographs:

> […] schools and hospitals, pagodas and churches have been bombed as much as harbours, factories, plants, barracks, or other public buildings. Thousands of men, women and children have been killed, wounded or mutilated, often in a most horrible manner, by fragmentation bombs and other murderous devices.
>
> But the American war machine has won nothing. No political or military result has been obtained by this offensive, which has been denounced by the DRV [Northern] government as genocide.[44]

If these pictures seem unable to express the full horror and drama of that situation, it is perhaps because Riboud was being pointed by the North Vietnamese authorities to the issues its own

[38] Karnow, *Vietnam*, pp. 503-4. His reporting was secretly assessed as accurate by the CIA. See Lawrence, 'Mission Intolerable', p. 456.
[39] Knightley, *The First Casualty*, p. 416. Karnow, *Vietnam*, pp, 503-4. Atwood's sampling of the press coverage shows that the bulk of the media condemned Salisbury. See Lawrence, 'Mission Intolerable', pp. 447-52.
[40] Miller, *Magnum*, p. 222.
[41] Marc Riboud, *Face of North Vietnam*, text by Philippe Devillers, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York 1970.
[42] Ibid., n.p.
[43] Miller, *Magnum*, p. 223.
[44] Riboud, *Face of North Vietnam*, n.p.

photographers were already capturing, although he lacked the deep understanding of local conditions and close connections to the subjects that they had. Nevertheless, the book was an attempt to bring these subjects to attention in the Western media, from which the North Vietnamese photographs were largely excluded.

The US government and military made great efforts to keep their bombing operations in the dark. The campaigns against Cambodia and Laos were undeclared and illegal warfare, and thus kept secret. Yet even the mass bombing raids on the North were not trumpeted by the state, and were not the subject of the same visual PR campaign as the rest of the war. Photographers were not allowed to accompany air-strikes and there was much official concealment of the extent of the campaign and its targets.[45]

The reasons are not hard to fathom. You might make a plausible, if deceptive, case for the heroism of a GI tramping around the jungle. With fighter-bombers, too, some form of romance could feasibly be attached to their missions, since they were flown individually or in teams of two, and flew low to specific bomb targets while opening themselves to enemy fire. As we have seen, Tom Wolfe painted a prose picture, in particularly fawning and morally bankrupt terms, of the aircraft carrier pilots of the Seventh Fleet, those sporting heroes of the air who flew Phantom F4s, evading North Vietnamese air defences, to precision-bomb targets in the North.[46] Much of this was illusion, of course, and Wolfe neglected to mention—or confined to the carrier, perhaps did not know—the character of most of those targets. Harrison Salisbury saw the results of their 'precision' at Namdinh, a town that made textiles, following repeated raids:

> For blocks and blocks I could see nothing but desolation. Residential housing, stores, all the buildings were destroyed, damaged or abandoned. I felt that I was walking through the city of a vanished civilisation.[47]

As part of an assault on food supplies, the Seventh Fleet had also destroyed all the fishing boats along the coast of the Gulf of Tonkin.[48] But this, for Wolfe, could only be a matter of Salisbury being manipulated by the Communists as if, for PR purposes, they had laid on their own apocalypse.[49]

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[45] Knightley, *The First Casualty*, p. 421.
[46] Tom Wolfe, 'The Truest Sport', in Bates, *Reporting Vietnam*, pp. 270-301.
[47] Salisbury, *Behind the Lines*, pp. 99-100.
[48] Ibid. p. 119.
[49] Wolfe, 'The Truest Sport', p. 284.

Many in the West, not least the bombers themselves, were utterly blind to the consequences of the campaign. Peter Weiss went to North Vietnam and interviewed a captured US pilot, shot down on a bombing run. In answer to Weiss' questions, he seemed entirely unreflective, insisting on the obligations of duty, and even claimed ignorance of the effects of the cluster bombs his plane carried.[50]

Figure 8: Philip Jones Griffiths, US Air Force, 1966.

[50] Weiss, *Notes on the Cultural Life*, p. 163.

Photographers were permitted to work on board the carriers, showing the coming and going of the fighter-bombers, their pilots and the technical apparatus with which they were supported. Sometimes—from Burrows, for example—this yielded bright, technophile pictures, if not of sport exactly, then of neutral efficiency. Griffiths' photographs laid out a more prosaic vision of the carrier-bound bombers, and the perverse labour that went into the loading of bombs, and the shuttle in and out of aircraft with their lethal loads. His pilot, far from being the clean-cut sporting types of Wolfe's imagination, or the high-tech operatives of Burrows, looks grimy and wearied at the prospect of another shift. Judging by the decoration of his helmet, he has no illusion about the nature of his job.

Figure 9: USAF Boeing B-52F Stratofortress (s/n 57-0162, nicknamed 'Casper the Friendly Ghost') from the 320th Bomb Wing dropping Mk 117 750 lb (340 kg) bombs over Vietnam.

But at least the fighter-bombers were not those factories of the stratosphere, with their crew of six, dropping their bombs from 30,000 feet, beyond the range of most anti-aircraft weaponry, and obliterating entire areas without a semblance of discrimination—of those, the less said, the

better.[51] Photography and film of the B-52s made by the USAF showed their power in sublime, technophile displays, far removed from the chaos, fire and blood left in their wake.[52]

Bombing in Secret

In addition to the semi-public bombing of North Vietnam, the US launched two secret and colossal long-term bombing campaigns against Cambodia and Laos. Both were extraordinarily intensive and indiscriminate, and both were photographed very little. Their secrecy was necessary since, aside from being illegal, they sought to produce military and above all political effects by bombing alone, to destroy radical movements by obliterating the societies from which they grew. Secrecy and intensity were bound in a tight and extraordinary spiral: that so vast an operation could have been kept secret for so long—of Cambodia from 1965-73, of Laos even longer—suggests a pliant press, and a military culture of deep conformity and subservience.[53] The scale of the bombing defies description if not enumeration.

For Cambodia, the official figures showed an intensification of the bombing of the campaign as it continued, towards a crescendo of destruction in violation of Nixon's eventual promise to Congress that it would be scaled down. B-52s and fighter-bombers dropped unimaginable quantities of bombs onto this small, agrarian country. In the Second World War, the campaign that devastated almost every Japanese city used 160,000 tons of bombs. Yet the official figures show that for Cambodia, the total tonnage dropped by the end of the bombing in August 1973 was over 500,000, almost half of it in the last six months, hitting thousands of square miles of fertile and densely populated land.[54] Very large scale maps were used by the air force, despite their requests for more detailed ones. As William Shawcross recounts, William Harben in the US Embassy in Phnom Penh:

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[51] The only weapons that could touch them were Soviet-supplied SAM 2 missiles. The first B-52s were shot down in September 1967. See the account in Phùng Thê Tài, *Remembering Uncle Hô*, Thé Giói Publishers, Hanoi 2005, pp. 205-13.

[52] The B-52s were rarely glimpsed amid the glorification of the war; but in its late stages, so divisive had the bombing strategy become—particularly as it was extended to the most densely populated urban areas of North Vietnam, that even *Life* carried a story about the futility of the bombing and the war generally, and the casualties in both parts of the divided country. Jon Saar, 'Report from the Inferno', *Life*, vol. 72, no. 16, 28 April 1972, pp. 27-36.

[53] On the press acceptance of US denials, see Daniel Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, Penguin Books, New York 2002, pp. 330-1.

[54] William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia*, Fontana, London 1980, pp. 272, 297. The figures may be an underestimate and have been subject to dispute. See Taylor Owen, 'Bombs Over Cambodia', *The Walrus*, October 2006, pp. 62-9; see http://thewalrus.ca/2006-10-history/; and Ben Kiernan/ Taylor Owen, 'Making More Enemies than We Kill? Calculating U.S. Bomb Tonnages Dropped on Laos and Cambodia, and Weighing Their Implications', *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Volume 13, Issue 17, no. 3, 27 April 2015, pp. 1-9.

> […] cut out, to scale, the "box" made by a B-52 strike and placed it on his own map. He found that virtually nowhere in central Cambodia could it be placed without "boxing" a village. "I began to get reports of wholesale carnage", he says. "One night a mass of peasants from Saang went out on a funeral procession. They walked straight into a 'box'. Hundreds were slaughtered."[55]

The numbers of dead, maimed and wounded will never be accurately known because the bombing often took place where there were no authorities to count, and was repeated, churning up the graves and destroying corpses. Estimates of fatalities begin with the low hundreds of thousands.

Out of this holocaust, which had torn up old social structures, divided and obliterated families, and caused widespread shock, grief and trauma, stepped the Khmer Rouge, an armed band—most no more than teenagers—determined to eradicate every trace of the taint brought by the West and modernity itself. Their attitude to journalists and photographers was utterly different from the NLF, and before this difference was realised, many went to their deaths there—including Gilles Caron, Sean Flynn and Dana Stone.[56] The genocidal bombing campaign was, then, barely photographed, except in military images made from the air. Cambodian peasants had no photographic equipment, the Cambodian state under Lon Nol was complicit in the bombing, and many of the photojournalists who went there were killed.[57]

Laos was also the target of a sustained bombing campaign, conducted in deep secrecy, which was meant to disrupt the supply lines of the NLF and to destroy the Pathet Lao, a leftist guerrilla force that had gained much support in the country. Like the NLF, the Pathet Lao was a largely peasant movement that offered land reform, education and greater equality for women.[58] As in Vietnam, the solution to this political issue was to drive the peasantry out of existence—but, as in Cambodia, through bombing alone. It protected US lives, since it was conducted against people who had no defence against such attacks, at the price of immense 'collateral' damage.[59]

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[55] Ibid., p. 272.
[56] See Peter Arnett, 'Do Not Forget the Missing', in Faas/ Page, *Requiem*, pp. 259-63.
[57] Taylor Owen, 'A Spatio-Historical Analysis of the US Bombardment of Cambodia, 1965-1973'; http://www.taylorowen.com/Articles/06_GIS_Bombing_Analysis.pdf; this article includes maps of the bombing which shows villages in the target zones.
[58] These are common themes of the interviews collected in Fred Branfman, ed., *Voices from the Plain of Jars: Life Under an Air War*, Harper Colophon Books, New York 1972; for a RAND analysis of Pathet Lao doctrine and organisation, see Joseph Jermiah Zasloff, *The Pathet Lao: Leadership and Organization*, Lexington Books, Lexington MA 1973.
[59] Alfred W. McCoy, 'America's Secret War in Laos, 1955-75', in Marilyn B. Young/ Robert Buzzanco, eds., *A Companion to the Vietnam War*, Blackwell, Malden, MA 2002, p. 309. McCoy also surveys the main US literature on the Laos bombing, noting its remarkable blindness to the character of the campaign.

Here, plainly—and as in Vietnam—the term falls into absurdity since collateral damage was the very purpose of the assault.

For over nine years, rural settlements in northern Laos were subjected to repeated bombing, strafing and poisoning. Villages were levelled and burnt by bombing, napalm and white phosphorus.[60] Particularly from 1968 onwards, the aim was the systematic destruction of all villages and harvests so as to cause famine.[61] As one farmer put it:

> […] our lives became like those of animals desperately trying to escape their hunters. […] When looking at the faces of my children who were losing the so very precious happiness of childhood, as each and every day we would seek escape somewhere in the forest, I would grow increasingly miserable because of the war and hate it more and more.[62]

Another talked of the destruction of all houses, cows and buffalo: 'Until everything was levelled and you could see only the red, red ground.'[63]

Laos became very intensively bombed with (once again) more bombs dropped there than on Germany or Japan in the Second World War.[64] People tried to remain on their land, in the most terrible conditions, hiding in underground shelters or caves from the bombing as it systematically destroyed their crops, livestock and homes. As in Vietnam, for those who did flee the land, refugee camps offered poor land, bad food, sickness and frequent death.

While it relied on the same genocidal strategy, this was the shadow war to the killing for show campaign in Vietnam. It was being waged without the sanction—or even the knowledge—of Congress. The existence of the bombing campaign was long denied by US officials, and journalists were not allowed to fly on missions or talk to pilots. Reports of it did reach Western journalists, but they chose not to pursue them.[65] The regions where this murderous campaign was conducted were remote, and the people had no means to talk about their experiences to the wider world.

Fred Branfman, an aid worker on educational projects in Laos, was the first to draw Western attention to the bombing. When he talked to Laotians, conducting thousands of interviews, they

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[60] Branfman, *Voices from the Plain of Jars*, p. 5.
[61] Ibid., p. 19, citing the UN advisor, George Chapelier.
[62] Ibid., pp. 42-3.
[63] Ibid., p. 127.
[64] McCoy, 'America's Secret War, in Young/ Buzzanco, *A Companion to the Vietnam War*, p. 307.
[65] Harrison Salisbury is told in detail of the campaign by a 'foreign Communist'. Salisbury, *Behind the Lines*, pp. 35-7.

all had similar stories to tell: of a concerted strategy of repeated bombing and strafing intended to make rural life impossible by targeting people, farm animals, crops and buildings. The aim was to drive people off the land by terror and starvation, to kill any that remained, and to revisit any populated settlement again and again until the task was completed. In pursuit of that aim, no savagery was forbidden.

Figure 10: Unknown artist, An old woman went to get rice for her children. From Fred Branfman, *Voices from the Plain of Jars*.

Since the victims had no cameras, Branfman had them draw what had happened. Their pictures show the attacking jets, the falling bombs, the machines guns firing on fleeing peasants and their animals, the napalm attacks, the fallen and the wounded. Waged in secret, against a people who generally lacked the means to record the crimes against them, it is a similar scenario to the drone campaigns, which are only now possible in areas where people are too poor and remote to be able to use social media. Perversely, the one has been used as a precedent in an attempt to legally justify the other.[66] Aside from these drawings, the visual record of the Laos bombing is confined

[66] Zsombor Peter, 'Bombing of Cambodia Cited to Defend US Drone Strikes', *The Cambodia Daily*, 10 February 2013; https://www.cambodiadaily.com/archives/bombing-of-cambodia-cited-to-defend-us-drone-strikes-9642/

to aerial photographs of numerous craters—and of the deceptively calm, stately photographs of bombers, releasing their sticks of bombs that hang frozen in the air.[67]

Such campaigns of extermination from the air were the logical end of a longer colonial project. It is still often believed that the Nazis were the ones to let the genie of the aerial bombing of civilians out of the bottle, in the sense of using it as a pure weapon of terror without military pretext. They were the first to do it in Europe but, as with much else, they merely brought back techniques of repression from the colonies—including the concentration camp and genocide itself.[68] In 1932 at the Geneva Disarmament Conference, it was the British who blocked a widely supported draft agreement to outlaw such bombing. They did so on the grounds that it was needed for 'colonial pacification'.[69] Bombing had indeed become a standard means of terrorising opponents in the colonies, and was used by the British in India and Iraq, by France in Syria, and by Spain, Italy and Japan.[70] In 1930 France had also put down a Vietnamese insurrection with ruthless suppression, using aircraft to strafe demonstrators and to bomb one village—incidents that are still remembered there.[71]

Of the bombing campaign against Japanese cities in the Second World War, in which McNamara had a role, he was later asked whether the strategy was 'proportional'.[72] This concept appears in the Geneva Conventions, which state that an attack causing loss of life, injury to civilians or destruction in civilian areas is a war crime if it is deemed excessive in relation to the specific military advantage gained.[73] While the judgement of proportionality is meant to be geared to each particular situation, and does not provide a hard and fast rule of conduct, in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, the question answers itself.[74]

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[67] On the very limited Lao photography of the time, see Zhuang Wubin, *Photography in Southeast Asia: A Survey*, NUS Press, Singapore 2016, p. 232.For a photographic coming to terms with the current consequences of the bombing, see Karen J. Coates/ Jerry Redfern, *Eternal Harvest: The Legacy of American Bombs in Laos*, ThingsAsian Press, San Francisco 2013.

[68] On the history of such camps, see Khalili, *Time in the Shadows*, pp. 172-83. On the links between Nazi genocide and German actions against the Herero in South-West Africa, see Domenico Losurdo, *War and Revolution: Rethinking the 20th Century*, trans. Gregory Elliott, Verso, London 2015, p. 246; David Olusoga/ Casper W. Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism*, Faber & Faber, London 2010, pp. 11-12, 284-91.

[69] Ian Patterson, *Guernica and Total War*, Profile Books, London 2007, pp. 105-6.

[70] Ibid., pp. 105-8. See also Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, trans. Linda Haverty Rugg, Granta Books, London 2001, section 140. In the book as a whole, Lindqvist recounts various colonial bombings of civilians in the interwar period; on the British bombing of Iraq in 1923, see sections 112-13.

[71] Brocheux, 'Interview', p. 79.

[72] McNamara asks this question in Errol Morris' film, *The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara*, 2003.

[73] First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of 1977, Article 51, para. 5b.

[74] On the concept and application of proportionality, see Weizman, *The Least of All Possible Evils*, pp. 12-13.

Bombing the South

The use of bombing in South Vietnam was very different. Mary McCarthy acutely characterised the contrasting effects that the war had on the North and the South. In the North, the bombing was countered by a vast and remarkable programme of dispersion which decentralised and concealed industries, medical facilities, schools and many other activities in the countryside. In the South, bombing was part of an equally vast programme of enforced urbanisation which concentrated people in the cities. Both in different ways profoundly affected people's lives, by eroding traditional social structures (and in their polar divergence, added social divisions to a nation subject to an artificial political divide).[75]

In the North, Cambodia and Laos bombing was the primary, and often the only, military and political instrument. In the South, bombing was part of an overall strategy of attrition, forced displacement, confinement and extermination. While many areas of the South were carpet-bombed and subject to large-scale artillery and naval bombardment, there was also much targeted killing and destruction from the air.

There were supposed to be strict rules about where such force could be applied, as negotiated with local government officials. In a brilliant exposé of the actual conduct of US bombing and artillery use, Jonathan Schell showed that the system was deeply corrupted, and in any case regularly ignored by pilots and commanders. While pilots blowing up houses, huts and sheds, burning crops or slaughtering people in the countryside told themselves all sorts of tales about their preternatural ability to sniff out the enemy, these were merely exculpatory masks laid over the face of arbitrary killing. The targets were often any built structure, or any person seen outside in a particular area.[76] The Bomb Damage Assessment Reports were supposed to enumerate military structures and the number of bombs that fell on target. Yet, since the guerrillas usually found refuge underground and very rarely constructed purpose-built structures above ground, the term 'military structure' was retrospectively applied to any building that the pilots happened to bomb.[77]

Bombing in the South was merely one device of extermination, and was complemented by artillery, helicopter and gunship fire, all used freely and on a massive scale. A large majority of bombing and shelling was essentially random. In the widespread practice of 'unobserved strikes',

[75] See for example her description of the bombing and the relocation of hospitals that had been targeted, McCarthy, *Hanoi*, pp. 73-6.
[76] Schell, *The Military Half*, especially pp. 125-50.
[77] Ibid., pp. 179-80.

or 'harassment and interdiction' fire, areas were attacked blindly on the assumption that the enemy was present. In 1966, such strikes made up 65 per cent of US bombing at a cost of more than $2 billion.[78] Or there was the 'tactic' of 'reconnaissance by fire', which meant shooting into a building or area to see if anyone fired back. Many civilians were killed this way.[79] In 1967, an article in *Life* magazine claimed that the cost of killing a single guerrilla was $400,000, which included the cost of 75 bombs and 150 artillery shells.[80] Over the course of the war, US forces fired nearly 7,500,000 tons of artillery shells.[81]

Military and government officials admitted that they had no other strategy to fight the guerrillas than attrition—as much of the environment and its inhabitants as of the guerrillas themselves. William DePuy, Westmoreland's chief of operations, told Keyes Beech of the *Chicago Daily News*: 'We are going to stomp them to death', adding, 'I don't know any other way.' Or as DePuy put it to Daniel Ellsberg: 'The solution in Vietnam is more bombs, more shells, more napalm … till the other side cracks and gives up.' Westmoreland himself, asked by Neil Sheehan about civilian casualties caused by the bombing posed, replied: 'Yes, Neil, it is a problem, but it does deprive the enemy of the population, doesn't it?'[82]

The US military, incredibly, measured its success by gathering statistics about how many bombs and shells had been used, how many leaflets had been dropped, how many tons of defoliants had been sprayed and rice handed out.[83] The entire war was pursued in a systematic, quasi-scientific matter, underpinned by the truly capitalist faith that if enough money was spent, the desired ends would surely materialise.

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[78] Chomsky, *For Reasons of State*, p. 78, note 143 on p. 159. Chomsky is citing a defence of McNamara's methods, which gives this figure. See Alain C. Enthoven / K. Wayne Smith, *How Much is Enough? Shaping the Defense Program 1961–1969*, Harper & Row, New York 1971, p. 305. See also Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, p. 153.
[79] Ellsberg, *Secrets*, p. 165.
[80] Robert Sherrod, 'Notes on a Monstrous War', *Life*, vol. 62, no. 4, 27 January 1967, p. 22.
[81] Turse, *Kill Anything*, p. 91.
[82] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, pp. 568, 619, 621.
[83] See Schell, *The Military Half*, p. 179.

Figure 11: Philip Jones Griffiths, MACV HQ, Saigon.

This was McNamara's data war that applied Fordist management methods in a corporate number-crunching and audit system geared to destruction, as if military action could be graded and counted like car sales. It was built on sand because at all levels there were strong incentives to fake the data so that no one knew who was being killed and maimed, or what was being destroyed, or to what effect. Once again, Griffiths was one of the few photojournalists to realise the significance of this computable layer of illusion and to try to depict it.

The other main indicator of progress was the body count. Given that the holding of territory was not at issue, the production of corpses became the major index of success. Officers who did not achieve satisfactory body counts were replaced and units that performed well were rewarded with leave and other inducements. The pressure to achieve high counts was enormous. As Philip Caputo, an infantry officer, put it:

> Our mission was not to win terrain or seize positions but simply to kill [...] Victory was a high body count, defeat a low kill ratio, war was a matter of arithmetic.[84]

[84] Quoted in Bilton/ Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, p. 38. See also Fall, *Viet-Nam Witness*, p. 311.

Officers whose units were not meeting their quota of corpses would keep them in the field longer, hoping that exhaustion and frustration would put their troops in a killing mood.[85] As with 'military structure', any corpse added to the tally was judged to be an enemy fighter. There were numerous ways of gaming the system, including digging up bodies from graveyards which, vile though it was, lay at the gentler end of this fraud.[86]

Soldiers could hardly engage in such mass killing without believing that their targets were less than human. The military machine fed off the racism that many US soldiers brought with them into training, where it was reinforced and institutionalised, and became an integral part of the war's conduct.[87] One veteran said:

> I couldn't believe Americans could do things like that to another human being… but then I *became* that. We went through villages and killed everything, I mean *everything*, and that was all right with me.[88]

An essential part of military desensitisation in training was to depict the enemy as sub-human, especially by saying that they do not care about life as we do.[89] Instructors always used derogatory names for the Vietnamese, and did all that they could to stop soldiers thinking of them as people, and to regard them as animals.[90]

The language of sport was turned to describe killing missions—scores, hunting, quarry and prizes. The media, close to the military in everything, reflected such talk in their accounts. On TV, the enemy were regularly described as 'vermin' and the areas that they occupied as 'infested'.[91] Colonel George S. Patton III sent out a Christmas card with photographs of dismembered NLF fighters stacked in a pile with the motto 'Peace on Earth', and carried about a skull at his Vietnam farewell party.[92]

In all of this, the founding genocide of the US state was continually invoked. Politicians, diplomats, the press and the military constantly compared the enemy to Native Americans. Territory in which the NLF was strong was habitually referred to as 'Indian country'.[93] Herr

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[85] Turse, *Kill Anything*, pp. 43-4.
[86] Greiner, *War Without Fronts*, pp. 278-9.
[87] That racist attitudes at home correlated with support for the war was not lost on King. See Martin Luther King, 'Declaration of Independence from the War in Vietnam', *Ramparts*, vol. 5, no. 11, May 1967, p. 33.
[88] A veteran cited in Fred Turner, *Echoes of Combat: The Vietnam War in American Memory*, Anchor Books, New York 1994, p. 28.
[89] See Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, p. 236.
[90] Turse, *Kill Anything*, p. 28, 49-50.
[91] Hallin, *The 'Uncensored' War*, pp. 145, 158.
[92] David Remnick, 'Introduction' to Hersh, *Chain of Command*, p. xi; Knightley, *First Casualty*, p. 387.
[93] Turner, *Echoes of Combat*, p. 20; Greiner, *War Without Fronts*, p. 143.

recounts a Marine captain who characterised search-and-destroy operations as playing 'Cowboys and Indians'.[94] Helicopters were (and remain) named after near-exterminated Native-American tribes—Apache, Chinook, Iroquois, Kiowa, Sioux; the names of military operations often bore the same resonances—Comanche Falls, Apache Snow, Navajo Warhorse and so on.[95] As John Tirman argues, the insistent reference to the 'Indian wars' were meant to place soldiers in the familiar moral scenario of the Western, in which the enemy were savages whose violent extermination would serve civilisation.[96] This noxious and genocidal culture was and is so ubiquitous that it appears to many as an anodyne invocation of identity and truth while Native Americans live daily with its continual and largely unthinking celebration.[97]

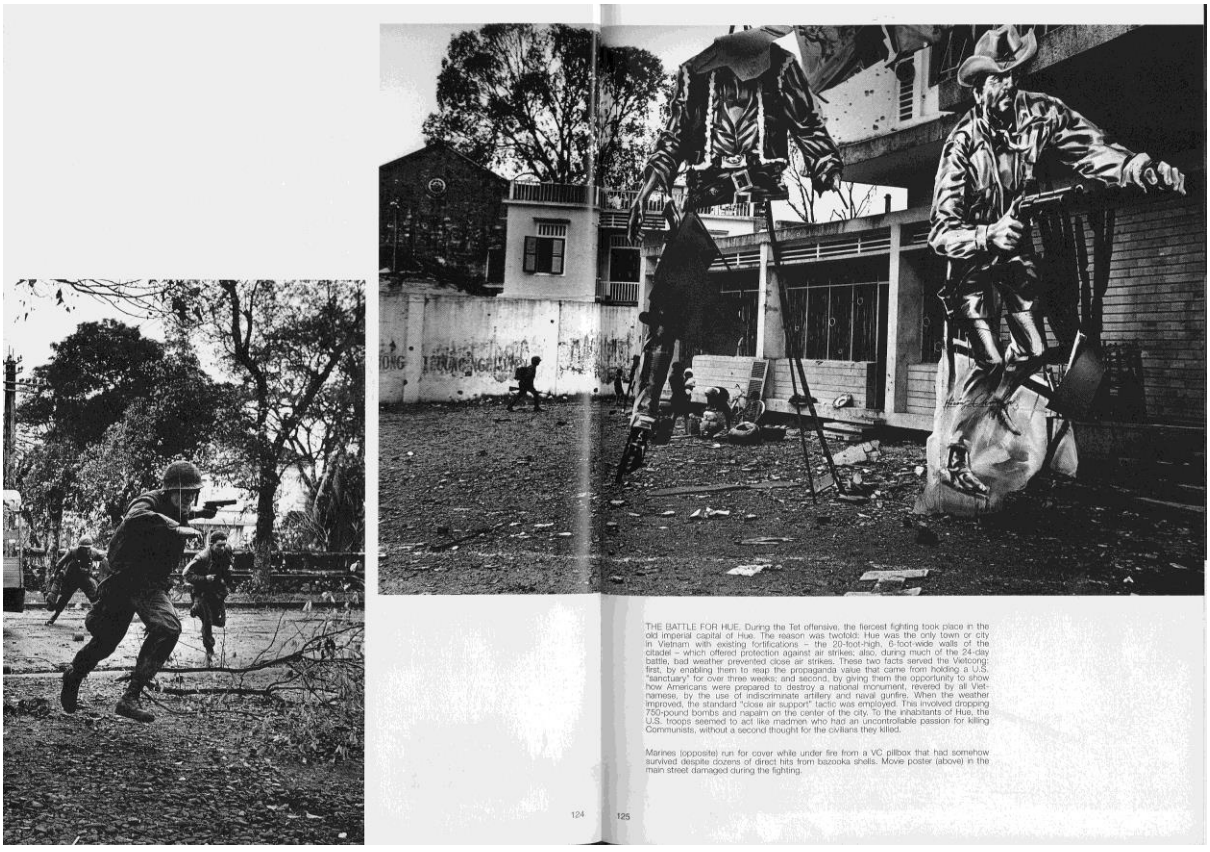

Figure 12: Griffiths, page spread from *Vietnam Inc.*, 1971.

[94] Herr, *Dispatches*, p. 55.
[95] On helicopters, the point is made in Alasdair Spark, 'Flight Controls: The Social History of the Helicopter as a Symbol of Vietnam', in Walsh/ Aulich, *Vietnam Images*, p. 89. On operations, see Greiner, *War Without Fronts*, p. 108.
[96] Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, p. 122.
[97] For a brilliant visual and verbal analysis, see *The American West*, curated by Jimmie Durham and Richard William Hill, Compton Verney, Warwickshire 2005.

In a juxtaposition of images across the page in *Vietnam Inc.*, Griffiths illuminated the cowboy fantasy of many US troops. He also implied its ramshackle and ruined character when faced with the manifestly corrupted and squalid war, a matter that was soon to backwash into the Western itself with films such as *Little Big Man* and *Ulzana's Raid*.[98]

Racism was strong enough to trump class and privilege. Schell also quotes an exasperated ARVN Colonel, Hoang Dinh Tho, complaining about US bombing, saying that it is absurd that the Civil Affairs Office builds a village and the Operations Office then destroys it, and that ARVN troops return home on leave to find their homes destroyed and families killed. The US bombs hit rich and poor without discrimination:

> The rich man is the VC's enemy. We should protect him. But now he has two enemies: the VC and the Americans who bomb all the houses.[99]

There was indeed a strong element of class war in Vietnam: the peasantry and the poor versus the privileged post-colonial elite and war profiteers who were entirely dependent on US force. Yet, from the US side, it was a class conflict so blinded by racism that it could not even distinguish and protect its own allies from the people as a whole.

Destroy and Search

The other main engine of the destruction of the peasantry was so-called 'search and destroy' missions conducted by US troops. These photogenic operations were one of the mainstays of Western reporting, providing at their best a series of emotive sketches well-suited to the media: character studies of stressed but resilient troops, fire amid picturesque villages and farmland, distraught and 'tragic' peasants, and captives bowed in submission. Much was seen and much remained hidden—above all, the overall strategy into which these missions were built.

[98] *Little Big Man* (1970) was directed by Arthur Penn; *Ulzana's Raid* (1972) by Robert Aldrich.
[99] Schell, *The Military Half*, p. 165.

Figure 13: Dana Stone, Soldiers of the US First Air Cavalry Division point their weapons at villagers who they flushed from the bush along the riverbank, Operation Irving, Bong Son, October 1966.

So in the clean visual version, US troops approach a village. If they are fired upon, they respond with devastating force, often calling in air attacks and destroying the entire area. If not, they question villagers, and search huts and underground shelters. They may find weapons or supplies, take prisoners and conduct interrogations.

There are fundamental choices that a photographer will make when placed in a situation that they do not control: where to place the camera, and when to release the shutter. The point where the photographer chooses to stand can say much, as in a photograph by Dana Stone in which he takes the typical position of the photojournalist: behind the troops with whom he is embedded. We see this position again and again, in photographs by Eddie Adams, Gilles Caron, David Douglas Duncan, Catherine Leroy, and in thousands of spot-news photographs. Photographers taking this position were with the troops and saw what they saw.

Figure 14: Tim Page, First RAR Trooper, Rung Sat 1966.

By contrast, in a photograph taken with Australian soldiers under US command who were conducting search-and-destroy missions, Tim Page goes inside a hut and looks out to see the

machine-gunner in the doorway: a simple way of taking the viewpoint of the civilian, to stand at the wrong end of the gun barrel, and to register the threatening and alien intrusion.[100]

Figure 15: Larry Burrows, Yankee Papa 13, March 1965: coming into the landing zone, Farley returns fire.

Search and destroy was very often backed up with helicopters, which raked target areas with fire before the troops went in. Burrows rode with a helicopter gunship, in making a famous story for *Life*, focused on US troops and their trauma at the death of one of their own.[101] The story is centred on the expressive face of Lance Corporal James C. Farley (whose fresh looks appealed to the photographer), and his transformation from gung-ho adventurer at the start of the mission to grieving collapse at the end.[102] Burrows went to considerable lengths to get a view of the machine gun from outside the helicopter by mounting the camera on a rig made for the purpose inches from the muzzle, and shows Farley in charge of the weapon, his face lit up with glee.

[100] Page was accompanying the First Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment.
[101] Larry Burrows, 'One Ride with Yankee Papa 13', *Life*, vol. 58, no. 15, 16 April 1965, pp. 24-33.
[102] Russell Burrows, in Burrows, *Vietnam*, p. 100.

While this is the same look back at the invader as in the Page, the view here is not one that a civilian—or anyone else in normal circumstances—could see. To take the position of the peasant under the rocket and mini-gun fire that poured from these engines would have been suicidal; so how to approach the subject?

Figure 16: Tim Page, Overflying the Cambodian-Vietnamese Border, 1969.

Page shows the view from the gunship, dwelling not on its inhabitants but on the dominance of the machine-gun over the landscape. Such a photograph, if you read around it, summons up accounts of free-fire zones where soldiers were permitted to shoot anything that moved—and did so regardless of age, sex or even species, gunning down buffalo and elephants. Or of places where the rules of engagement changed, so that at one time the soldiers could shoot anyone who ran, another time anyone who froze in a game of 'air sports' which many pilots and gunners plainly relished.[103]

[103] Herr, *Dispatches*, p. 55.

The unsanitised version of the search-and-destroy missions was rarely depicted, though sometimes described. In free-fire zones, everyone was a fair target since by definition there were no innocent civilians.[104] Thousands of people were killed this way, along with their farm animals to cause starvation among the survivors. Even outside the free-fire zones, no-one—no matter what age or sex—was safe.

Figure 17: Richard Merron, Untitled, Vietnam, *c.* 1966.

As Herr put it, the description 'search-and destroy' had it the wrong way round, and the actual practice was to 'pick through the pieces and see if you could work together a count.[105] Soldiers would often plant weapons and ammunition on dead civilians to avoid awkward questions about the disparity of corpses and arms, or torch the scene or mutilate bodies beyond recognition to conceal evidence of their murderous behaviour.[106] Such acts were far from rare. As Nick Turse notes, while a huge number of court-martial records have been destroyed or gone missing, what

[104] Turse, *Kill Anything*, p. 60.
[105] Cited in Turse, *Kill Anything*, p. 51.
[106] Turse, *Kill Anything*, p. 48; Greiner, *War Without Fronts*, p. 177.

remains shows that atrocities were committed by members of every infantry, cavalry and airborne brigade and division deployed in Vietnam.[107]

The wider strategy was hardly secret. Westmoreland spelt out its aims directly, saying that the decision facing peasants was simply one of life or death: US operations were meant to make the option of staying put on their own land and serving neither side impossible.[108] It was rather that the consequences of this baldy stated strategy were registered only slowly by many in the US. The rural Vietnamese were either killed, imprisoned in the camps, or driven into the cities, where they mostly lived in shanty towns. In all, during the American War in the South, four million people were uprooted, a quarter of the population.[109]

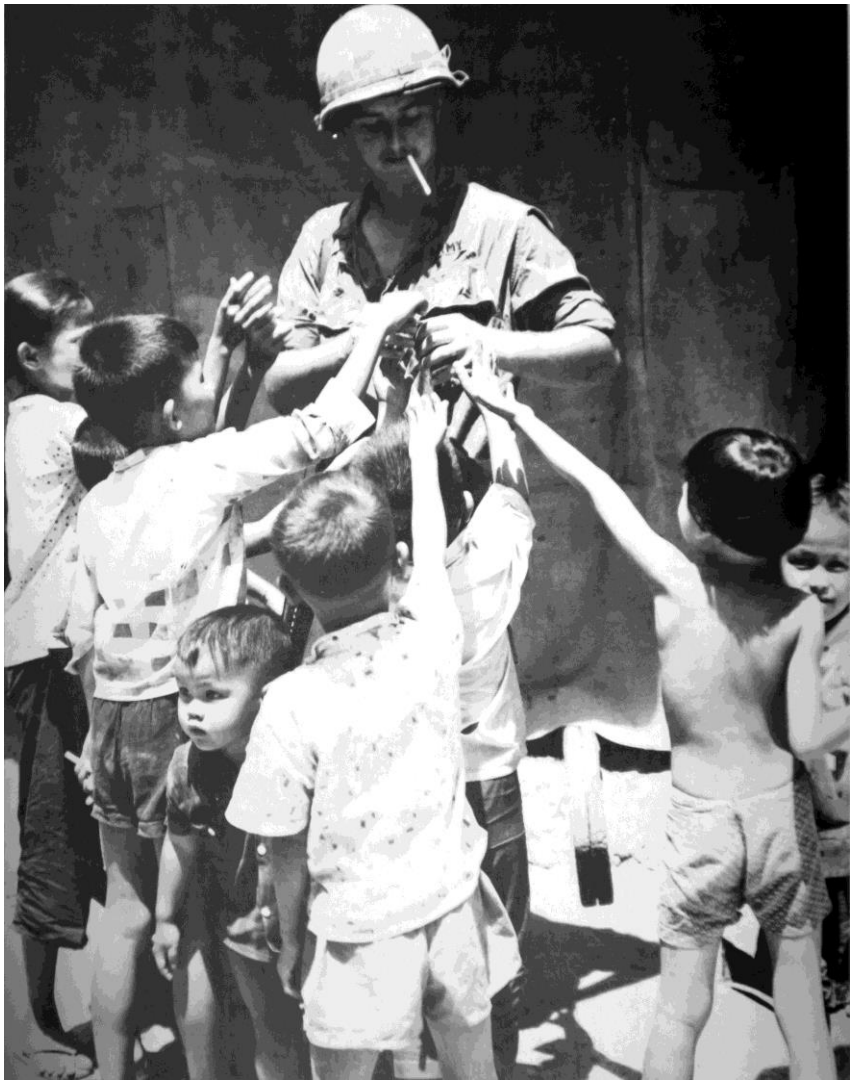

Figure 18: Sp4 George J. Denoncourt II, An infantry officer of the 1st Infantry Division hands out treats to children in Lai Khe, north of Saigon, n.d.

[107] Turse, *Kill Anything*, p. 21.
[108] Ibid., p. 64.
[109] Bradley, *Vietnam at War*, p. 118; Karnow, *Vietnam*, p. 454.

Nick Turse notes that it was the weird inconsistency in the behaviour of US and Korean troops that made little sense to the peasants. Sometimes they would pass through their villages handing out sweets—there are plenty of pictures of that! (fig. 107)—sometimes burning homes, and sometimes murdering anyone that they could find.[110] Yet this inconsistency reflected the double aspect of killing for show and other forms of propaganda, directed at different audiences. Charity and the clean kill for the press; for the locals, something else entirely.

People were tortured, raped and killed in front of their loved ones to give object lessons in the consequences of resistance or non-cooperation. Bodies were abused and mutilated in extravagant ways. Women were a particular target as troops subjected them to brutal sexual violence—once again publicly in an act of terror—before they were murdered and mutilated. Company insignia were left with corpses, or they had the letter C (for 'Charlie') carved into the skin. The details are recorded in many places.[111] But of these matters, it is hard to say more. As Bertrand Russell put it in his investigation of the crimes, 'the tale is sickening. I cannot bear to tell the whole of it—nor could you bear to listen.'[112]

Much of this took place without the presence of the press. Yet part of the shock of the Tet offensive was how this strategy of destruction stepped into unambiguous light. In the towns and cities, and before camera and TV lenses, the indiscriminate use of weaponry was put on flagrant display, and something of the sheer scale of the killing was revealed. The attitude to the Vietnamese people was famously encapsulated in a single phrase when USAF Major Chester L. Brown said of Ben Tre: 'It became necessary to destroy the town in order to save it.'[113]

One place where this large-scale killing became particularly visible was Hué. It was an important city, strategically and symbolically, an ancient centre of power in Vietnam, the seat of its royalty, and a venerated historical monument. During Tet, it was seized by NVA and NLF troops who held it against US attack for two weeks, inflicting heavy casualties on the Marine assault force, before retreating (fig. 108). It was an extremely rare pitched urban battle, which allowed photographers a remarkable set of opportunities, and many of them—McCullin, Griffiths, Leroy and Sawada—made some of their most striking images there. Leroy, as we have seen, was captured by the NVA, leading to an unusual opportunity to photograph the enemy. McCullin,

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[110] Turse, *Kill Anything*, pp. 132-3.
[111] Such acts were widely recorded at the time—for example in Bertrand Russell, *War Crimes in Vietnam*, Monthly Review Press, New York 1967; Falk et al, *Crimes of War*; Felix Greene, *Vietnam! Vietnam! In Photographs and Text*, Fulton Publishing Company, Palo Alto 1966; and in much literature since.
[112] Russell, *War Crimes in Vietnam*, p. 88.
[113] See Griffiths, *Vietnam Inc.*, pp. 120-1.

out of touch with his newspaper, left after nearly two weeks with 'thirty rolls of the most powerful film I've ever taken in my life' (figs. 66 and 168).[114]

Figure 19: Anon., bodies of dead and wounded soldiers litter the streets of Hué as a corpsman calls for assistance for his colleague, February 1968.

McCullin's work was mostly focused on intense combat in the city, and on the Marines' struggles with a form of fighting for which they had no training, plan or doctrine.[115] Similar pictures were taken by John Olson in a story for *Life* magazine that was celebrated at the time but missed much of the wider story.[116] Sawada also dwelt on the beleaguered Marines, adrift amid the chaos and their heavy casualties, but did photograph the colossal ruination of the city. Griffiths in word and image commented on the vast destruction, and the extraordinary disproportion of fire and response. Hué was shelled from US battleships, which targeted sniper's positions with naval guns launching 750 pound shells.[117] By the time US forces had finished, 70 per cent of the city's

[114] McCullin, *Shaped By War*, p. 80.
[115] Eric Hammel, *Marines in Hue City: A Portrait of Urban Combat, Tet 1968*, Zenith Press, St Paul, MN 2007, p. 13.
[116] John Olson, 'The Battle That Regained and Ruined Hué', *Life*, vol. 64, no. 10, 8 March 1968, pp. 24-9.
[117] Griffiths, *Vietnam Inc.*, p. 134.

homes had been destroyed and almost all looted, and huge numbers of people driven out.[118] It was, as Griffiths noted, a very public demonstration of how the US had no compunction about destroying a revered national monument.[119] Even David Douglas Duncan, whose main concern, as always, was the plight of US troops, objected to the destruction:

> We Americans pounded the Citadel and surrounding city almost to dust with air strikes, napalm runs, artillery and naval gunfire and the direct cannon fire of tanks and recoilless rifles—a total effort to root out and kill every enemy soldier. Christ! The mind reels at the carnage, cost—and almost fanatical ruthlessness of it all.[120]

He went on to say that if the body count is taken as the measure of victory, then 'genocide' is threatened.

The People and the Land

Aside from these operations of direct violence, two other main strategies were used to destroy the peasantry: imprisoning them in 'strategic hamlets' (fortified settlements in which the peasantry were supposed to be kept safe from the NLF), and despoiling the land. Nguyen Ti Tho wrote of the entire programme:

> First, they sent aeroplanes to bomb the villages. Then troops to attack the villages. Finally, bulldozers to destroy completely all the people's houses. The homeless were then forced into these strategic hamlets, built through their own forced labour.[121]

Such places were an innovation of a number of colonial regimes at the opening of the twentieth century, including Britain during the Boer War.[122] They were also used by the British in their counter-insurgency campaign in Malaysia (which was of particular interest because it was one of the rare instances of a clear victory against a guerrilla revolt), and they were employed by

[118] You can still read accounts of the battle that praise US forces for dislodging the enemy in such difficult circumstances, as if it was some Napoleonic triumph of brilliant tactics; the fact that the city was effectively flattened is underplayed. An example is Hammel, *Marines in Hue City*.
[119] Griffiths, *Vietnam Inc.*, pp. 129, 125.
[120] Duncan, *I Protest!*, n.p.
[121] As quoted in Russell, *War Crimes in Vietnam*, pp. 174-5.
[122] Khalili, *Time in the Shadows*, pp. 174-5.

successive South Vietnamese dictatorships under US supervision.[123] Millions of people were forced at gunpoint from their land, and driven into these fortified enclaves.[124]

The camps were meant to protect the population from the enemy (in the double sense of protecting them from violence and ideological contamination), and through expenditure on modernisation projects (schools, roads and clinics) transform the peasantry into pliant citizens and consumers.[125] This makes some sense of McCarthy's surreal description of a Marine colonel hoping to manage the locals with PsyOps techniques, who wished to erect a monumental bronze-painted dollar sign in the middle of his model hamlet.[126] It also points to the essential carrot-and-stick dichotomy in counter-insurgency theory: to persuade through development and to intimidate with acts of violence.[127]

Yet aside from a few showcase camps, it is remarkable how far the development side was neglected. The refuges were far from what they purported to be. In a fine exposé, Mary McCarthy identified the strategic hamlets by their right name, 'concentration camps', describing places where people were herded behind barbed wire in terrible conditions, malnourished, ravaged by disease, and subject to informers and interrogation.[128] The camps were grossly over-crowded and squalid. People starved slowly, falling ill from malnutrition and lack of sanitation, and were denied medical attention.[129]

The prisoners were forced to pay high taxes, and to work without recompense, while men of military age were conscripted into the ARVN. Troops commonly raped women in these supposed havens.[130] Naturally, many peasants preferred to risk their chances of death by bombing or shooting than the certainty of the hunger, disease, oppression and filth that awaited

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[123] The Malaysian example was of particular interest to the Diem regime. See Tang, *A Vietcong Memoir*, p. 46. Robert Thompson, an architect of the Malaysian 'New Villages' was brought in as an adviser in the strategic hamlets programme. See Khalili, *Time in the Shadows*, p. 31-2, 52. For Thompson's own critique of US policy in Vietnam, see his book, *No Exit from Vietnam*, David McKay Company Inc., New York 1969.

[124] See Kolko, *Anatomy of a War*, pp. 134, 136-7. It is hard to know exactly how many people were forced into these camps, or for how long they stayed. There was a welter of statistics, but as with other aspects of the war, they were thoroughly corrupted.

[125] One origin of this thinking lies in the work of Joseph Gallieni, and was partly formulated in response to a revolt in Vietnam in the 1980s. See Khalili, *Time in the Shadows*, pp. 19, 25, 177, 211.

[126] Mary McCarthy, *Vietnam*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1967, p. 78.

[127] Khalili, *Time in the Shadows*, p. 4.

[128] McCarthy, *Vietnam*, p. 41.

[129] Bradley, *Vietnam at War*, p. 119.

[130] Ibid., p. 175.

them in the concentration camps.[131] As Sartre put it, the choice being offered was between 'a violent and immediate death and a slow death from mental and physical degradation.'[132]

Figure 20: Philip Jones Griffiths, Phu Quoc, 1967: government poster attached to the barbed wire fence of a 'refugee camp' that serves a reminder of the constant hazards of rural life.

Griffiths indicates the false choice clearly in a photograph that shows a propaganda poster, along with a glimpse of conditions behind the barbed wire. As he points out, the poster was a fiction: no village would be suicidal enough to fly an NLF flag, and not doing so was no protection against bombing. The woman with her baby, trapped in a bare concrete enclosure behind the wire, speaks of the positive draw of the life that the peasants had led before their imprisonment.[133] Griffiths notes that the slogan above the gate of one forced resettlement camp was 'Welcome to Freedom'; it's not so far from 'Arbeit macht Frei'.[134]

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[131] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, pp. 686-7; see also Turse, *Kill Anything*, p. 63.
[132] Jean-Paul Sartre, 'On Genocide', in Falk et al, *Crimes of War*, p. 542.
[133] Deep cultural and religious attachments to the local land and to the ancestors buried there were other reasons to stay. See Weiss, *Notes on the Cultural Life*, p. 23; Frances Fitzgerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam*, Macmillian, London 1972, pp. 9-10, 143-4.
[134] Griffiths, *Vietnam Inc.*, p. 89.

Figure 21: Vu Ba, driving through the poisonous chemical barrage at Truong Son, 1969.

The other assault was against the land itself. One way to ensure that the peasants would not try to return to their land was to destroy its fertility. A short-term and widely used solution was to burn crops and settlements with flamethrowers and napalm. A more permanent solution was to use vast bulldozers, known as Rome ploughs, to scrape away the topsoil and uproot trees. In 1969 half a million acres of forest were destroyed this way.[135] Finally, defoliants which were sprayed over millions of acres of jungle and agricultural land alike in colossal quantities had a doubly murderous effect: they stripped cover from the forests, and destroyed crops, causing

[135] Chomsky, *For Reasons of State*, p. 227.

starvation (fig. 110). A RAND study found that for every ton of rice denied the guerrillas, five-hundred civilians went short of food.[136] As one witness to Russell's War Crimes Tribunal said:

> Whenever they see green on the soil, they come to kill the crops, to cut off the source of life of the people and to cause famine and epidemic, in addition to the painful disease and death resulting from the chemical.[137]

Exposure to the chemicals could also cripple and kill. The most notorious of them was Agent Orange, which contained dioxin, known even then to be a dire and persistent poison.[138] Many people, especially children, died at the time of the spraying; many more were to do so later, and the genetic malformations caused by dioxin affect many Vietnamese born today. There are estimated to be a million of these victims, whose needs cannot be properly met by the impoverished Vietnamese state.[139]

Figure 22: Philip Jones Griffiths, Ho Chi Minh City, 1998. Deformed foetuses preserved in formaldehyde at the Tu Du Hospital.

[136] Khalili, *Time in the Shadows*, p. 314; citing A. Russo, 'Statistical Analysis of the US Crop Spraying Program in the South', RAND Corporation, Santa Monica 1967.
[137] Russell, *War Crimes in Vietnam*, p. 144.
[138] Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, p. 161; see also Griffiths, *Agent Orange*, pp. 164-6.
[139] Griffiths, *Agent Orange*, p. 53.

One of Griffiths' trio of books about Vietnam is devoted to the long-term effects of Agent Orange in a photographic investigation of the lives of people who have suffered malformation, and of those who look after them. It opens with terrible, bleak photographs of the still barren and poisoned land. Even now, in many places the effects persist as, after repeated sprayings, the impoverished soil can sustain nothing more than what has become known as 'American grass'.[140] Pursuing the story over three decades, and at first finding it very hard to get his photographs published, Griffiths' book is hard to look at. It has sections about stillborn foetuses kept in jars, and the many instances of terrible debility. Yet much attention is also paid to medical staff, devoted carers, and to the resourcefulness of the victims themselves, who find ways to live and work, and even campaign for compensation from the US.

Conventional bombing left its own environmental legacy. Vietnam had an estimated 21 million bomb craters at the end of the war. These were the 'footprints of America' that Johnson proudly boasted about leaving.[141] Much agricultural land was lost to cultivation, soil was eroded, and irrigation systems disrupted. Millions of acres of forest were also lost to the bombing.[142] It is telling that the US military personnel who became ill from handling Agent Orange have been compensated, but not those who were its targets. Not a penny of compensation has been paid to set against this rapacious damage, despite lengthy legal cases, and only under pressure from Vietnamese and US activists, forty years later, have some funds been dispersed to begin cleaning up the polluted and still dangerous land.[143]

The Death Squads

The final element in the overall strategy to destroy the peasantry was the notorious Phoenix assassination programme. Targeted killing was widely used by the NLF against regime officials, and it was carried out with extreme care, calculating the likely political and military implications, and usually against corrupt and unpopular government officials. Such actions were elaborately planned to make sure that the right person was killed without harming anyone else.[144] The NLF depended, after all, on the support of the peasantry, and carelessness or political miscalculation would rebound against them.

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[140] Ibid., p. 20.
[141] See Howard Zinn, *The Zinn Reader: Writings on Disobedience and Democracy*, Seven Stories Press, New York 1997, p. 283.
[142] Turse, *Kill Anything*, pp. 93-4.
[143] Marjorie Cohn, '40 Years On, the Vietnam War Continues for Victims of Agent Orange', *Counterpunch*, 17 December 2015.
[144] Trinh Duc in Chanoff/ Doan, *Portrait of the Enemy*, p. 97.

US-led assassinations could hardly compare, not least because in many areas there was little distinction between the mass of the peasantry and the NLF, so the possibility of a discriminate programme of killing was undermined. A Phoenix handbook, advising on targets for seizure, interrogation and killing, included a broad sweep of the population—anyone who paid taxes to the NLF or helped them in any way, and any 'members of the populace' in NLF-dominated areas—who comprised the so-called Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI).[145] Assassination was, in any case, a supplement to and never a replacement for mass killing, and was applied corruptly, incompetently and profligately.

As a precursor to Phoenix, from 1964 US officials had backed a terror campaign against the NLF, organizing ARVN troops into death squads. The corpses of their victims were left on public display, along with a paper print of an eye. In an indication of the scale of the programme, the US Information Service printed 50,000 of these.[146] This was the all-seeing eye, which embodied an ambition to terrorise civilians into believing that they were under continual surveillance. It was a technique tried out by counter-insurgency pioneer Edward Lansdale, in the Philippines, where agents would sneak into villages at night to paint the eye from the Great Seal of the US on walls facing the houses of suspects.[147]

The CIA assembled Phoenix assassination teams from NLF defectors and hardened criminals, which were backed up with US Special Forces' squads.[148] It was yet another exercise in the accountancy of death, with a quota which demanded that 3,000 VCI be 'neutralized' every month.[149] Phoenix required village authorities to fulfil these quotas, which they did by classifying all corpses as 'Viet Cong', and by implicating those innocents who could not afford to pay them off. By the time the programme was wound down in late 1971, *The New York Times* reported that over 20,000 civilians had been killed, a figure echoed by official sources.[150]

Phoenix death squads did not just kill but spread terror through extreme acts of torture, sexual violence and mutilation. Their Vietnamese agents, under CIA supervision, used dogs to maul prisoners, raped them with foreign objects and subjected them to electric shocks. They also conducted many false flag operations, terrorising civilians and blaming their atrocities on the enemy. Bodies were mutilated—often by cutting out the liver or nailing calling cards into the

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[145] Khalili, *Time in the Shadows*, p. 146.
[146] Browne, *The New Face of War*, pp. 119-20.
[147] Douglas Valentine, *The Phoenix Programme*, William Morrow and Co., New York 1990, p. 62.
[148] Maclear, *Vietnam*, p. 355, citing Frank Snepp, a CIA agent attached to the US Embassy in Saigon between 1969 and 1971.
[149] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, p. 732. Valentine gives a lower figure of 1800 per month. *The Phoenix Programme*, p. 13.
[150] Valentine, *The Phoenix Programme*, pp. 289, 303.

skull to pierce the pituitary gland—playing on Vietnamese beliefs that spirits with such incomplete corpses could never reach the afterlife.[151]

Jeff Stein and Bart Osborn, two US Army intelligence officers who had worked for Phoenix, tried to expose the programme in the face of governmental indifference. Osborn finally got his Congressman to conduct a Senate hearing in 1971, in which he testified:

> I never knew in the course of all these operations any detainee to live through his interrogation. They all died. There was never any reasonable establishment of the fact that any one of those individuals was, in fact, cooperating with the Viet Cong, but they all died and the majority were either tortured to death or things like thrown out of helicopters.[152]

Congressman Ogden Reid asked: 'They all died?', to which Osborn reiterated: 'They all died.' Aside from the incentives to gather corpses, no matter whose, the intelligence on which the Phoenix teams were meant to act was basically flawed, since the 'known VCI' lists that came from command lacked the diacritical marks which would have allowed them to firmly identify individuals.[153] A Pentagon study of 1970-71 found that 97 per cent of those targeted by Phoenix had been of 'negligible importance' to the enemy.[154] Unsurprisingly, the operation was labelled mass murder by the anti-war protesters.[155]

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[151] On these beliefs, see Bradley, *Vietnam at War*, p. 138; Valentine, *The Phoenix Programme*, pp. 61-2.
[152] Alexander Cockburn/ Jeffrey St. Clair, *White Out: The CIA, Drugs and the Press*, Verso, London 1998, p. 237; see also Maclear, *Vietnam*, p. 358.
[153] Valentine, *The Phoenix Programme*, p. 228.
[154] Ian F.W. Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies: Guerrillas and their Opponents Since 1750*, Routledge, London 2001, p. 202.
[155] Karnow, *Vietnam*, pp. 616-7.

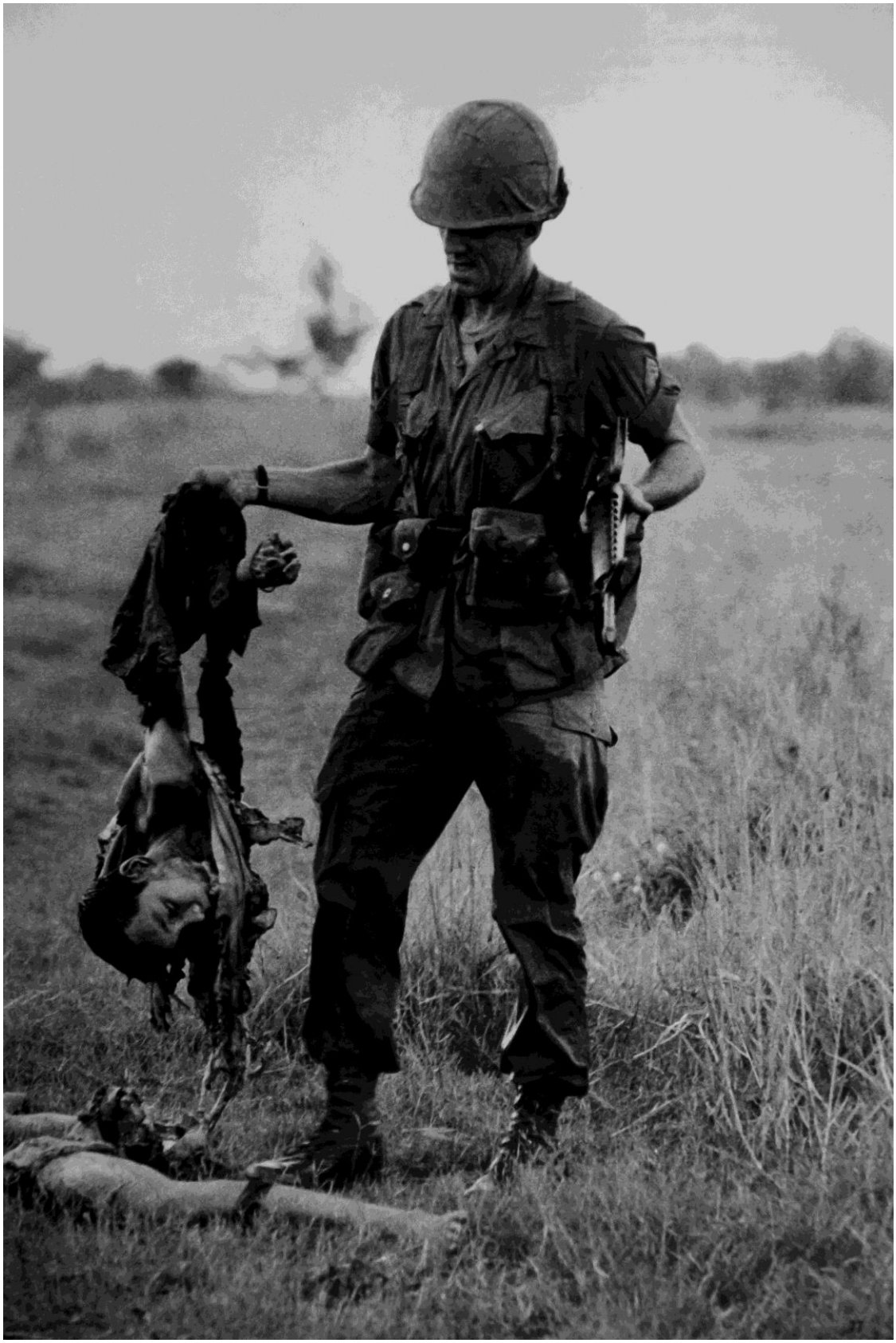

Figure 23: Bunyo Ishikawa, Tây Nihh, 1967: a grenade launcher had hit the torso of an NVA soldier. A US soldier, proud of the effect, gathers the body parts.

The Phoenix teams worked in secrecy, of course, beyond the reach of the press. Yet they also collaborated closely with Army units in some of their killing campaigns, including Operation Speedy Express.[156] So while there is little direct photographic record of Phoenix activities, their exemplary violence, designed for local show, was of a piece with more public military terror operations, and there are occasional photographs of those—usually taken by those who owed no fealty to the occupying forces. It was one thing to photograph the results of such actions, and quite another to unearth their causes.

[156] Greiner, *War Without Fronts*, p. 259.

Chapter 12: Depicting the Guilty

Photography is usually much better at showing effects than revealing causes. This is particularly so in modern combat situations, even when they are staged to be seen. At the level of individual actions, we have seen that the enemy was almost never photographed by Western photojournalists except when captured or dead. The effects of fire and those doing the firing are hardly ever shown in the same frame. It is easy to show the dead and the wounded but very hard to show who was responsible. Bullets and shells in flight are invisible to the naked eye and most camera equipment; soldiers use cover and camouflage, and rarely welcome the photography of close-quarters killing.

Figure 24: Tim Page, Twelve-year-old mini-gunned by US choppers in the abattoir near Y-bridge, mini-Tet, Saigon, 1968.

In a telling incident on the outskirts of Saigon during the Tet Offensive at which Griffiths and Page were both present, a dead child was loaded onto a truck, as her distraught brother looked on. Both took pictures, Griffiths publishing the scene in black and white, Page in colour.

Page tells us that the girl was twelve years old, and also tells us what we cannot see: that she had been shot from a US helicopter. Griffiths says the same, and adds that when *The New York Times* published his picture, it implied that there was no proof that the child had been killed by US forces.[1] The cause could be asserted but not directly shown. Given the influential promulgation of official lies about 'oriental' insouciance in the face of death, very conventional mourning pictures, which have long formed a genre in photojournalism and which are often used to conservative purposes, here took on a radical tinge: of claiming rights for their subjects.

In getting at causes, the best photographers can do is to work with reporters or to write their own words to give narratives of what has taken place, for which pictures may be used as props and uncertain forms of evidence. Or, after the fact, photography may work forensically with investigators to sift through the physical remains to gather evidence of causality and scale: unearthing graves, fragments of munitions, identity documents and possessions to establish patterns of violence, and the identities of victims and perpetrators.[2]

In Vietnam, where a persistent and intensifying extermination was in train, photographers were faced with a seemingly intractable problem: how to show, beyond the myriad of particular events, pattern and system. Single pictures, no matter how accomplished and powerful, could suggest little of the novelties of this war. This is the point at which the various levels of censorship—internal and external—bore with the greatest weight on the war's image-making. As we have seen, there were many levels of censorship and gate-keeping to prevent inconvenient images being published: the formal censorship of the South Vietnamese regimes; White House and Pentagon bullying; the de facto rules of the troops; and above all (for much of the war) editors imbued with establishment perspectives, a belief in the Manichean divide of the Cold War, and who were accustomed to cosy, mutually beneficial relations with the state.

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[1] Page, *Tim Page's Nam*, pp. 14-15; caption on p. 120. Griffiths' picture appears without a caption in *Vietnam Inc.*, pp. 118-19. The Magnum site carries this caption: 'VIETNAM. The Saigon fire department had the job of collecting the dead from the streets during the Tet offensive. They had just placed this young girl, killed by US helicopter fire, in the back of their truck, where her distraught brother found her. When *The New York Times* published this photograph, it implied there was no proof that she was killed by American firepower. 1968.'

[2] This became a model particularly in the disputes over killings in Bosnia and Kosovo, and has since become a widespread photographic practice. See the discussion in Kennedy, *Afterimages*, pp. 118-27. And for an example of such work, Fred Abrahams/ Gilles Peress/ Eric Stower, *A Village Destroyed, May 14, 1999: War Crimes in Kosovo*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2001; some of the work of Susan Meiselas on the issue of Kurdistan contains this element. See Meiselas, *Kurdistan: In the Shadow of History*, second edition, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2008; and Kristen Lubben, ed., *Susan Meiselas: In History*, International Center of Photography, New York / Steidl, Göttingen 2008, ch. 3. The forensic view has been given theoretical rigour and practical application in the work of the Goldsmiths research agency, Forensic Architecture, led by Eyal Weizman. For examples of such work on photography, see Thomas Keenan/ Eyal Weizman, *Mengele's Skull: The Advent of a Forensic Aesthetics*, Sternberg Press/ Portikus, Frankfurt am Main 2012; and Eyal Weizman/ Fazal Sheikh, *The Conflict Shoreline: Colonization as Climate Change in the Negev Desert*, Steidl, Göttingen 2015.

Many photographers either fully supported the war, and only wished to show its glories, or believed that the atrocities that they witnessed were justified in the great global struggle against Communism. All, no matter what their political views, were aware of the difficulties of making, let alone publishing, photographs that disrupted such views. Wire-service photographers had many stories of horrible pictures that they had taken and were never published: Horst Faas of the AP had photographs pinned up on the walls of his office that the service would not touch—severed heads floating in a river, a face with gouged eyes, a severed hand hanging from a piece of string, an NLF suspect being tortured.[3] As we have seen, Faas favoured the suppression of such pictures even when he had taken them himself (as of US troops playing football with severed heads).[4]

The suffering of individual Vietnamese civilians could be shown and published, so long as the causes of that suffering remained vague. At least until Tet in 1968, in mass media depictions these were generally assumed to have been wounded or killed by the NLF or perhaps, through some accident, by US or ARVN forces. US soldiers and, as the war developed, ARVN troops had a better idea of what photography could show and do, and they had their own ideas of what should and should not be depicted, and how they should be portrayed. ARVN troops were conscripted, or press-ganged from the destitute on city streets, paid below subsistence level, and led by openly corrupt officers. The vast majority of them were little attached to the war's continuance, and may have seen photojournalism as acting against it.[5] US Army troops, increasingly rebellious and cynical about the war's aims and conduct, may also have sometimes allowed critical images to be made.

[3] Knightley, *The First Casualty*, p. 408; Moeller, *Shooting War*, pp. 404-5.
[4] Arnett, *Live from the Battlefield*, p. 174. See Faas's account in which he supports this action: http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/node/38274 [accessed 8 December 2014]
[5] See the account of Chuck Allen on the ARVN's military performance, in Santoli, *To Bear Any Burden*, pp. 98-9; on press-ganging, Edward Brady, in the same volume, p. 121. On the condition of the ARVN generally, see Bradley, *Vietnam at War*, pp. 119-20, 154-5.

Figure 25: Tim Page, Recon track crew with NVN arm bone from Ambush Alley, 1968.

When the troops permitted, photographers could show looting and trophy-taking, which were carried out systematically by both ARVN and US soldiers.[6] US troops were assiduous souvenir and trophy hunters who would regularly mutilate bodies in order to take trophies. Page took a relatively mild example (fig. 114). The collection of body parts—ears, bones and skulls,

[6] Griffiths says that in the looting during Tet in Saigon, the AVRN first took everything that could be carried, the US coming later anything that could be loaded into an armoured personnel carrier—fridges, TV sets and so on. *Vietnam Inc.*, p. 143.

typically—was standard, and was sometimes officially encouraged as an aid to the body count. Customs officials examining parcels sent by US troops to family and friends would regularly find such souvenirs.[7]

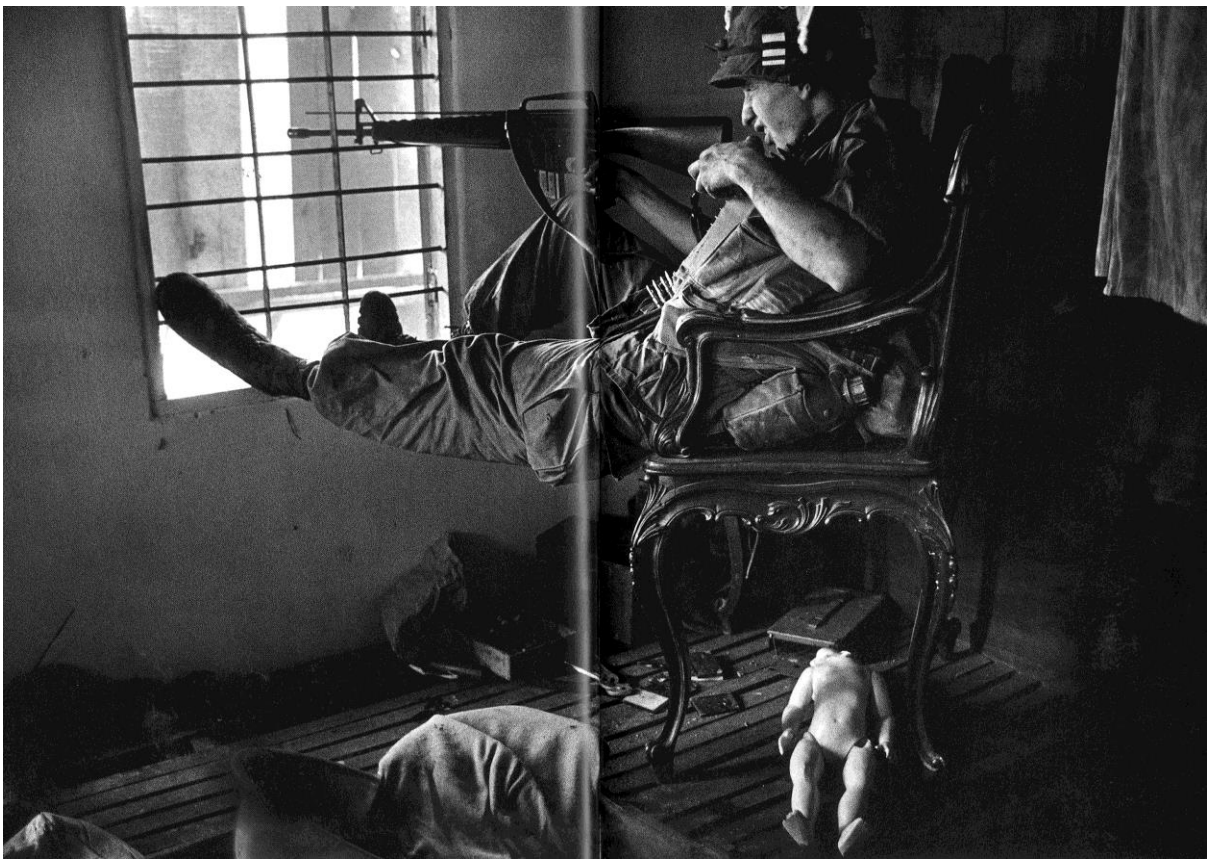

Figure 26: Philip Jones Griffiths, The Battle for Saigon, 1968.

To get around the problem of widespread if inconsistent censorship by the killers, and the ability of photography to depict only single incidents, critical photographers needed to show what they knew to be the case: that US and ARVN soldiers were not merely killing civilians by accident but deliberately, systematically and brutally. In *Vietnam Inc.*, Griffiths has a short section on child casualties of the war.[8] Once again, we can tell that the children have been killed or wounded but not how. In one photograph taken during the Tet Offensive, Griffiths implies what he could not show: the frequent slaughter of children, not in any sense by accident but by line-of-sight

[7] Greiner, *War Without Fronts*, pp. 170-1.
[8] Griffiths, *Vietnam Inc.*, pp. 148-51.

weapons. Even the insouciance with which such killing was conducted is suggested in the way that the rifleman has made himself comfortable.

Figure 27: Jean Bertolino, Rach Kien, 1965.

Sometimes, and especially among French and Japanese photographers who had some prospect of publishing such images, more direct brutality was shown. Jean Bertolino, a photojournalist working for the Catholic newspaper *La Croix*, gave testimony to the International War Crimes Tribunal, at which he submitted his photographs into evidence. He described the assault on Rach Kien, a town close to Saigon in which the NLF could find support. The town was bombarded and occupied, and part of it was declared a free-fire zone. After US troops were shot at, a punitive expedition was organised composed of US and ARVN units. The latter returned with four NLF suspects who were paraded in front of a crowd in the town centre and then publicly beheaded. The killers, proud of their work, put cigarettes into the mouths of the dead,

and urged Bertolino to take pictures.[9] According to the photographer, US Marines put up one of his pictures on the wall of their training centre to harden new recruits leaving for Vietnam, while the East-German propaganda services made thousands of copies, distributing them to the Western tourists.[10]

Even when atrocities and killings could be directly shown, it was hard to build into photography an idea of causality and responsibility. Viewers might put down the worst scenes shown to psychotic renegades, or to the entire political and military apparatus; but how could either view be read from the photographs themselves? Much, as always, depended on the interpretative frame, which could be as local as the caption, or as large as the world-view of the onlooker.

The problem of representing cause and responsibility was compounded by the many methods by which the military concealed their crimes. While the US armed forces assiduously counted the bodies of those that might plausibly be called the 'enemy', they made no such record of civilian casualties, suppressing this information or, when they were made to say something about it, grossly under-reporting the real numbers.[11] Military authorities did their best to bury cases of crimes, locking away documents, dragging out investigations over many years, intimidating and corrupting witnesses by threatening their jobs, bullying their friends and families, or subjecting them to overt surveillance.[12] Bernd Greiner, whose research on the Army records of reported crimes showed them to have been committed by every unit, also shows that cover-up was as standard as criminality: the Army 'respect for the laws of warfare and the Rules of Engagement were only demonstrated by the vigour with which the documents were falsified.'[13]

The issue was made considerably more complicated by the tight binding together of individual and systematic elements. Powerful political forces protected the wealthier and the educated from the draft. Conscripts were drawn disproportionately from poorer segments of US society, and dominated particularly at lower levels by men from the South, many of whom brought with them its martial traditions and racism.[14] As more and more troops were dispatched to Vietnam, the US Army found its pool of working-class men running low. In 1966 Robert McNamara, in a highly cynical piece of PR, presented the lowering of Army standards on the grounds of

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[9] Jean Bertolino, 'Report on American Conduct of the War in the South', in Falk et al, *Crimes of War*, pp. 329-32; see also Jean Bertolino, *Au sud et au nord du 17e parallèle: Vietnam sanglant, 1967-1968*, Stock, Paris 1968, pp. 40-2.
[10] Jacques Borgé/ Nicolas Viasnoff, *L'Aristocratie du reportage photographique*, Balland, n.p. 1978, p. 234.
[11] Turse, *Kill Anything*, p. 12.
[12] Ibid., p. 243.
[13] Greiner, *War Without Fronts*, p. 280.
[14] Eighty per cent of the soldiers were from working class and/ or ethnic minority backgrounds. See Kennard, *Irregular Army*, p. 8. See also Maclear, *Vietnam*, p. 315. Richard West observed Confederate flags flying from 9th Division tank turrets during the Tet Offensive. See *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 17.

criminality and mental debility as 'Project 100,000', a programme that was focused on those he called the 'subterranean poor'. In admitting people who failed to meet the qualifying standards with the lure of socialisation and training for future civilian life, the US would have its troops, who would return from war to ghetto transformed into useful citizens. In fact, the 'Moron Corps', as it became known in the Army, were used as cannon fodder, being more likely than other soldiers to enter combat and become casualties.[15] As we shall see, similar policies were revisited to deal with the recruitment crisis caused by Afghanistan and Iraq, with worse consequences.

Later in the war, some US soldiers turned on military authority and testified against the system of killing, admitting their own crimes.[16] Much worked against such dissent: the brain-washing and personality breakdown that constitutes military training; the cultivation of racism and sexism among the troops; the profound divide of language and culture between occupiers and occupied; the rage caused by the death of comrades; and, above all, the collective ethos of the unit. Individuals did sometimes resist this system of hatred and violence by mutiny, desertion and even by killing officers. Yet the pressures to conform were enormous: new troops were bloodied on their first patrols during which they were strongly urged to mistreat civilians, kill prisoners and mutilate corpses.[17] Those who refused—let along those who threatened to report the maltreatment—faced the threat of death by fragging.

As the Army began to break down as a cohesive force, and such refusals became widespread, a deeply contradictory counter-culture emerged: one which displayed peace symbols, refused to engage the armed enemy, threw itself into a narcotic daze, but still gloried in killing and sexual violence in a downward spiral of self-conscious degradation, simultaneously revelled in and reviled.[18] As we have seen, that dark, paradoxical culture found its photographic poet in Tim Page (fig. 60).

Photojournalism is necessarily local and momentary. The higher the level of responsibility for a particular act, the harder it is to depict in such photography. It could, as we shall see, play an important role in building a case against the commanding officers of a unit which had committed terrible crimes. It had little to say about the higher echelons, let alone about those civilian and

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[15] Turse, *The Complex*, pp. 163-4; see also Kennard, *Irregular Army*, pp. 139-40. There is no evidence that people drafted into the armed forces under Project 100,000 were any more likely than other soldiers to engage in misconduct. Greiner, *War Without Fronts*, p. 115-16.
[16] See Vietnam Veterans Against the War, *The Winter Soldier Investigation*.
[17] Greiner, *War Without Fronts*, pp. 130-1.
[18] The culture is described in Herr's famous account, *Dispatches*, Picador; see particularly the chapter, 'Illumination Rounds'.

military strategists who set the entire mechanism in motion. In book form, it could be done—and was by Felix Greene, Griffiths and Ishikawa, all of whom built photographs into structures to show pattern, repetition and order, as well as the savagery of individuals and small units. These accounts assemble very large numbers of photographs in themed sections to show through repetition the patterns of the war.[19] They also use text extensively alongside pictures, and structure their many pictures to produce a narrative. Greene was a journalist who did much reporting about Asia, including China, and later travelled to the North, meeting Ho Chi Minh. His book, which clearly stated that it was putting the case against the US war in Vietnam, assembled coruscating photographs, including NLF and NVA work, to produce an account of French colonialism and its defeat, the Southern dictatorships, the NLF, bombing in the North, and the whole brutal conduct of the war.[20] It included a gruesome section on torture by US and ARVN forces, using images by Sawada (fig. 69) and Flynn, along with others showing water torture and an NLF suspect having his stomach sliced open with a knife.[21] Each of these books, precisely because they presented a concerted view which struck against mainstream platitudes, could be dismissed as propaganda within the standard Cold War frame.

My Lai

There is one infamous event where photography did show the details of a slaughter and played a role in assigning blame: the massacre at My Lai.[22] It took place in Quang Ngai province, which had been subject to the attentions of Task Force Oregon, which had destroyed 70 per cent of the homes in this area, where 17,000 people lived. All this was, as usual, cloaked under a fiction of free choice: leaflets, a million a day, were being dropped on the province, with messages such as:

> The choice is yours. If you refuse to let the Viet Cong use your villages and hamlets as their battlefield, your homes and lives will be spared.[23]

Westmoreland had ordered that villages should be burnt down, food supplies poisoned and livestock killed. Troops were also told that no one in the province was friendly, and that the entire area should be considered a free-fire zone.[24] Phoenix was also at work, closely tied to the

[19] Greene, *Vietnam! Vietnam!*.
[20] For Greene's declaration of the book's stance, see 'The Case Against', *Vietnam! Vietnam!,* p. 4.
[21] Ibid., pp. 40-3.
[22] This was not the Vietnamese name for the place, which was Xom Lang. The name My Lai came from US military maps. Greiner, *War Without Fronts*, p. 4.
[23] Bilton/ Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, p. 59.
[24] Greiner, *War Without Fronts*, pp. 152-5.

military operations.[25] The area was comprehensively bombed, shelled, napalmed and machine-gunned, and on numerous occasions troops had massacred civilians.[26] There had been so many murderous assaults against entire villages that they had occasionally driven women, old people and even children to launch 'impossible attacks' against US troops, 'apparently motivated by sheer rage'.[27]

Figure 28: Philip Jones Griffiths, Mother and child shortly before being killed, 1967.

Griffiths took photographs in the province in 1967. One shows a woman cradling a little boy while a melancholy looking US soldier gazes in their direction, perhaps in awareness of their fate. The caption reads:

> Mother and child shortly before being killed. A unit of the American Division operating in Quang Ngai province six months before My Lai. [...] This woman's husband, together

[25] Ibid., p. 203.
[26] For an account of US actions in Quang Ngai, see Turse, *Kill Anything*, pp. 128-43; and Greiner, *War Without Fronts*, pp. 152-79.
[27] Schell, *The Military Half*, p. 36.

> with the other men left in the village, had been killed a few moments earlier because he was hiding in a tunnel. After blowing up all the tunnels and bunkers where people could take refuge, GI's withdrew and called in artillery fire on the defenceless inhabitants.[28]

This was not an isolated incident in Quang Ngai. An old revolutionary stronghold since the time of the French occupation, operations there were supposed to take place without generating refugees because (with inverted logic) the camps were full. Task Force Oregon's solution was to conduct operations as normal but without evacuating villagers whose homes they destroyed.[29] With the same twisted reasoning, peasants were not warned before strikes were called down on their villages.[30] Griffiths' photograph and caption, then, described not aberration but policy.

The attack on My Lai opened with a fusillade of indiscriminate fire from artillery and helicopters, which caused many deaths. Then a force of US infantry entered the hamlet and, although they encountered no resistance, killed everybody they could find, even babies. I will not recount what they did in detail: Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim's excellent book, from which much of what follows is drawn, gives a full description. It is enough to say that the My Lai killings were part maniacal, part methodical, and were accompanied by unimaginable cruelties, including mutilation and the rape of children.

One officer involved, Lieutenant William Calley, explicitly defended the killing of children in evidence he gave to the investigation, saying that everyone in the village was an enemy: '[…] the babies were all VC or would be VC in about three years. And inside of the VC women, I guess there were a thousand little VC now.'[31] Even for this single unit of the 11th Infantry Brigade, Charlie Company, such killings were part of a pattern. Its members had beaten, tortured, raped and murdered civilians with impunity in the weeks before the massacre.[32] At My Lai, having tortured and massacred hundreds of people, they sat down to eat lunch.[33] For them, it was just another picnic.

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[28] Griffiths, *Vietnam Inc.*, pp. 58-9. Actually, the Americal Division.
[29] Schell, *The Military Half*, pp. 157-8.
[30] Noam Chomsky, *At War with Asia*, AK Press, Oakland, CA 2005, p. 226; citing a letter from Jonathan and Orville Schell, published in *The New York Times*, 26 November 1969.
[31] Greiner, *War Without Fronts*, p. 200.
[32] Bilton/ Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, p. 21. See also Maclear, *Vietnam*, pp. pp. 375-6.
[33] A detail noted in Mary McCarthy, *Medina*, Wildwood House, London 1973, p. 12. See also Bilton/ Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, p. 283.

Figure 29: Ron Haeberle, My Lai, 1968.

What was most unusual about this operation were the circumstances of its being photographed. An Army photographer new to combat operations, Ron Haeberle, accompanied the troops. He carried two cameras, an Army Leica loaded with black-and-white film, and his own Nikon loaded with colour. This is Haeberle's later account of the massacre:

> I knew it was something that shouldn't be happening but yet I was part of it. I think I was in a kind of daze from seeing all these shootings and not seeing any return fire. Yet the killing kept going on. The Americans were rounding up the people and shooting them, not taking any prisoners. It was completely different to my concept of what war is all about. I kept taking the pictures. That was my job as a photographer, to take pictures [...]. I feel sometimes that the camera did take over during the operation. I put it up to my eye, took a shot, put it down again. Nothing was composed. Nothing was prethought, just the normal reaction of a photographer. I was a part of it, everyone who

was there was a part of it, and that includes the General and the Colonel flying above in their helicopters. They're all a part of it. We all were. Just one big group.[34]

Haeberle took innocuous pictures of Charlie Company's operations on the army camera and pictures of the massacre on his own. There were distinct limits to what Haeberle could show even in this situation: troops would not let him photograph them actually committing atrocities.

Figure 30: Haeberle, My Lai: villagers about to be shot, 1968.

[34] Bilton/ Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, p. 124, interview with Haeberle.

He photographed one group of terrified people clinging to each other and looking on at the slaughter, as guns were trained on them. One woman rebuttons her shirt after being sexually assaulted. The image was reproduced in *Life*, with the caption:

> 'Guys were about to shoot these people', photographer Ron Haeberle remembers. 'I yelled "Hold it", and shot my picture. As I walked away, I heard M16s open up. From the corner of my eye I saw bodies falling, but I didn't turn to look.'[35]

So these people's lives were spared for a moment while they had their picture taken. The photograph, along with the investigation of the massacre, has meant that the names of these victims are among the few among the millions of Vietnamese dead that have circulated in the West. When in 1991 Chris Burden made his gigantic rolodex of the dead, *The Other Vietnam Memorial*, he used a few thousand actual names along with three million computer-generated ones to stand in for the unknown. The terrified child wearing a white blouse is Do Thi Kim Be, aged seven; the woman trying to protect her is her grandmother, Nguyen Thi Cung. The woman holding a child in her arms is Do Thi Cang, holding her niece, Do Hat, aged six. The woman in the red shirt at the front, Ba So, was a merchant from a neighbouring village who had come to My Lai to sell fish sauce.[36]

While the troops went about their business, they were observed by many people, including high-ranking officers, from the air. McCarthy details what Haeberle alludes to, the various levels of surveillance and command:

> If you imagine My Lai 4 as a picture, the top layer, at 2,000 feet, is occupied by Gen. Koster (code name Saber) in his helicopter; below him, in *his* helicopter, at 1,500 feet, is Col. Henderson (code name Rawide 6), the brigade officer; the next layer is occupied by Lt. Col. Barker (code name Coyote 6) in the command-control shop, ranging over the whole operation, his brain child, at a general altitude of 1,000 feet […]. Underneath him are OH 1b gunships, and occupying the lowest stratum, in a small observation craft, an OH 23 or 'bubble ship', are Hugh Thompson and Larry Colburn.[37]

[35] 'The Massacre at My Lai', *Life*, vol. 67, no. 23, 5 December 1969, p. 36.
[36] Bilton/ Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, p. 275.
[37] McCarthy, *Medina*, pp. 21-2.

Another most unusual aspect of My Lai, and one of the causes for its eventual investigation, was the action of Hugh Thompson, a helicopter pilot who landed and intervened, threatening to fire on members of Charlie Company if they continued the killing.[38]

At first, it seemed as if the incident would be passed over like many others. Barker's official report on the operation described it as well planned, executed and successful, and claimed 128 Viet Cong deaths.[39] Westmoreland sent a message of commendation to those on the My Lai mission, and *Stars and Stripes* reported their outstanding action against a force of unknown size.[40] Even *The New York Times* (which prides itself on being the original paper of record) carried a wire story about the mission's success. Haeberle and Sergeant Jay Roberts, an Army reporter on the mission, decided to remain silent, knowing that the military would bury any dissenting accounts.[41] Back in the US, Haeberle even took to giving lectures in Ohio showing his My Lai images mixed in with more usual reminiscences of Vietnam, and apparently thinking little of what he had photographed, it being more business as usual.[42]

Even in these highly unusual circumstances—with photographs taken, and Thompson's effective mutiny—that would have been the end of the matter if Ron Ridenhour, a soldier with journalistic ambitions, had not joined a unit with various Charlie Company members. When he heard what had happened, he ensured a proper investigation was held, in part by writing to prominent anti-war politicians. Even then, the mass media would happily have ignored the massacre. As Noam Chomsky notes, in November 1969 the revelations were taken up by anti-war activists who sent the story to many US and Canadian newspapers; Ridenhour acting on his own had been unable to place it.[43] Seymour Hersh, following a tip, had managed to interview Calley, writing a series of stories that again he found very hard to place, having to turn to an alternative news agency to finally get the story to press and onto TV.[44]

Once a serious investigation was launched, Haeberle's photographs played a great part in it. They were the first hard evidence that the investigators found that a massacre had taken place.[45] Relatives were able to identify the victims from the photographs, and the exact places where they had fallen. Haeberle's images were treated forensically: magnified, they showed the unit emblems

[38] Bilton/ Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, p. 177.
[39] McCarthy, *Medina*, p. 25.
[40] Ibid., pp. 25-6.
[41] Bilton/ Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, pp. 182-3.
[42] Greiner, *War Without Fronts*, p. 310; Oliver, *The My Lai Massacre*, p. 62.
[43] Chomsky, *At War with Asia*, p. 75.
[44] Turse, *Kill Anything*, pp. 227-8; for a full account of the extreme difficulties the story faced, see Oliver, *The My Lai Massacre*, pp. 39-50.
[45] Bilton/ Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, p. 242.

on the gunships. They helped to narrow down the likely suspects for each of the many incidents of slaughter, and caught out a unit leader, Captain Ernest Medina, in lies.[46]

While in print alone, the story had been widely disbelieved in the US, the photographs did convince many people, and when first published in *Life*, had a great and immediate impact.[47] *Life* framed its account within a military frame, which sought reasons for the troops' actions but at least and for once stated clearly that the images showed 'a story of indisputable horror—the deliberate slaughter of old men, women, children and babies'.[48]

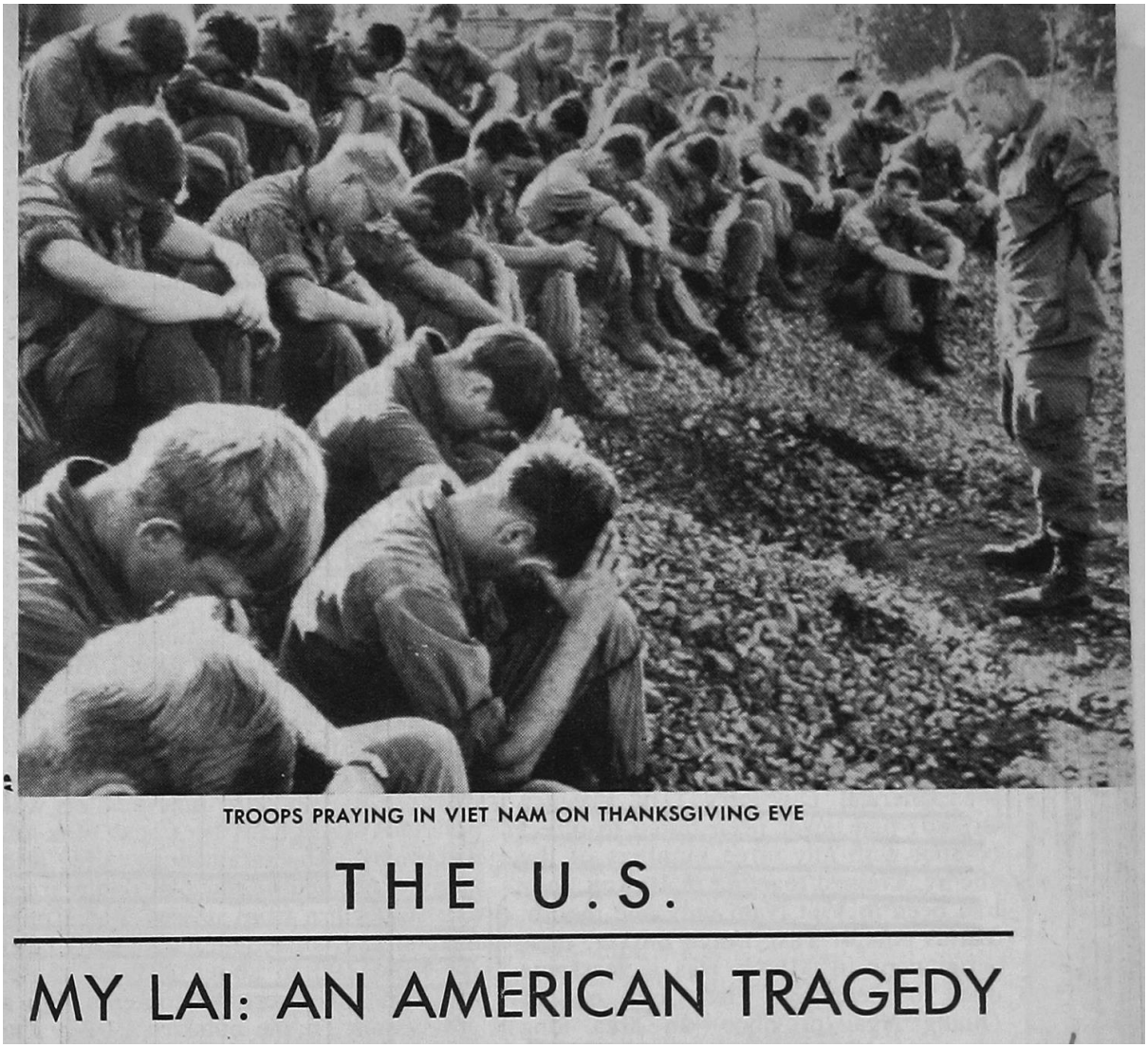

Figure 31: *Time* magazine, 5 December 1969.

[46] Ibid., pp. 281-3.
[47] Ibid., *Four Hours*, p. 260.
[48] 'The Massacre at My Lai', *Life*, p. 36.

From the first exposure of the story in the mainstream press, it was seen with hideous myopia as a particularly US matter. When *Time* magazine finally reported the massacre, it did so under the title, 'My Lai: An American Tragedy'.[49] It asserted, in a reversal of the truth, that massacre was the regular tactic of the NLF, and not of US forces. The accompanying picture was a telling piece of propaganda: a group of US troops with their heads bowed in prayer. The false association of story and photograph suggests an act of contrition, and that the troops are good Christians, subject to sin, repentance and redemption. The victims' fate could only be seen through the trauma of the perpetrators.

As the prosecution of Calley and other Charlie Company soldiers proceeded, they received much public support in the US. In the Army itself, Calley became a hero to some: as Bilton and Sim argue, the sentiment of many GIs was expressed in a piece of Saigon graffiti: 'Kill a Gook for Calley'.[50] At home, support for Calley extended to flags flying at half-mast in public buildings throughout the South, death threats against Thompson, a best-selling song in solidarity with the killer, alongside rallies, protests and petitions to reprieve the accused, who was even on occasion compared to the crucified Christ.[51]

While some of this was doubtless racism and kneejerk patriotism, hostility to the prosecutions was supported on the grounds that such killings were a regrettable but necessary part of war, and that only low-ranking soldiers faced sanctions for their crimes. Both positions had a logic that cut across pro- and anti-war adherents: a vast number of US troops had committed such crimes without having photographs of their actions published; and the conduct of this war, as demanded by military and political leaders, required the extermination of a people and their way of life. If anyone was guilty, then the culpability surely ran upwards right through the chain of command, permeating every level, to the President himself.

[49] 'My Lai: An American Tragedy', *Time*, vol. 94, no. 23, 5 December 1969, pp. 23-4.
[50] Bilton/ Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, p. 340.
[51] See Greiner, *War Without Fronts*, pp. 340-5.

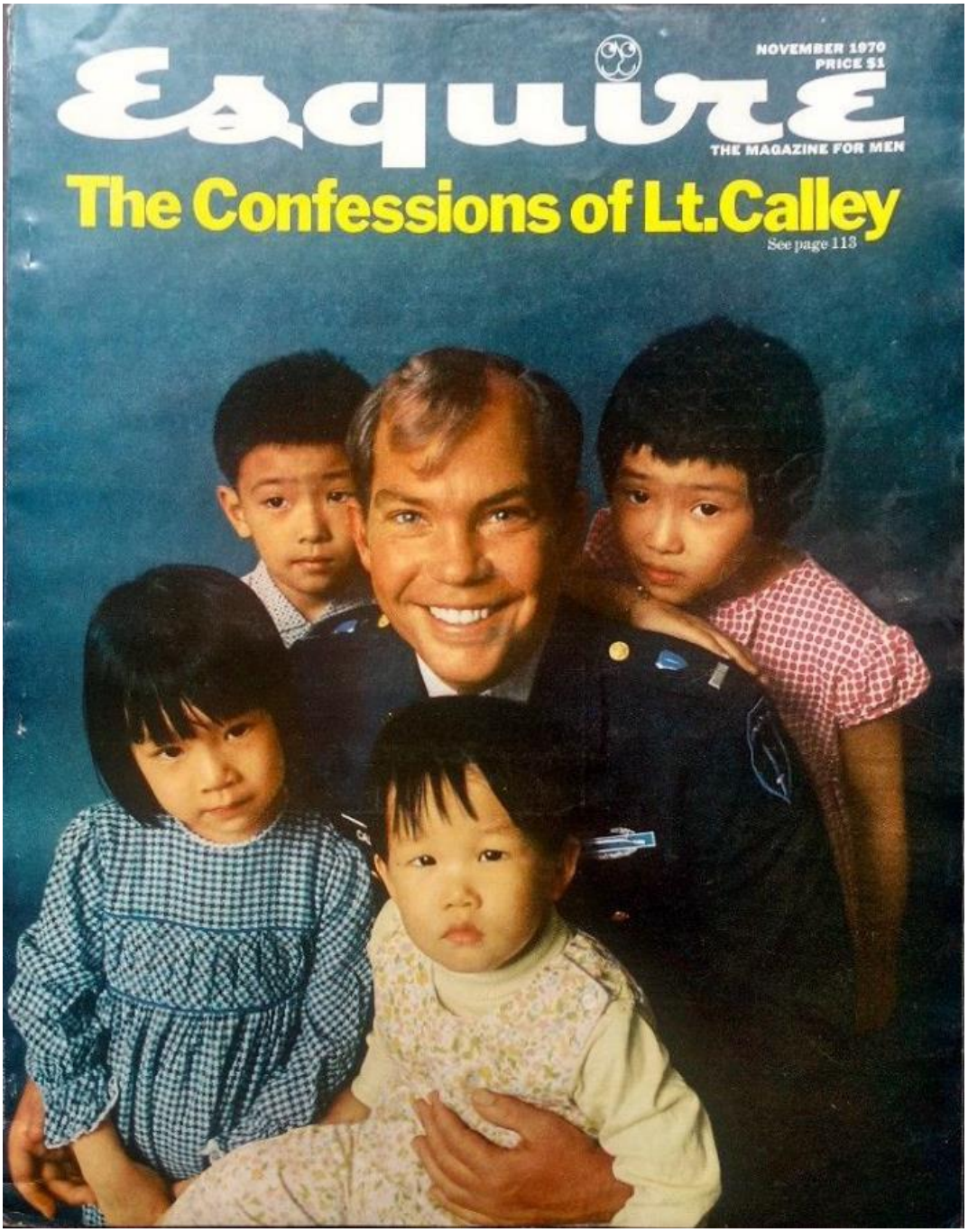

Figure 32: *Esquire* magazine cover, November 1970.

Esquire magazine, trying to play both sides of the debate, interviewed Calley at length during his trial, and in what must be one of the creepiest and most exploitative images of the war, ran a cover in which they posed him, grinning, amid a group of Asian children. Calley was paid an advance of $150,000 for the interviews, a vast sum in those days.[52] While living models stand in

[52] See Bilton/ Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, p. 332. See also Carol Posgrove, *It Wasn't Pretty, Folks, But Didn't we Have Fun: Surviving the '60s with* Esquire*'s Harold Hayes*, RDR Books, Oakland 2001, pp. 223-8.

for his victims, once again, an American takes centre-stage. This incident reflects the scant attention given to Vietnamese concerns in the vast literature about the war as a whole (30,000 non-fiction books alone) in which US massacres rarely feature.[53] It is as if the majority of Holocaust literature was centred on the troubled and 'tragic' intentions of the Nazis.

In time, My Lai came to be treated as an exceptional event, rather than a fairly typical one which happened to be have been recorded, investigated and uncovered.[54] While the My Lai massacre was taking place, another group of soldiers a few miles away, from the fellow Bravo Company, were doing the same thing on a smaller scale, killing ninety of the one-hundred inhabitants in the hamlet of Cy Luy.[55] My Lai was, though, exceptional in other ways: because a member of the US armed forces tried to stop it and the radio signals of his intervention were recorded, and because of Ridenhour's courage in pursuing a story he heard by chance. But it is exceptional most of all because it was photographed by a professional, and because those photographs were published.

The irruption of these photographs into the mainstream press provoked furious controversy, and clearly revealed the split between those who believed that the war was a genocidal and imperial conflict, and those who would stand with the US in its Cold War struggle, no matter what. Polls showed that nearly half of US citizens thought that the massacre was an invention, while an even greater number thought that killing civilians was a normal part of war that should not be bound by rules, let alone the law.[56]

In previous modern genocides, cameras had usually been banned, censorship was strong and secrecy a principle. A few, poor images survive in which the wider horrors may be glimpsed.[57] In Vietnam, where much of the point was to kill for show, there is an embarrassment of visual riches, and a torrent of textual propaganda that attempts to purify them, and allow them to fit the US national self-image, of which an integral part is the principle of clean, decisive and redemptive violence.

With the My Lai images, the accommodation was rapid. The many deaths at My Lai displaced media attention from the huge number of smaller massacres. As Nick Turse shows, Operation Speedy Express, pursued in the Mekong Delta area in 1968-69, which comprised hundreds of

[53] See Turse, *Kill Anything*, pp. 257-8.
[54] Other massacres on a similar scale are recalled by the Vietnamese interviewees in Martha Hess, *Then the Americans Came: Voices from Vietnam*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick 1994.
[55] Bilton/ Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, p. 273; Greiner, *War Without Fronts*, pp. 214-15. Tirman notes that other incidents of mass killing have since been uncovered. See *The Deaths of Others*, p. 155.
[56] Greiner, *War Without Fronts*, pp. 338-9.
[57] The adequacy or otherwise of Holocaust imagery has been the subject of much debate. For an argument that images are important to knowledge of the Holocaust, see Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Lillis, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2008.

massacres of the most hideous character, and which was the subject of extensive journalistic investigation by Kevin Buckley and Alexander Shimkin, received little media attention. *Newsweek* delayed their story, cutting it extensively to remove the most controversial material so as to protect the Nixon administration from further discomfort.[58] Once it did appear, no other media sources followed it up.[59] As Turse characterises the remarkable media handling of the My Lai story and its aftermath, in which many other incidents had for a time threatened to come to light: 'It was almost as if America's leading media outlets had gone straight from ignoring atrocities to treating them as old news, with just a brief flurry of interest in between.'[60] The press had known about them all along, of course, and only for a brief moment permitted them to become newsworthy.

In Errol Morris' documentary *The Fog of War*, McNamara is asked if he feels guilty about US casualties in Vietnam—the 25,000 soldiers killed before he left office in 1968. It is a typical elision, in which the vastly greater toll of death on the other side does not even register. McNamara does not do the same, and talks of the three to four million Vietnamese deaths. No one can ever know for sure how many died due to the sheer explosive force applied to the country. Many corpses would have been incinerated or vaporised, and the bombing was so intense that it frequently unearthed buried bodies (all this, of course, makes a nonsense of the conspiracies around the US soldiers 'Missing in Action', and the impetus to account for every corpse).[61] Putting into proportion the modest scale of US casualties, McNamara says that if Americans had died at the same rate at the Vietnamese, it would have meant 27 million deaths. The famous Maya Lin memorial to the Americans killed in Vietnam is 493 feet long and contains just over 58,000 names. An equivalent memorial for the Vietnamese dead would span over five and a half miles.[62]

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[58] Turse, *Kill Anything*, pp. 208-20, 252-5; Knightley, *First Casualty*, pp. 399-400. See also Kevin P. Buckley, 'Pacification's Deadly Price', *Newsweek*, 19 June 1972, pp. 42-3.
[59] Greiner, *War Without Fronts*, p. 273.
[60] Turse, *Kill Anything*, p. 247; see also pp. 5-6.
[61] The campaign was a propaganda exercise orchestrated by Nixon. See Turner, *Echoes of Combat*, pp. 101-3.
[62] On the following calculation: 3.5m dead, 117.8 names recorded per foot lengthways of the memorial. Tirman notes the imprecision of casualty numbers, though says that the total deaths in the American War across Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos could be four million dead. Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, p. 320. See also Turse, *Kill Anything*, pp. 12-13.

Chapter 13: Patterns of Killing in Iraq

The ideal of clean and efficient technological violence was on full display in the invasion of Iraq. In its emphasis on data, rapid response and precision, there was a constant refusal to fully understand what such actions would mean for civilians. Yet, as we have seen, the assault on pressure points, not only of military importance but of the entire state and industrial infrastructure, was a strategy that explicitly targeted civilians as a war aim.

On a large scale, there was an attack on the population as a whole: in a nation reliant on electricity for pumping water and air conditioning, with the fall back of petrol generators (for those who could afford to buy and run them), the destruction of infrastructure meant an immediate rise in danger—how to stay cool, to store food, to drink safe water, to refrigerate medicines and blood? Dahr Jamail's account of life under the occupation clearly shows the results: fuel shortages and eight-hour queues for petrol to run cars and generators; unreliable power and water provision, which were sometimes cut off as a collective punishment in areas considered insufficiently compliant. This was coupled with the depredations brought about by a tabula rasa neoliberal 'reform' of the state, and (as in Vietnam) the influx of military consumer demands, leading to rampant inflation. All of this made ordinary life extraordinarily difficult, yet those who demonstrated against such conditions could be gunned down by US troops.[1]

The precision warfare of the 'Shock and Awe' assault on Baghdad was experienced by Reuters journalist Samia Nakhoul, who wrote of the scale and length of the bombardment, as it went on night after night, and the terrible casualties particularly in Shia areas as homes, markets and hospitals were hit.[2] The abject terror of the invasion's opening bombardment is brought out forcefully in Leilah Nadir's book, in which her relatives speak of days spent huddling in their house without power or water, keeping away from the doors and windows, too petrified to move, and listening to the continuous bombing while hoping not to die. When after twenty nights they emerge, it is to find US tanks in the streets, and soldiers who believe that they can improve relations by throwing chocolates at the traumatised residents.[3]

On the level of individual interactions between Iraqis and the occupying forces, the grim logic of counter-insurgency warfare soon came into force. The initial tactic had been to favour light engagement and avoid civilian casualties, with the idea that the troops would be welcomed as

[1] Jamail, *Beyond the Green Zone*, passim; on collective punishment, see p. 30.
[2] See Nakhoul's account in Reuters, *Under Fire: Untold Stories from the Front Line of the Iraq War*, Pearson Education, New York 2004, pp. 26-31.
[3] Nadir, *The Orange Trees of Baghdad*, pp.123-4, 270-1.

liberators, but this quickly foundered on fedayeen resistance, and led to hard tactics against any locus of enemy fire.[4] The main assault quickly turned murderous. John Bebow, an embedded journalist, wrote:

> I don't think there's any way that any American civilian journalist or military person in Iraq felt anywhere near what the Iraqis felt. I mean, the stuff we rained down on these people. The capacity that we have to kill is so chillingly efficient. We don't even begin to comprehend what those people felt. I saw them without their skulls. I saw them disembowelled. I saw them shot up and raked by helicopter fire.[5]

Despite some parallels, to do with the logic of colonialism and occupation, there were great differences between the actions in Vietnam and Iraq, and in the regime of killing in each. The similarities are obvious enough: the client dictatorship in South Vietnam was replaced by direct rule in Iraq, but both were deeply unpopular, kept in place by US force, and demonstrated fantastic levels of corruption and incompetence. Also similar was the scene of overall hostility towards the occupiers who had to be on guard amid constant danger, and found it difficult to distinguish fighters from civilians.

The most obvious difference was that most of the fighting in Iraq was urban. In both conflicts, the US Army was unprepared for urban warfare, preferring the long-range obliteration of the enemy and anything nearby. When the Tet Offensive brought urban warfare to Vietnam, US forces had little idea how to handle it, and as we have seen, turned the tactics of destruction from country to city, regardless of risk to civilian life. It had since become an adage of US military policy that the Army 'did not do cities', a principle reinforced by the debacle in Mogadishu.[6]

As urban warfare expanded in Iraq—which the US Army had not expected, and for which it had not prepared—it fell back on knowledge drawn from Israeli operations in occupied Palestine along with older precedents. Mike Cerre of ABC News was embedded with a Marine Company whose previous members had fought at Hué in the Tet Offensive. Members of the 1968 unit

[4] See Martin Walker's reporting in Walker, *The Iraq War*, pp. 76, 80.
[5] John Bebow (*Detroit News*) in Katovsky/ Carlson, *Embedded*, p. 5.
[6] This was indeed part of a general effort to restore US military prestige after Vietnam by avoiding any conflict of the kind in which it had been defeated. See Bacevich, *The New American Militarism*, pp. 41-2.

corresponded with the 'current class of Fox 2/5', sharing experiences and helping them prepare for what they might encounter in Baghdad.[7]

Urban terrain is one of the greatest obstacles to the RMA ideal of total visibility. Buildings block sensors, while the piling up of rooftops, floors, cellars and sewers introduces layers of opaque complexity to the battleground so that enemies can appear from above and below. Soldiers often die simply because they are looking the wrong way.[8] Bombardment, the usual US recourse, merely churns up the environment, introducing even more chaos.

Another marked difference was the divided character of the Iraqi population, split between many ethnic, religious and tribal affiliations, played off against one another for decades first under imperial administrations and later under Ba'ath rule, and further exacerbated as the effectiveness of the state was weakened under the sanctions regime.[9] Most of these groups were glad to see Saddam Hussein deposed and to have done with his disastrous and murderous tyranny, although many Sunni, who had enjoyed some privilege under his rule, were anxious about what lay in store. That did not mean, though, that they were pleased to see an invasion and occupation by the US (the major exception being the Kurds who had the implicit backing of the invaders in their emerging separatist state).

Indeed, after a time, given the violent behaviour of US troops and the failure of the occupation to provide security or basic services, most Iraqis supported military resistance against the occupiers. Especially after the first assault on Fallujah, Sunni and Shia came together to resist the occupation, with most Iraqis believing that US forces were behaving very badly, and being deeply suspicious about their long-term strategies and goals.[10] For many Iraqis, the fate of Palestine haunted their imaginations: would their country be subject to long-term occupation?

Faced with the dangers of a united opposition, the US regime in Iraq promoted sectarian divisions by funding and arming a variety of militia and government forces which regularly engaged in torture, murder and mutilation. A link here with the RMA was to outsource terror, to keep the war quick and cheap by exploiting sectarian divides, letting the Shia defeat the Ba'athists

[7] Katovsky/ Carlson, *Embedded*, p. 97. Cerre was embedded with Fox Company 2/5, Second Battalion, Fifth Marines.
[8] Glezos, *The Politics of Speed*, pp. 71, 74.
[9] See Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, passim, and pp. 4-6.
[10] Jamail, *Beyond the Green Zone*, pp. 159-60; Steele, *Defeat*, p. 157.

(as the US administration liked to conceive the conflict), especially by supplying them with wages and arms.[11]

If Iraq would not lie down peacefully under occupation or client regime, then the solution would be that used in El Salvador: to foster civil war and send the nation into a downward spiral of perennial violence, poverty and anarchy. One US military official told *Newsweek* that the intention was to make the Sunni 'population' pay a price for supporting terrorism, and to collectively punish all Sunnis by manufacturing a civil war directed against them.[12]

Eventually, splits were opened up in the Sunni opposition—particularly given the excesses of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) which led the US to arm sectarian killers on various sides. As it became clear to many Sunnis that violent insurrection was gaining them nothing, they turned against the militants, who responded with greater violence meant to terrify the population into compliance with acts of appalling brutality.[13] This development was accompanied by a shift of strategy by the US forces led by General David Petraeus in the so-called 'Surge' which abandoned the swift, cheap war in favour of a much longer campaign, and prioritised protecting civilians from militants over hunting down insurgents, while seeking to lower the barriers between locals and troops.[14]

The gentler form of policing by troops was, however, accompanied by the increased use of Special Forces to decapitate militant organisations. Death squads started to operate in Iraq on a large scale, killing thousands of suspects.[15] Violence did subside for a while, partly because a vile spate of ethnic cleansing had been largely completed.[16] But the change in strategy came far too late, as if all the events of the previous period could be forgotten, as if power could drain back to the occupiers, and as if the culture of the US armed forces could be so readily changed.

The death squads were set up by those with experience of creating the 'El Salvador option'; James Steele, who coordinated the US Military Advisory Group there in the mid-1980s was one of those put in charge of founding the notorious Special Police Commando, the Wolf Brigade.[17] US Special Forces were used to advise, support and train Iraqi death squads to target Sunni

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[11] Wright, *Generation Kill*, pp. 327-8. See also Jamail, *Beyond the Green Zone*, pp. 360-1; and Julian Assange, 'Introduction: Wikileaks and Empire', in *Wikileaks*, p. 15. It was not that divide-and-rule was not tried in Vietnam, for example with the Montagnards, but it met with little success. See Fall, *Viet-nam Witness*, pp. 190-6; the effort failed in part because they suffered grievously from ARVN abuse. See Kolko, *Anatomy of a War*, p. 526.
[12] Anon., 'Dictators and Human Rights', in *Wikileaks*, p. 85; John Barry, 'Forces-Led Assassination or Kidnapping Teams in Iraq', *Newsweek*, 8 January 2005.
[13] Burke, *The 9/11 Wars*, pp. 250-1.
[14] Ibid., pp. 264-7.
[15] Ibid., pp. 277-8.
[16] Ibid., pp. 271-3; Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr*, p. 220.
[17] Scahill, *Dirty Wars*, p. 165

resistance leaders and their supporters. Run by the Iraqi Interior Ministry, they were largely responsible for the organised campaign of killing, torture and detention in Iraq.[18]

The New Death Squads

The US-run death squad has lain largely beyond the bounds of public photographic visibility. Fortunately, these death squads have operated in only partial shadow, both because of bragging by the military and the general willingness in the new wars to commit crimes openly, and also because of the sustained efforts of journalists such as Jeremy Scahill, who has written a long and detailed account of the murder machine assembled by the White House.[19]

The death squads, which operate under the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) programme, were set up under Cheney and Rumsfeld's initiative to be independent of normal Pentagon structures which were believed (in the words of an internal Defense Department memo) to be too cumbersome for 'the agility and tactical surprise so necessary for manhunts, snatches and retribution raids'.[20] Regime officials were frustrated that few special ops had been given the go-ahead because they needed 'actionable intelligence' that amounted to certainty. In a reversal of this conventional position, Cheney took the line that if there was any doubt about a suspect's innocence, they should be captured or killed.[21]

The system gathered intelligence which was used to capture or kill suspects in operations which in turn generated further intelligence to fuel the lethal feedback loop. We find here an echo of Marx's famous M-C-M' circuit, though here intelligence stands in for money and commodities are the bodies of the enemy; as in Marx's circuit where the amassing of limitless capital is the ultimate goal, the circuit is interminable.[22] The intelligence on which it based its targets was deeply flawed, corrupted by ignorance and score-settling.[23] The process soon came to resemble its ancestor, Phoenix, and even employed some former Phoenix personnel.[24]

Iraq was used as the laboratory of the kill-and-capture JSOC machine. The JSOC command centre at Balad airbase was fittingly known as 'the factory' or 'the shop floor', suggesting the

[18] Jamail, *Beyond the Green Zone*, pp. 244-6, drawing on a September 2005 UN report.
[19] Much of the following relies upon Scahill, *Dirty Wars*; for separation from Pentagon structures, see pp. 94-5.
[20] Hersh, *Chain of Command*, p. 267.
[21] Scahill, *Dirty Wars*, pp. 99, 101.
[22] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex 1976, pp. 247-57.
[23] Scahill, *Dirty Wars*, pp. 142-3, 145.
[24] Hersh names one of them: Thomas O'Connell, a veteran of Phoenix, became civilian assistant secretary for special operations in the Pentagon. Hersh, *Chain of Command*, pp. 275, 283

mechanical regualarity of its programme.[25] The JSOC teams are apparently open with each other about their role. One former SEAL told Hersh: 'Each one of us when we do these missions, say to ourselves, "Let's face it. We're going to commit murder."'[26] They did, night after night, killing targets and witnesses alike, often entire families.[27]

In Vietnam, the accountancy of death was open and on show, and administered on a colossal scale before a mostly admiring media. In Iraq, this same accountancy operated on a much smaller scale and in secret. Bush would press his commanders on how many people they had killed each day; the numbers may never be made public, but they certainly run into thousands.[28] In one of his memos, Rumsfeld asked:

> Are we capturing, killing or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrassas and the radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying against us?[29]

Rumsfeld admits to ignorance of the metrics, but there are shades of Vietnam here and, as with McNamara, an accounting mentality that admits no realisation that the killing is itself a radicalising force. An analysis of the effects of the assassination programme was unambiguous: its only effect was to make Iraq more dangerous for US troops.[30]

This was an outsourcing of disciplinary violence: the *Lancet* reports into excess deaths found in their 2004 report that 84 per cent of violent deaths in Iraq were caused by Coalition forces; by 2006 this had dropped to 31 per cent but the leading cause of fatalities was now death squads and other armed groups.[31] In this enterprise, the US administrations were all too successful, and the legacies of divide-and-rule are plain in Iraq and across swathes of the Arab world today.

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[25] Scahill, *Dirty Wars*, p. 162.
[26] Seymour M. Hersh, *The Killing of Osama bin Laden*, Verso, London 2016, p. 27.
[27] See the account given in Cockburn, *Kill Chain*, p. 147.
[28] Ibid., p. 174. In Afghanistan, the situation was worse since the killing targeted all Taliban without discrimination—and this was a broad group, many of whom with no interests outside their country. See Hersh, *The Killing of Osama bin Laden*, pp. 10-11.
[29] Quoted in Scahill, *Dirty Wars*, p. 114.
[30] Cockburn, *Kill Chain*, p. 166.
[31] Ibid., pp. 247, 299n.

Figure 33: Pauline Lubens, Baghdad, June 2004: US Administrator L. Paul Bremer (2nd-R) is escorted to an Air Force plane by Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih (2nd-L) at the Baghdad International Airport for his flight out of Baghdad, Iraq 28 June, 2004.

Two large differences explain much about the contrasting regimes of killing in Iraq when compared to Vietnam: that the US armed forces were solely volunteers; and the very large role played by mercenaries. The use of mercenaries was an aspect of Rumsfeld's military privatisation programme from 2001 onwards in which business management methods were applied to the Pentagon.[32] By 2009, there were nearly equal numbers of US military and Department of Defense contractors in Iraq, standing at around 95,000 each.[33] Outsourced killers, while very expensive to pay, offered a number of advantages. When they became casualties, they were off the military's books, and rarely subject to media attention. In photography and video, they were mostly glimpsed in their role as the heavily armed guards of the viceroy (fig. 122). Blackwater mercenaries were sometimes used in the US death squads, again as a way to avoid oversight.[34]

[32] The policy was announced in a notorious speech, 'Bureaucracy to the Battlefield', 10 September 2001. See Jim Garamone, 'Rumsfeld Attacks Pentagon Bureaucracy, Vows Changes', *DoD News*, http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=44916 The programme met concerted Pentagon resistance when it came to structural reform but briefly succeeded when it came to operations. See Bacevich, *The New American Militarism*, pp. 172-3.
[33] Kennard, *Irregular Army*, pp. 1-2.
[34] Scahill, *Dirty Wars*, p. 178.

When they committed atrocities, the Pentagon could disclaim responsibility, while the killers were granted legal immunity for their actions in Iraq.[35]

The all-volunteer force in Iraq proved resistant to the dissolution that threatened the occupying forces in Vietnam.[36] As Andrew Bacevich has shown, the armed forces have grown distant in culture and outlook from the US population as a whole. Many of them are career soldiers who remain loyal to their profession even when things go badly and when the military is pursuing a politically discredited campaign.[37] Yet, in other ways, similar elements were at work. As in Vietnam, most of those in the Army were drawn from the bottom layers of a divided society—which had become markedly more unequal since the 1970s. Many had chosen enlistment out of a very limited range of options. Remarkably, for many inner city youths, the Army, even at war, was a safer place than the gun- and drug-ridden streets back home.[38]

In his investigation of recruitment, Matt Kennard has shown that as the war dragged on the US Army struggled to attract and retain soldiers. Shortfalls led it to work their soldiers harder, supplying them with drugs such as speed to keep them awake through very long shifts. Standards for recruits were lowered, and those soldiers guilty of infractions and even crimes, which would have once led to dishonourable discharge, were kept in service. The US Army also accepted recruits with histories of drug and alcohol abuse, and offered large financial inducements on signing up.[39]

From 2004, under a new programme for filling the ranks, which included a 'Moral Waiver Study', recruits with criminal records were allowed into the military. Many were admitted who had been convicted of serious crimes, including aggravated assault, robbery and even, incredibly, making terrorist threats. As the difficulties of recruiting and retaining troops became graver as the war continued, even rapists and murderers were admitted into the ranks.[40]

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[35] Only recently did this come under legal challenge when a group of Blackwater mercenaries, responsible for one of the worst massacres of the war in Nisour Square, Baghdad, were finally convicted of murder and manslaughter. Dan Roberts, 'US Jury Convicts Blackwater Guards in 2007 Killing of Iraqi Civilians', *The Guardian*, 23 October 2014; http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2014/oct/22/us-jury-convicts-blackwater-security-guards-iraq

[36] There were many less-than-enthusiastic volunteers serving in Vietnam who had joined up knowing that voluntary enlistment would buy them a shorter term of service and a better chance of not being sent into combat. See Greiner, *War Without Fronts*, p. 114.

[37] Bacevich, *The New American Militarism*, pp. 23-4, 29-30. For the figures on average length of service, see Brigham, *Is Iraq Another Vietnam?*, p. 64.

[38] Sebastian Junger, *War*, Fourth Estate, London 2010, p. 238. See also David Axe, *Army 101: Inside ROTC in a Time of War*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia 2007, p. 21, which gives comparative death rates.

[39] Turse, *The Complex*, pp. 151, 159-60. See also http://usmilitary.about.com/od/armyjoin/a/enlage42.htm

[40] Kennard, *Irregular Army*, pp. 75, 79-80. The overall programme was called the Joint Advertising Marketing Research & Studies (JAMRS).

Since the Army refuses to collect statistical records about many types of troop misconduct, the full consequences of these policies are unclear, though there is ample anecdotal evidence of the infiltration of gang culture, far-right politics, and of widespread racism.[41] Despite military regulations that forbid them, many soldiers are decorated with Nazi and supremacist tattoos.[42] Extreme and violent sexism is also common among the troops, as evidenced by the many experiences of sexual abuse and rape within the military, and by frequent attacks on civilians (about which, again, the military does not officially keep records).[43]

The results of allowing declared racists, gang members and hardened criminals to serve in the US military are unsurprising. There are many accounts of the murderous Army ethos fed by such recruiting and magnified by the dehumanisation of training. Kennard quotes Private Steven D. Green, an Iraq veteran who served on a moral waiver: 'My main preoccupation in life is wanting to kill Iraqis, whoever they are and wherever they are.'[44] In March 2006, in Yusufiyah, near Al-Mahmadiyah, following numerous crimes around checkpoints in which civilians were shot, Green led a group of troops on a raid in which they raped and killed a young girl, Abeer Qasim Hamza al-Janabi. In an attempt to conceal the crime, they also killed her parents and six-year-old sister, setting their house on fire with the bodies inside. The soldiers blamed the killing on the Iraqi resistance, and would have got away with it but for one member of the battalion, Justin Watt, who told officials what had really happened.[45]

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[41] Ibid., pp. 47-8, 38.
[42] Ibid., p. 19.
[43] Ibid., p. 89. On rape within the US military, see the section, 'Divide and Conquer: Gender and Sexuality in the Military', in Iraq Veterans Against the War, *Winter Soldier Iraq*. Nearly a third of women veterans say that they were sexually assaulted while in the US military. Many accounts circulate of US troops raping Iraqis, and some are accompanied with photographs or video stills but, with the exception of the very small number investigated by the Army itself, they are very hard to verify.
[44] Kennard, *Irregular Army*, p. 72; see also Iraq Veterans Against the War, *Winter Soldier Iraq*, pp. 60-1.
[45] Kennard, *Irregular Army* pp. 72-3. These troops, who had left the military by the time the crime was revealed, and were thus tried by civilian courts, received long jail terms. Green was jailed for life without the chance of parole.

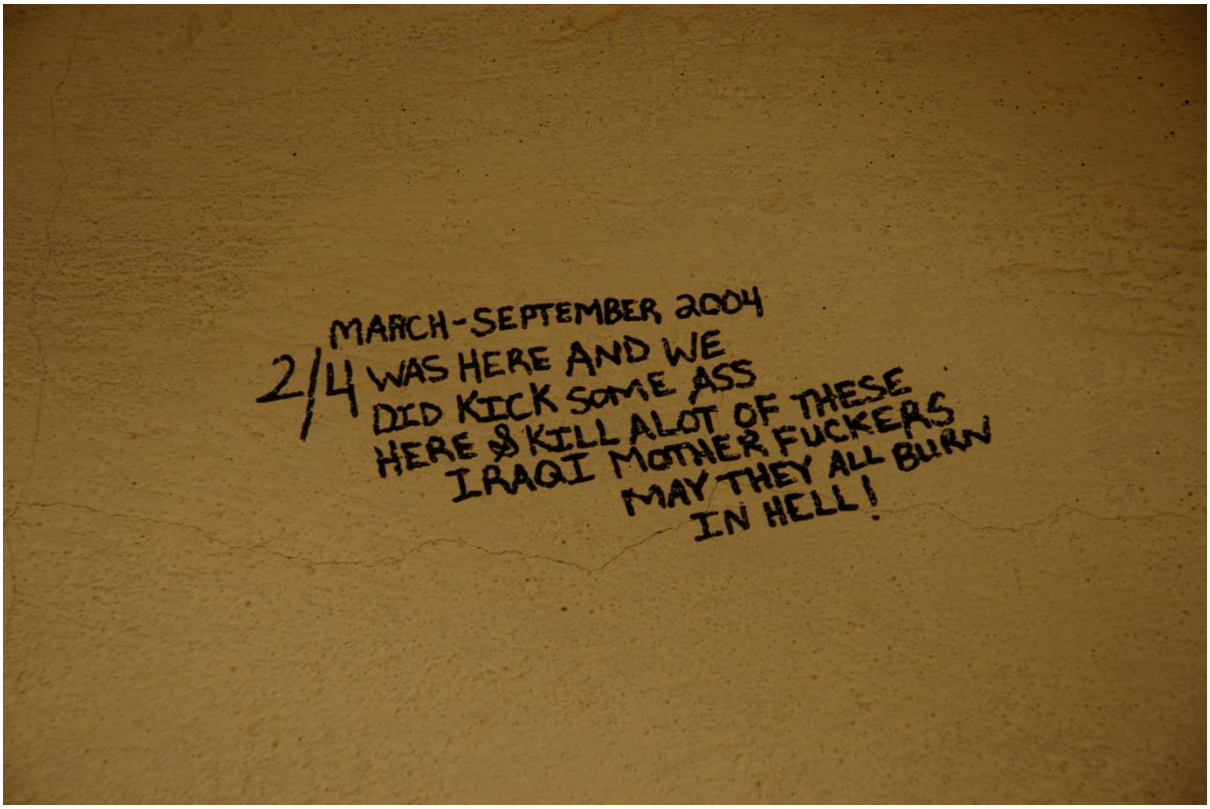

Figure 34: Ashley Gilbertson, Marines who lost twelve comrades in a single firefight on 6 April 2004, left this message on a wall in the Ramadi Government Centre.

The racism that saturates US society was mapped onto Iraq. When the US Army ran a survey of troop attitudes, it found that around 40 per cent disliked Iraqis and believed that they did not deserve to be treated with respect. Two-thirds of Marines and half of other troops said that they would not report a fellow soldier for mistreating a civilian, and a tenth of them actually admitted committing abuse.[46]

Some embedded journalists, immersed in troop culture, reported on the murderous racism at play. Evan Wright recounts a discussion between the Marines with which he was embedded, comparing Nasiriyah to the Mexican border town of Tijuana, popular with US tourists, particularly those attracted by its seedy nightlife. One Marine says: 'And this time I get to do what I've always wanted to do in TJ […] Burn it to the ground.'[47] Wright also tells of the Marines first hearing the news that the PR name for the invasion and occupation is 'Operation Iraqi Freedom'. A Marine comments that 'freedom' was the combat phase in Iraq: 'Rip through this

[46] Burke, *The 9/11 Wars*, p. 244; using Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq*, Penguin Press, New York 2009, pp. 7-8.
[47] Wright, *Generation Kill*, pp. 58, 59.

bitch shooting anything that moves from your window. That's what I call freedom.'[48] Or again, he hears a young corporal say, as helicopters fly into combat:

> They kill hundreds of people, those pilots. I would loved [*sic*] to have flown the plane that dropped the bomb on Japan. A couple dudes killed hundreds of thousands. That fucking rules! Yeah![49]

Here the joy of racist killing is taken to its logical end point in a fantasy of genocide.

Or take Dexter Filkins, first reporting for *The New York Times* and later in his book, *The Forever War*, who also captured the attitudes of the killers. Talking to snipers of the 5th Marine Regiment outside of Diwaniya: 'We had a great day', Sergeant Eric Schrumpf told me, 'We killed a lot of people'. He goes on to say that they had killed a few civilians, claiming that resistance fighters had used them as shields. They had included a woman: 'I'm sorry but the chick was in the way.'[50]

Gary Knight, accompanying another Marine unit in the same town at the same time saw them kill many civilians by firing on cars, using tank fire to demolish buildings, and randomly throwing grenades over the walls of houses.[51] Evan Wright writes about another sniper who claims to have shot an armed Iraqi who had taken cover behind a child by shooting through the child, saying (in an echo of Calley): 'I just killed a future terrorist.'[52] Not all of the violence was fast and directly murderous. In the town of Ash Shatrah, Marines looted, urinated on and smashed up the water purification plant.[53] In ignorance or more likely malice, they endangered lives as surely as with bullets.

Throughout Dahr Jamail's independent reporting, based on talking to Iraqi civilians, there are numerous accounts of violent responses to demonstrations and small acts of resistance, in which civilians were often killed. These heavily disproportionate responses sent a message to Iraqis about the worth in which their lives were held. In January 2006, Jamail visited the casualties of election-day violence who were crammed into Yarmouk Hospital. American troops had ignored their pleas for medical supplies, and a doctor there reflected on the extreme disparity in the treatment of badly wounded Americans and Iraqis: the former flown to Germany and America

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[48] Ibid., p. 345.
[49] Ibid., p. 47.
[50] Filkins, *The Forever War*, pp. 90-1; Dexter Filkins, 'A Nation at War: In the Field | Marines; Either Take a Shot Or Take a Chance', *NY Times*, 29 March 2003.
[51] Knight in Kamber, *Photojournalists on War*, p. 142.
[52] Wright, *Generation Kill*, p. 222.
[53] Ibid., p. 227.

for the best treatment; the latter left to die in a filthy hospital lacking specialists or even painkillers.[54]

Figure 35: Bruno Stevens, Baghdad, 9 April 2003: Jamieh, outskirts of Baghdad: mangled vehicles and charred bodies on the Hilla road bear witness to the violence of the fight for the city as US troops prepare to enter it.

The imbalance of fire and response also sent Iraqis a clear message. The Marines used the tactic of 'going in heavy', which meant that if they faced any opposition at all they would counter it with 'violent supremacy', pulverising their opponents with artillery, mortars, rockets and heavy machine gun fire.[55]

In built-up areas, this was bound to cause many civilian casualties. Vaughan Smith, a videographer and former British Army officer who was used to subtler counter-insurgency tactics, was taken aback by this behaviour. Commenting on Marines entering a town with a loudspeaker blaring, 'We come in peace', he thought that the show of force suggested the opposite. Their message was rather: 'We have come from another planet. Don't touch us. One

[54] Jamail, *Beyond the Green Zone*, pp. 273-4.
[55] John Koopman in Katovsky/ Carlson, *Embedded*, p. 118.

of us is worth a thousand of you.'[56] Or again, on the town of Al Muwaffaqiyah, another Marine comments to Evan Wright: 'Dude, we destroyed that place. We had one guy shot in the foot, and we blew up their whole town.'[57] This racist imbalance was faithfully reflected in mainstream reporting; an analysis of CNN war coverage showed that Iraqis killed by US forces were rarely mentioned, and when they were, it was in an effort to exonerate the troops.[58]

The armed forces are generally represented in the US as being composed of exceptional people. Many in the military like to think of themselves that way, and in contrasting dull domestic routine with its mild distractions to the intensity of life under fire, in which every decision is consequential, call civilians the 'stupid people'.[59] In movies, TV and computer games, the military are generally seen as brusque, taciturn, hyper-alert, no-nonsense types, highly trained, competent and (when need be) heroic. Doubtless, there is some truth to that, especially among the elite forces. But, taken collectively, they are special in other ways too: they are more racist, more criminal and less educated than the rest of the population, and amid a long and general decline in cruelty and violence, many of them kill without hesitation or question, and often with enjoyment.[60] This points to the paradoxical character of the Army as both a hyper-bureaucratised system, bound with an encyclopaedic array of rules and auditing procedures, and as a realm of exception in which feral behaviour is inculcated and—when unleashed upon an enemy, a city or an entire people—nothing is forbidden, and almost no infraction of law and regulation is punished.[61] In the Iraq Winter Soldier Investigations, Marine Lance Corporal Jon Michael Turner showed a video of the Executive Officer of his unit gloating at the dropping of a 500lb bomb on Ramadi: 'I think I just killed half of the population of northern Ramadi, fuck the red tape.'[62]

The Western media's clean-cut, heroic and technophile account of the invasion effectively masked its sheer bloodiness. Saturation bombing of Iraqi forces had taken place in a wide kill-zone around Baghdad, in late March, using B-52s and other weaponry.[63] Accounts from US soldiers themselves give the lie to bloodlessness: one sergeant, as his unit advanced to Baghdad,

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[56] Loyn, *Frontline*, p. 409.
[57] Wright, *Generation Kill*, p. 252.
[58] DiMaggio, *When Media Goes to War*, p. 107.
[59] JoAnn Wypijewski, 'Home Alone', *New Left Review*, no. 93, May-June 2015, p. 111; see also Bacevich, *The New American Militarism*, p. 24. The consequences of tiny actions—or inactions—in combat are eloquently described in Junger, *War*.
[60] On the fall in levels of violence, see Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, Viking, New York 2011.
[61] On the state of exception, see Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty, trans. George Schwab, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1985*; for a fine account of Schmitt's thought and its relevance to current political thinking, see Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy: An Intellectual Portrait of Carl Schmitt*, Verso, London 2000.
[62] Iraq Veterans Against the War, *Winter Soldier Iraq*, p. 23.
[63] Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, p. 227.

was horrified by the huge numbers of dead that they passed, troops killed from the air: 'When I see that many bodies, I just don't want to be here anymore.'[64] These people, we should remember, were not volunteers but the conscripts of a tyranny.

The RMA, as we have seen, defended unconventional and risky military offensive moves with overwhelming force. The risk taken in late March to push on the invasion with a swift advance to Baghdad without waiting for reinforcements and supplies was complemented by the decision to use maximum force, turning an eighty-mile corridor from Najaf to the capital into a zone of destruction. As Jim Dwyer reported for *The New York Times*:

> It was possible today to drive 30 miles north from Najaf toward Baghdad and not see a single living person other than American soldiers. The roads were littered with the hulks of pickup trucks and taxi cabs that had been fired on by American forces. […]
>
> So it was that a swath of the Iraqi countryside along the Euphrates River, about 60 miles from Baghdad, was all but devoid of ordinary life on this beautiful spring day, as American troops from the 101st Airborne Division hunted down Iraqi soldiers and guerrillas in a relentless show of force.[65]

Yet, as Friel and Falk write in their discussion of the newspaper, its reporter never asked whether the US forces had indiscriminately killed civilians.

We have seen that little of that depicted destruction and death reached the Western, and particularly the US, media which remained sanitised. TV viewers in the US almost never saw civilian casualties. A survey of the main networks' coverage of *battle scenes* during the invasion showed a remarkable avoidance of images of the dead or the wounded. When the dead did intrude, it was in video of closed coffins or surrogate images such as abandoned shoes.[66] As we have seen, this was due to a powerful confluence of commercial and political considerations: the public did not want to see it, advertisers did not want would-be buyers disturbed, and the government did not want it shown.

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[64] Quoted in Murray/ Scales, *The Iraq War*, p. 206.
[65] Jim Dwyer, 'A Nation at War: In the Field | 101st Airborne Division; Under Blizzard of Bullets, a Battle Inches On', *The New York Times*, 1 April 2003; as cited in Howard Friel/ Richard Falk, *The Record of the Paper: How* The New York Times *Misrepresents US Foreign Policy*, Verso, London 2004, pp. 127-8.
[66] Moeller, *Packaging Terrorism*, pp. 152, 154-5. Moeller draws upon research by Sean Aday and Steven Livingstone at George Washington's School of Media and Public Affairs, which analysed 600 hours of battle coverage from 20 March to the fall of Baghdad on 9 April, drawn from CNN, Fox News and ABC: only 13.5 per cent showed the dead or wounded.

The image of the US occupation that emerges from Iraqi accounts is consistent and disturbing. While the facts of any single incident may be disputed, the overall pattern cannot be dismissed: they recount widespread arbitrary killing; lethal attacks on demonstrations; collective punishments including the destruction of houses, trees and crops, and the cutting off of water and electricity; deliberate attacks on hospitals and ambulances; looting and, of course, torture. Here the embedding system produced its greatest distortions since troops were on best behaviour when reporters were present.[67]

The combination of fast and slow violence—the slow so dire as to be felt as fast—had terrible effects. The uprooting of date palms, the demolition of a home, the blockade of a town or the denial of medical supplies could kill as surely as bullet or bomb. The lack of care for anything other than the oil infrastructure was consistent. It was apparent in the lack of interpreters accompanying the troops (which often had fatal consequences for Iraqis who misunderstood instructions), road 'accidents' caused by utter disregard for civilian traffic or pedestrians, and the shooting up of cars in very frequent checkpoint encounters.[68] As in Vietnam, there were many incidents of murdering people by running them over:

> If somebody gets too close to your Humvee you run him or her over, and if a car gets too close, you knock it into a ditch. All war depends on these tactics—people believing, "Kill the other guy or he'll kill me".[69]

One soldier recounts being told to run down Iraqi children who stepped in front of a convoy, with the justification: 'They don't value life like we do and they don't share our same Western values.'[70] Again, Westmoreland and his ilk come to mind.

Chris Hondros was embedded with a unit of US infantry patrolling in Tal Afar at night shortly after curfew, in such a way as to remain largely hidden. A car blindly approached them and the troops riddled it with bullets. The car had six children inside; five of them, with remarkable good fortune, were unharmed, though eleven-year-old Rakan Hassan was paralysed; the parents who were in the front of the vehicle were both killed. Hondros photographed the whole incident, from the shooting, the removal of the children from the car, the dead, and the children's

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[67] On home demolitions used as collective punishment, see Jamail, *Beyond the Green Zone*, pp. 72-3.
[68] On the fatal consequences of not following instructions that civilians could not understand, see ibid., p. 250. On the regular pattern of such killings, see Anne Garrels of NPR, in Hoyt/ Platella, *Reporting Iraq*, pp. 65-6.
[69] Haller/ Sharbonno, *Riley and his Story*, p. 57. On running people over in Vietnam as a regular practice and for sport, see Turse, *Kill Anything*, pp. 156-7.
[70] Chris Hedges/ Laila Al Arian, *Collateral Damage: America's War Against Iraqi Civilians*, Nation Books, New York 2008, p. 13; quoted in Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, p. 232.

horrified shock. It is remarkable, Hondros says, that the troops did not stop him taking photographs.[71] For the troops, the incident was entirely routine:

> Just a day's work for them. That stuff happens in Iraq a lot. That's why it's such a damn mess, because almost everybody's had something like that happen to them at the hands of US soldiers. They hate them.
>
> But I realise, as much as that happens in Iraq, it almost never gets photographed […][72]

Hondros behaved discretely and used a degree of subterfuge to get the images out before they could be examined and perhaps deleted by the military. One particular image of five-year-old Samar Hassan, squatting on the ground at the feet of a soldier, screaming and covered with the blood of her family, became very well known.

Figure 36: Chris Hondros, Tal Afar, January 2005: Samar Hassan, five, screams moments after her parents were killed by US soldiers from the 25th Infantry Division.

[71] For Hondros' account, see Hoyt/ Palatella, *Reporting Iraq*, pp. 159-62.
[72] Ibid., pp. 160-1.

The image, briefly a lightning rod of liberal guilt in the West, had little life in Iraq where far more explicit images circulated. It showed in any case what everyone already knew through incessant accounts of arbitrary death and maiming which were the constant topic of conversation. Samar Hassan had not seen the picture, until she was tracked down years later by *The New York Times*, who displayed it for her so that their readers could benefit from her reaction. As for Hondros, whose reputation was borne up by the fame of his signal image, like Adams, he was disappointed to discover that the photograph had been displayed at anti-war demonstrations outside the White House. He remained attached to the ideal of journalistic objectivity, and when he covered the Tal Afar incident he did so fully and neutrally (as even Petraeus acknowledged).[73] Hondros' subsequent death in Libya confirmed his elevation from photojournalist to photographic author, and the image of Samar Hassan now more often rebounds to his fame than to a condemnation of US actions in Iraq.

Figure 37: Ayman Oghanna, Samar Hassan, with a relative, had never seen the photo of her taken after her parents were killed by US soldiers in Iraq.

The story of the Hassan family following the shooting speaks to much about the state of Iraq under the occupation and afterwards. The boy, Rakan, had been paralysed by a bullet that passed

[73] Régis le Sommier, 'Foreword', in Hondros, *Testament*, p. 9; on Petraeus' comments, see Hondros in Kamber, *Photojournalists on War*, p. 119.

through his spine. Because of the fame of the photograph, he was eventually taken to Boston for treatment and, following intensive therapy, was able to walk again with assistance and return to his extended family. Yet three years later, Rakan was killed in a bombing attack on the family house, apparently motivated by the belief that, given the time that he had spent in the US, he was a spy. An American aid worker, Marla Ruzicka, who had helped arrange Rakan's treatment abroad was herself later killed by a car bomb in Baghdad.'[74]

Such tactics and behaviour demonstrated a deep disregard for Iraqi life. Under the 'Shock and Awe' schema, the enemy was supposed to be defeated swiftly before domestic opposition to the war could take hold, and this meant a swift and wide inculcation of terror. Cheney was in addition a fan of Phoenix, admiring its secrecy and its lawless methods.[75]

While in Vietnam, the counting of corpses was used as the major index of the war's progress, in explicit reaction to the PR disaster that the body count eventually became, in Iraq, there was a refusal to count—or at least a refusal to release the figures. The huge tranche of Army documents sent to WikiLeaks by Chelsea Manning revealed that it had been keeping a tally—albeit one corrupted by the opposite incentives than those in Vietnam, to deflate rather than inflate the figures.[76]

Figure 38: Christopher Anderson, Marking kills on helmet, Iraq, April 2003.

[74] Hondros, *Testament*, pp. 87, 155; see also Tim Arango, 'Face That Screamed War's Pain Looks Back, 6 Hard Years Later', *New York Times*, 7 May 2011.
[75] Ehrenberg et al, *The Iraq Papers*, pp. 461-2, 226.
[76] David Leigh, 'Secret Data Gives Lie to Claim that "We Don't Count Bodies"', *The Guardian*, 23 October 2010, p. 7.

A largely pliant press did little to investigate what the Pentagon was hiding. In June 2003 after a five-week investigation, the AP reported that at least 3,240 civilians had died in the invasion; these numbers were arrived at by examining 'hand-written, blood-spattered hospital logs', and counting the dead exhumed from ruins.[77] In 2004, Jamail visited a Baghdad morgue to investigate the death rate: as far as the doctors there could tell, it was running at three to four times that before the invasion. What is more, many bodies were buried by relatives without going near the morgue, while others (for reasons we will come to) were left to rot where they lay, so the real rate was even higher.[78]

The pre-invasion death rate had already been greatly magnified by the sanctions regime, which had starved Iraqis and denied them essential medical supplies. The invasion and occupation were more lethal still. Leilah Nadir writes of four members of one branch of her family who died in the wake of the invasion:

> Within two years, they all died one after another. Not from a direct assault because of the war, but because of terror, stress, a lack of adequate nutrition, sanitation, medicine and access to decent health care and good doctors and nurses.[79]

Various organisations made very different attempts to get at the true figures, which have been analysed by John Tirman in a sustained analysis of death-count methodologies.[80]

The lowest figures are given by the Iraq Body Count, which uses news media in English to estimate casualties. This method arrives at an account of validated deaths but also a large under-count of the true scale of mortality because such data gathering is not a journalist's primary role, the Western media were concentrated in Baghdad and other cities, and the resources of the news organisations were stretched. These shaky grounds did not stop the mainstream media using the Iraq Body Count as if it was the most reliable source.[81] A more complete attempt was made by Marla Ruzicka who formed a charity, Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflicts (CIVIC), to organise 150 surveyors to go door-to-door gathering casualty figures. This became very dangerous work, and as we have seen Ruzicka gave her life for it.

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[77] Marla Ruzicka in Katovsky/ Carlson, *Embedded*, p. 299.
[78] Dahr Jamail, *Beyond the Green Zone*, p. 198.
[79] Nadir, *The Orange Trees of Baghdad*, p. 199.
[80] Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, ch. 10.
[81] What is more, few news organisations explained the different ways of counting the dead, and indeed little analysis of Iraqi deaths was made at all, except to play up the sectarian angle. See Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, pp. 331, 333, 335.

The medical journal, *The Lancet*, used a cluster survey approach to arrive at an estimate of the scale of deaths caused by direct killing and the consequences of malnutrition, and the degraded water, power and health services. The first survey of 2004 showed that 98,000 excess Iraqi deaths had occurred; the second in 2006, over 650,000.[82] While this study used standard and well-respected methods, its findings were so out of line with the invaders' PR and their media mouthpieces, that it was met with intense controversy. The *Lancet* study also showed that nearly 200,000 deaths could be attributed to US military action. This caused a severe reaction, not least because the figure was higher than those killed by Saddam Hussein throughout the twenty-four years of his dictatorship.[83] The controversy was enough for John Hopkins to conduct a scientific review of the second set of figures, which found nothing wrong in the methods used.[84]

Such secrecy and evasion over the scale of Iraqi deaths made any photographic record of the general conduct of the war more difficult. It issued into a deliberately obscured scene, in which the estimates of unofficial sources were always sharply contested. The Pentagon voices claiming (as they had done nearly four decades earlier) that their weaponry was precisely targeted, and that huge pains were being taken to avoid civilian casualties, were heard the loudest.

Massacre at Haditha

As with My Lai, one incident of slaughter stands out in historical memory, in part because of its photography. And similarly, if it is seen as exceptional rather than symptomatic, this is a distortion of the record. On 19 November 2005, a unit of Marines (Kilo Company of the 3rd Battalion, 5th Regiment), in apparent revenge for losing a troop member to a roadside bomb, massacred twenty-four unarmed Iraqis in a series of attacks that unfolded over several hours. At no time were they fired upon, and the victims included women and children (the youngest being three years old), and a very elderly, wheelchair-bound amputee who was shot nine times.[85] The Marines entertained themselves by photographing the corpses.

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[82] Les Roberts/ Riyadh Lafta/ Richard Garfield/ Jamal Khudhairi/ Gilbert Burnham, 'Mortality Before and After the 2003 Invasion Of Iraq: Cluster Sample Survey', *The Lancet*, vol. 364, 20 November 2004, pp. 1857–64; Gilbert Burnham/ Riyadh Lafta/ Shannon Doocy/ Les Roberts, 'Mortality After the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: A Cross-Sectional Cluster Sample Survey', *The Lancet*, vo. 368, 21 October 2006, pp. 1421-8.
[83] Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, pp. 308-9, 358. For one extreme reaction, see Christopher Hitchens, 'The Lancet's Slant: Epidemiology Meets Moral Idiocy', *Salon*, 16 October 2006.
[84] Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, pp. 326-7.
[85] Marjorie Cohn, 'The Haditha Massacre', *Counterpunch*, 31 January 2012; http://www.counterpunch.org/2012/01/31/the-haditha-massacre/ See also Burke, *The 9/11 Wars*, p. 244.

When the massacre came to be investigated, the exact sequence of events was hard to reconstruct. Local Iraqis were too terrified to talk to the US authorities. The Marines first lied to cover up their crimes, and then, incredibly, were permitted to strike deals to testify in exchange for immunity from prosecution. After US forces had left Iraq, classified interviews with the military personnel involved were found in a junkyard, being used for fuel. They showed that the Marines had not thought the incident worth investigating because the deaths of civilians in such numbers were so routine, and that they often gunned down civilians while their fellow troop members took pictures. As Major-General Steve Johnson, the commander of US forces in Anbar Province put it, in a telling phrase, such deaths were 'a cost of doing business'.[86]

The Western press played down the incident, casting doubt on whether US troops could be responsible for such acts, refusing to use the words 'massacre' or 'terror', and only reluctantly using the word 'murder'.[87] The US media, in particular, remained fixed on the motives and mental conditions of the perpetrators, as if that were the one and only story, and carried remarkably little comment from Iraqis, not even from those who had survived the massacre.

Figure 39: Lucian Read, Haditha, November 2005: The bodies of some of the twenty-four civilians killed by US Marines following the death of a Marine killed by a roadside bomb in Haditha are laid out for burial.

[86] Michael S. Schmidt, 'Junkyard Gives Up Secret Accounts of Massacre in Iraq', *New York Times*, 14 December 2011.
[87] DiMaggio, *When Media Goes to War*, p. 107.

Photography was involved in various ways. One Marine who had taken photographs for his own purposes was ordered to delete them.[88] Another, Lance Corporal Roel Ryan Briones, was instructed to take photographs of the corpses before moving them.[89] *The Washington Post* later published leaked photographs, showing the victims' corpses:

> Marines were found to have downloaded the images from each other's devices, traded them and loaded them onto personal Web sites; one Marine told investigators he saw some of the photographs set to music on another Marine's computer. Some were e-mailed from Iraq to a civilian in the United States, but none surfaced publicly until now.
>
> Among the images, there is a young boy with a picture of a helicopter on his pajamas, slumped over, his face and head covered in blood. There is a mother lying on a bed, arms splayed, the bodies of three young children huddled against her right side. There are men with gaping head wounds, and a woman and a child hunkered down on their knees, their hands frozen around their faces as if permanently bracing for an attack.[90]

Sacrificing journalism to commercial and political convenience, the *Post*'s editors protected their readers from seeing the worst of these; and along with them, US military authorities and the Bush regime.

Lucian Read, who was invited by Iraqis to take photographs of the dead and was allowed to step away from his embed for a while to do so, refused to believe that his beloved Marines could be guilty of massacre.[91] Before the killings, he had taken a series of celebratory monochrome portraits of the future perpetrators, including squad leader, Staff Sergeant Frank Wuterich.

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[88] Schmidt, 'Junkyard'.
[89] Marjorie Cohn, 'The Haditha Massacre', *Counterpunch*.
[90] Josh White, 'Marines' Photos Provide Graphic Evidence in Haditha Probe', *The Washington Post*, 7 January 2007.
[91] Read in Kamber, *Photojournalists on War*, p. 220.

Figure 40: Lucian Read, Sgt. Frank Wuterich, twenty-five, Meridan, Connecticut, 3rd Platoon, Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, United States Marine Corps, at the company's firm base in Hit, Iraq, 23 September 2005.

Read filed his pictures of the massacre victims, and for months there was no response whatever. Only when *Time* magazine got hold of the story, through the horrific video of the corpses taken by an Iraqi videographer, did it attain notoriety.[92] Franco Pagetti later took photographs of the children who survived the massacre by playing dead beneath the bodies of their family members.[93]

Despite years of investigations and court proceedings, no one was ever imprisoned for the deaths, and even Wuterich received only a three-month suspended sentence. As Tirman points out, this followed the pattern for earlier massacres:

> […] initial shock at the revelations, military lying and cover-up, investigations in response to the news media coverage, right-wing backlash against prosecuting or blaming soldiers, very little legal culpability achieved, and ultimate public indifference.[94]

Riverbend wrote a blog about both the rape of Abeer Qasim Hamza al-Janabi and the murders at Haditha, in an expression of what was surely a common change in attitude towards the invaders:

> In the news they're estimating her age to be around 24, but Iraqis from the area say she was only 14. Fourteen. Imagine your 14-year-old sister or your 14-year-old daughter. Imagine her being gang-raped by a group of psychopaths and then the girl was killed and her body burned to cover up the rape. Finally, her parents and her five-year-old sister were also killed. Hail the American heroes... Raise your heads high supporters of the 'liberation'—your troops have made you proud today. I don't believe the troops should be tried in American courts. I believe they should be handed over to the people in the area and only then will justice be properly served. [...]
>
> The pity I once had for foreign troops in Iraq is gone. It's been eradicated by the atrocities in Abu Ghraib, the deaths in Haditha and the latest news of rapes and killings. I look at them in their armored vehicles and to be honest—I can't bring myself to care whether they are 19 or 39. I can't bring myself to care if they make it back home alive. I can't bring myself to care anymore about the wife or parents or children they left behind. I can't bring myself to care because it's difficult to see beyond the horrors. I look at them

[92] Read in Kamber, *Photojournalists on War*, p. 220.
[93] Iman Wahid, as published in Tim McGirk, 'Collateral Damage or Civilian Massacre in Haditha?', *Time*, 19 March 2006.
[94] Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, pp. 306-7.

> and wonder just how many innocents they killed and how many more they'll kill before they go home. How many more young Iraqi girls will they rape?[95]

The Regime of Death

For Iraqis, incidents such as this which came to light merely confirmed the many, many stories of abuse and killing with which they were all too familiar. Once again, photographers who wanted to show the systematically brutal character of the occupation had a hard task before them. Susan Sontag's charge that photography makes the world 'atomic, manageable, and opaque', denying interconnectedness in a welter of freestanding incident, while only persuasive in atomised societies, held true of the narrow view of embedding, driven from incident to incident, and confined to the social solidarity of the troop unit.[96] Yet, as we have seen, even their impressionistic, individualised view of death was ruled out as embedding rules evolved to exclude bodies, the wounded, hospitals and war damage.

[95] Blog of 11 June 2006; quoted in Nadje Sadig Al-Ali, *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present*, Zed Books, London 2007, pp. 239-4. See http://riverbendblog.blogspot.co.uk/2006_07_01_archive.html
[96] Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 23.

Figure 41: Farah Nosh, Baghdad, March 2006. Duyar Sai Fehan was wounded in May 2003 when his civilian vehicle was run over by an American tank.

One photographic attempt to grasp the toll on civilians was Farah Nosh's series of black-and-white portraits of Iraqis left with life-changing injuries by military action and sectarian conflict. They were made covertly and often hurriedly in very perilous circumstances.[97] As she moved around Baghdad, Nosh was frequently caught up in incidents which could easily have led to her death.[98] She had to make elaborate arrangements to persuade her subjects to be photographed and to visit them in their homes; only males would agree. Each of her photographs is a powerful

[97] See Nosh in Kamber, *Photojournalists on War*, pp. 202-3; Nadir, *The Orange Trees of Baghdad*, pp. 218-19.
[98] See Nadir, *The Orange Trees of Baghdad*, pp. 204-6, 209-11.

portrait of the maimed, often seen with their carers and dependants, and the circumstances of their domestic life, but the effect builds over the series as the scale of mutilation is revealed and the causes are carefully detailed. Duyar Sai Fehan lost a leg and an arm when a US tank ran over his car (as we have seen, a frequent type of incident). He had to sell most of his possessions to pay for medical treatment and rely upon the charity of friends. Generally, the people Nosh photographed had similar stories to tell: of no or little compensation for their injuries, of having to pay for medical treatment, of unemployment and destitution, and the support of friends and neighbours.[99]

Figure 42: Razak Rashed Abbas (L), of the Iraqi Police, aged fifty-four, injured on 27 October 2003 by a suicide bomber, resulting in a left leg amputation. Abbas at home with his son and granddaughter in the Adhamiya district of Baghdad.

[99] See ibid., ch. 14; on Duyar Sai Fehan, p. 220.

With Vietnam, the most concerted photographic accounts of the war came in books. In Iraq, this did not happen in quite the same way. A number of books were swiftly made which celebrated the triumph of the invasion and the pictorial glories of the RMA.[100] These need not detain us since they were content to relay narrow and misleading spectacle.

Then various photojournalists made single-authored books—again, quite soon after the invasion—which reflected more critically on the Iraqi situation, and opened themselves to civilian life. Bruno Stevens' *Baghdad: Truth Lies Within* was a remarkable counter-narrative to the war, made by spending much time with Iraqis, and clearly detailing their circumstances before and after the invasion, along with the scale of US violence (figs. 15, 16 & 124). The most celebrated of these early books was van Kesteren's *Why, Mister, Why?*, which has sometimes been compared in its scale and organisation to Griffiths' *Vietnam Inc.*[101] The two books are actually quite different, and part of the divide is expressed in their titles: Griffiths' urge was to analyse the situation and uncover the causes hidden behind the various PR spectacles on offer. *Vietnam Inc.* expresses its thesis succinctly in its title: that the war is to force consumerism on the subject nation. By contrast, *Why, Mister, Why?* takes the form of a question, and much of the book is staged as a series of bewilderments. Following a model pioneered in photojournalism by Gilles Peress, van Kesteren piles up a chaotic accumulation of fragmented views as a register of his own disorientation as much as that of the Iraqis'.[102] Some pictures are even split in half by pages containing text, which must be lifted up to reveal them as a whole, so that the book forces the viewer into a process of discovery. While *Vietnam Inc.* is structured around a number of conceptual categories, *Why, Mister, Why?* is divided into a series of photographic episodes based on events—expressed in headline mode: '5 US Troops Killed by Mortar Attack', 'Saddam Falls'—many of which remain murky in motivation and meaning.

Two other rapid responses were collections of photographic work—one, *Unembedded*, of independent photographers, and the other, *War*, of photographers working for the photographic agency, VII.[103] The latter gave an account of various aspects of the war on terror, while the former focused on Iraq to show what was being missed by the embedding system. Both were necessarily fixed on incident, and did not evolve a singular view of the conflicts.

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[100] Editors of Time, eds., *21 Days to Baghdad*, Time Books, New York 2003; Marcel Saba, ed., *Witness Iraq: A War Journal February-April 2003*, powerHouse Books, Bew York 2003; Storm, *Desert Diaries*; Walker, *The Iraq War*.
[101] Bruno Stevens, *Baghdad: Truth Lies Within*, Ludion, Gent-Amsterdam 2004; Van Kesteren, *Why Mister, Why?;* Robert J. Galbraith also self-published a photographic diary, *Iraq: Eyewitness to War* in 2004.
[102] See the discussion of Peress' book *Telex Iran* (1983) in Kennedy, *Afterimages*, pp. 69-73.
[103] Abdul-Ahad/ Alford/ Anderson/ Leistner, *Unembedded*; VII, *War*, de.MO, New York 2003.

Another wave of books appeared in 2007 and 2008—by Christoph Bangert, Thomas Dworzak, Ashley Gilbertson and Benjamin Lowy. Gilbertson's book, *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*, developed a critical view of US military culture out of a series of embeds. While this book contained images of intense proximity, the products of very perilous combat situations, Gilbertson reflected long on US military culture and strategy, and on the photojournalism that they encouraged. The book ends with an image of an armed militia fighter, paid by the US and the Iraqi government, sitting in a ruined building beneath a poster of Muqtada al-Sadr to whom he claims allegiance. Gilbertson writes:

> I left Iraq in January of 2006 convinced that the country will never pull itself together again, whether under American or Iraqi administrators. America invaded Iraq, and it stood aside as the country plunged into chaos. […] America armed militias on all sides, and then shrugged as civil war broke out, proclaiming it to be an Iraqi issue.[104]

The experience marked the end of war photography for Gilbertson.

The other three books, in marked contrast, all emphasise distance. Lowy's book is tellingly composed of views through the armoured windows of military vehicles.[105] It gives an insight not just into the isolation of the photographer in Iraq but of the remarkable despoliation of the environment, marked by ruins, blast- and separation-walls, barbed wire and piles of trash, as civilians scurry anxiously through the streets. Dworzak's book pairs images of a US medical station, and of troops in action, and stills from subtitled re-runs of *M*A*S*H* that the photographer watched at the base (fig. 72).[106] Again, Iraqis are necessarily held at a distance, usually seen during home invasions or when held as prisoners. While *M*A*S*H* was set during the Korean War, its critical view of war was also of Vietnam, and Dworzak's juxtapositions point up how the situation in Iraq edged closer to that of Vietnam. Bangert's book describes empty spaces, or scenes of odd spatial dislocation, while some photographs point to the absurd and alien presence of US troops in the country who are usually seen as waiting, watchful and anxious, rather than in action poses. Their distance from the population is emphasised, as is the photographer's own, who rarely has contact with Iraqis outside of hospitals and morgues. As in Lowy, views of abandoned market stalls and playground equipment, and onto devastated cityscapes, delineate the legacies of the invasion and sectarian violence.[107]

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[104] Gilbertson, *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*, p. 241.
[105] Lowy, *Iraq | Perspectives*.
[106] Dworzak, *M*A*S*H I*R*A*Q*.
[107] Christopher Bangert, *Iraq: The Space Between*, powerHouse Books, New York 2007.

Figure 43: Christoph Bangert, an American soldier searches for weapons and bomb-making materials in a disused water tank, Tel Sokhayr, Dyala, April 2005.

A remarkable oddity of the book-length accounts is that of those international photojournalists who stayed longest in Iraq—Franco Pagetti, Yuri Kozyrev, Ghaith Abdul Ahad and Andrea Bruce—and thus had the chance to evolve systematic accounts, none has produced a book. Attempts at it—by Kozyrev for Schilt and Pagetti for Trolley have failed. From a commercial point of view (and here we see, once again, the materials essential to democracy at the mercy of business calculations), they stayed on too long, as the war dragged on apparently unchanged, and interest faded at the complex, bloody and sordid spectacle of intractable sectarian violence.[108]

[108] Kozyrev's book for Schilt, a large volume entitled *Iraq: The Full Story* has been announced but has failed to appear; Pagetti's for Trolley, *The House of Wisdom: Five Years in Iraq*, was stalled due to lack of funds.

Figure 44: Ahmad Al-Rubaye, Sadr City car bomb, Baghdad, May 2016.

Some photojournalism, especially that made by Iraqis, did show civilian casualties on a large scale, the widespread devastation of the country, the brutality of life under the occupation, the degeneration of infrastructure, and the move to sectarian warfare. It served to inform many in the Arab world and beyond, along with dissident opinion in the West. Yet the mainstream media in the combatant nations—especially in the US and the UK—had access to such images but generally declined to use them. Many of the images gathered by stringers and citizen reporters in Iraq were thought too graphic or too disruptive of accepted narratives for Western news organisations to show.[109] Stripped of its core function as news, it only became possible to reconstruct that image later, when the time for action against the war had passed.

[109] Matheson/ Allan, *Digital War Reporting*, p. 103.

Chapter 14: Circles of Invisibility

Other aspects of the invasion and occupation of Iraq, and more generally of the 'war on terror', remained even more difficult to depict and to publish. This was certainly true of the drone and the death squad, but what was perhaps the most salient feature of the occupation was the hardest to put into images: the destruction and neglect of the Iraqi state, which had lethal consequences for so many.

It has long been known that you cannot trust the armed forces to build things—their talents lie in the opposite direction. A concerted attempt was made to transform Iraq into a capitalist economy of a radical, unregulated and privatised type, completely open to foreign ownership and investment, and to do so from the ruins of an interventionist regime which had subsidised many basic needs, and which had maintained power through extensive patronage networks.[1] The construction of the new meant the dismantling of the old, not merely by military means but with legal orders and covert tricks. Iraqi state industries were prevented from working by denying them electricity and finance (indeed a secret edict forbade Iraq's central bank from offering finance to state enterprises). They were, in any case, scheduled for swift privatisation, no matter what the consequences in terms of hobbling the reconstruction or throwing people out of work.[2] The treatment dealt out was even more drastic than that applied in Russia and Eastern Europe after 1989, which had produced such catastrophic effects.[3]

One of the foundations of counter-insurgency thinking over the decades has been the coupling of intimidatory force and persuasive development.[4] Within the limits imposed by their use of the media, the US military were accomplished wielders of force, but they and the state apparatus as a whole were completely hopeless at development.

The Bush regime believed that it could will a radical new reality into existence, abolishing history, culture and regional politics. The Office of Special Plans, the cabal that had fabricated the WMD pretext for war, was placed in charge of postwar planning in Iraq, under the direction of Douglas J. Feith. This planning, which envisaged sweeping free-market reforms, was conducted in great secrecy, sealed off even from the State Department and the CIA. It was operating under highly

[1] On patronage, regulation of industry and subsidy, see Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, pp. 204-7.
[2] Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, pp. 349, 347.
[3] See Peter Gowan, 'Neo-Liberal Theory and Practice for Eastern Europe', *New Left Review*, I, no. 213, September-October 1995, pp. 3-60.
[4] This is a general theme in the counter-insurgency theory analysed in Khalili, *Time in the Shadows*. Much of what follows relies upon Rajiv Chandrasekaran's remarkable account, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City*, along with the cogent account and collection of documents in *The Iraq Papers*.

optimistic—if not delusional—assumptions about conditions in Iraq following the invasion. Feith was close to Ahmed Chalabi who was the Bush regime favourite to take eventual charge of the country despite his well-developed reputation for corruption and zero support among Iraqis. As a result, Middle Eastern specialists who might have advised against Chalabi or commented critically on the utter inadequacy of the planning were excluded from the process.[5] This blocking out of inconvenient expertise held throughout the occupation, and only a handful of the 1,000 staff at the US Embassy in Baghdad were fluent in Arabic.[6]

The plans were kept secret because they were illegal, and would have been incendiary if made public in Iraq where millions were employed by the state or were dependent on its welfare programmes. A confidential plan (put together by USAID and the Treasury Department), even the title of which—'Moving the Iraqi Economy from Recovery to Sustainable Growth'—now reads with grim irony, laid out a radical programme of privatisation, the promotion of unregulated foreign direct investment and the abolition of subsidies.[7] These schemes violated the Hague Convention which requires occupying regimes to respect the existing property laws of the occupied nation to prevent such looting of state property.[8]

Minimal funds and other resources were given to the body meant to aid Iraqis in the wake of the invasion, the Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), once again on the assumption that all would go well once the market was unchained. The inexperienced political appointees put in charge would have had an easier task if government buildings had not been looted, destroying their equipment and records. In a telling order of priorities, only the Republican Palace and the Ministry of Oil were protected by the occupying troops.[9] Rumsfeld's famous complacency at the rampant looting of government property ('freedom's untidy') was more than matched by some Occupation officials who saw the thefts as an informal privatisation.[10] If bus drivers stole buses to drive their old routes and pocket the fares, or if thousands of police cars became taxis, or if trucks used to deliver food rations were looted, all to the good.[11] Even thefts from arms dumps and military bases was not prevented.[12]

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[5] Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life*, pp. 30-4.
[6] Steele, *Defeat*, p. 12.
[7] Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life*, pp. 128-30.
[8] The plans were leaked to the *Wall Street Journal* in May 2003. See Ehrenberg et al, *The Iraq Papers*, pp. 295-6.
[9] Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life*, pp. 55, 43-5.
[10] Sean Loughlin, 'Rumsfeld on Looting in Iraq: "Stuff Happens"', *CNN*, 12 April 2003; http://edition.cnn.com/2003/US/04/11/sprj.irq.pentagon/
[11] Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life*, pp. 133-4.
[12] Steele witnessed the looting of the gigantic al-Taji military base in Tikrit. Steele, *Defeat*, p. 62; for another account, see Pax, *Baghdad Blog*, p. 160.

The CPA that replaced ORHA was led by a businessman, Paul Bremer, who had no experience of either Iraq or the Middle East. Ignorance of the region was seen as an advantage when it came to building the neoliberal tabula rasa. The appointees to the CPA, who were to command enormous funds, were mostly well-connected Republicans and young staff recruited through right-wing think-tanks such as the Heritage Foundation.[13] Unlike most Iraqis in 2003, they had a crude sectarian view of Iraqi politics, publicly announcing that they could use the Kurds and the Shiites to repress the remnants of the Ba'ath regime.[14]

The effects of deregulation were swiftly felt. They were immediately visible on the roads. In the first nine months of the occupation, the number of cars more than doubled, leading to severe petrol shortages and interminable traffic jams.[15] Moreover:

> The stoplights went out. People started driving on the wrong side of the road, secure in the knowledge that the cops were no longer reporting for work. Cars barrelled down sidewalks. People who always wanted to make a left turn in front of their house but couldn't because of a concrete median simply hired construction workers to jackhammer away the obstruction.[16]

The programme to make Iraq a neoliberal paradise foundered on the political resistance of its people, and the economic chaos that it had created. Unions in the oil industry successfully opposed the attempt at privatisation.[17] Hyper-inflation, caused by the large amounts of useless US spending, eroded the incomes of many Iraqis to the point of extreme poverty.[18] Plans to replace food rations (on which 80 per cent of the population depended for survival) with cash payments were thought too risky to implement as they threatened even greater public disorder.[19] Even so, as with everything else, the system started to break down anyway. The new regime only distributed half the rations that the Hussein dictatorship had managed under economic blockade. Those driven out of their homes by the violence could no longer be reached by the rationing programme, and millions of people became even more malnourished than they had been under sanctions, or even starved.[20]

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[13] Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life*, pp. 95, 101, 104-5.
[14] Steele, *Defeat*, pp. 203-4.
[15] Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life*, p. 262.
[16] Ibid., p. 261.
[17] Ehrenberg et al, *The Iraq Papers*, pp. 361-3.
[18] Burke, *The 9/11 Wars*, p. 433; see also Brigham, *The United States and Iraq*, p. 163.
[19] Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life*, pp. 250-4.
[20] Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr*, pp. 240-1.

The reconstruction effort foundered in a swamp of corruption. The administration spent colossal sums attempting to rebuild the Iraqi infrastructure but failed to make even modest improvements. At every level, the US regime and its Iraqi replacement failed. There were no reliable electricity supplies or clean water, or a decent health service, or basic security. Dahr Jamail interviewed doctors in Sadr City at the Chwader General Hospital who said that the shortages of all supplies and medicines were worse than in the sanctions era, and that they did not even have enough clean water to operate hygienically.[21] While the Hussein regime had managed to provide clean water to most Iraqis, the CPA would fail miserably in this regard with hideous consequences for people's health.[22] Neoliberal ideology and sheer fantasy trumped saving lives: in an effort to get Iraq to buy imported drugs from the US, the supply was mismanaged, leading to serious and prolonged shortages of essential medicines; no funds were given for the renovation of emergency rooms, as if the insurgency could be wished away by the refusal to treat its casualties.[23]

In another striking contrast with Vietnam, the environment was poisoned. We have seen that Vietnam was left with a terrible legacy of dioxin poisoning from the use of Agent Orange to destroy forests and crops. The US state and military fully understood the effects of dioxin but used it anyway on an immense scale in a deliberate act of environmental and genetic vandalism. Iraq has been suffering similar genetic malformations among children born since the invasion. Yet this is not so much an act of malice as of carelessness, and the lack of the ability or will to do anything to improve matters: huge pits were used to burn rubbish on military bases—an understandable expediency during full-scale war, perhaps, but they remained burning for over a decade—incinerating a toxic mix of heavy metals, foam, electronics, tyres, ammunition, faeces, animal carcasses, batteries and asbestos, despite the obvious effects on the health of Iraqis and US military personnel alike.[24]

The CPA was largely funded from the sale of Iraqi oil, with the proceeds being handed over to the occupying regime. $8.8 billion in Iraqi oil money went missing, including $2.4 billion in cash which had been flown into the country a few days before the handover of sovereignty.[25] Vast quantities of oil were also stolen.[26] Of the $18.4 billion granted by Congress to the CPA in 2003, very little was spent, due to bureaucratic delays and security problems, and nothing on

[21] Jamail, *Beyond the Green Zone*, pp. 196-7.
[22] Burke, *The 9/11 Wars*, p. 139.
[23] Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life*, pp. 240-3, 239.
[24] John Vidal, 'Iraqi Children Pay High Health Cost of War-Induced Air Pollution, Study Finds', *The Guardian*, 22 August 2016.
[25] Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life*, p. 329. See also the documents in Ehrenberg et al, *The Iraq Papers*, ch. 7.
[26] Ehrenberg et al, *The Iraq Papers*, p. 374.

construction, healthcare, sanitation or water supplies. Bremer, asked about his greatest achievements in Iraq, said that they has been lowering taxes, liberalising foreign investment and reducing import duties![27]

The result of this criminally negligent process of 'reform' and administration was grave suffering on a massive scale. The radical de-Ba'athification programme banned from office almost every experienced official in the country, along with many educators and doctors. As thousands of teachers were sacked, some schools in Sunni districts were reduced to one or two remaining staff. The fatal decision to dissolve the armed forces, the police and the secret service not only threw many thousands of armed and disaffected men out of work, who struggled with all the resources at their command to feed themselves and their families, but opened the new forces to infiltration by Jihadis.[28] Naturally, amid numerous unemployed ex-military and alongside many underpaid new recruits, arms were cheap and plentiful.[29]

Corruption rotted every state structure. High state positions were the preserve of returning exiles who dwelt in the Green Zone, cut off from the dreadful condition of life for ordinary Iraqis. There was a high turnover in these posts, so each incumbent looked to plunder as much as they could while they could.[30] The Iraqi Army proved its true worth in its first test against a determined opponent once the Americans had gone. It did even worse than the ARVN. It was by then supposed to be a well-equipped and well-trained force of 350,000 soldiers on which over $40 billion had been spent over the three years since 2011. Yet it collapsed in the face of an attack by hugely outnumbered ISIS fighters. The Iraqi government itself is little more than 'an institutionalised kleptocracy', as one former minister told Patrick Cockburn, and US insistence on outsourcing everything, including military supplies, opened up myriad avenues for graft. In a scam worthy of Gogol's *Dead Souls*, Army commanders claimed that they had many more troops than they did, pocketing the wages of the ghost soldiers. The forces sent to fight ISIS in Anbar Province had only a few clips of ammunition for their rifles, went hungry because their commanders had embezzled the funds meant to feed them, and in oil-rich Iraq were even short of fuel.[31]

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[27] Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life*, pp. 321-2.
[28] Ibid., pp. 76-81.
[29] The situation can be compared to that in much of sub-Saharan Africa where combat rifles are cheaply available because corrupt and badly paid soldiers sell them. See Paul Collier, *Wars, Guns and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places*, The Bodley Head, London 2009, 115-16.
[30] Al-Jezairy, *The Devil You Don't Know*, p. 159.
[31] Patrick Cockburn, *The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution*, Verso, London 2015, pp. xi, 64-6,136.

The strangest element here is that, whereas in every other US intervention globally, the elite had been defended from the masses, here, in taking the side of the Shia against the Sunni-dominated elite, it was potentially the opposite. Among the Shia, one of the most powerful movements was led by Muqtada al-Sadr, supported by many among the millions of the dispossessed who lived in Sadr City. Muqtada's attraction was in large part due to his steadfast opposition to the Occupation. As Cockburn points out, this produced a deep contradiction as the US tried to create a strong Iraqi government while at the same time suppressing the Sadrists who would have provided its core support.[32] Deeper still, was the project to empower the majority, most of whom desperately needed state support, while imposing neoliberal order and destroying the very programmes that they relied upon. Trying to square the circle, the CPA postponed elections in the false hope that there would emerge from the chaos a secular, moderate, pro-market political class that could lead the state to US satisfaction. This only produced greater Iraqi opposition to what became seen by many as a long-term occupation, on the model of Palestine under the Israelis.[33] The principles that the US and its allies were supposedly upholding were in fact being undermined by their association with the dysfunction and brutality of the occupation. It is hardly surprising that the forces of religion, nationalism and conservatism rose in reaction, being widely seen as a set of values to set against Western hypocrisy.[34]

[32] Cockburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr*, p. 239.
[33] Burke, *The 9/11 Wars*, pp. 112-13.
[34] This point is made in ibid., p. 140.

Figure 45: Wathiq Khuzaie, Iraqi boys swim in a pond caused by an explosion from recent fighting in the Shiite district of Sadr City, May 2008.

In these dire and dramatic circumstances, it was crucial to show the slow violence of corruption, infrastructure failure, and a climate of fear so extreme that it kept children out of school and the seriously ill out of hospital. Showing all of that was not an insuperable photographic problem—think of W. Eugene Smith's famous *Life* stories such as 'Nurse Midwife', which dealt with just such poverty and neglect—but it would have taken long, close engagement with subjects and environment, precisely the luxuries ruled out by the endemic violence of Iraq.[35] Wathiq Khuzaie's image of a crater that makes do for a swimming pool gestures towards the deep collapse, and celebrates Iraqi ingenuity and spirit in the face of such depredation. As we shall see in the next chapter, images taken by amateurs, especially when aided and framed by professionals, became one answer to this problem.

Remote-Control Killing

The state's ambition to gather universal surveillance, which was also pioneered in Iraq (of which more in ch. 22), is linked to the daily practice of murder by drone strike. The drone is the death

[35] See Glenn G. Willumson, *W. Eugene Smith and the Photographic Essay*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1992.

squad's complement, the means through which the RMA ideal of small-scale, cheap and often repeated disciplinary violence finds its logical end point. Lacking visibility, news exposure and US casualties, killing appears free.

Drones were first systematically used to kill, rather than merely spy, in Iraq. They came into greater use when US troops started to leave, and after they had gone, the US continued to command a fleet of drones, flown in Iraq's 'nominally sovereign' airspace.[36] Even more than with death-squad operations, most of the intelligence used to select targets for killing is circumstantial: people are killed because their behaviour fits a pattern deemed to indicate insurgency. In these so-called 'signature strikes', any male over the age of thirteen who is in the vicinity of a target is assumed to be a terrorist, and is added to the tally of dead enemies.[37]

There was a huge escalation in drone killings under Obama, and this policy was linked to the much increased use of signature strikes.[38] It is considered acceptable to kill thirty bystanders to assassinate one 'terrorist'—a limit that juggles proportionality and how attacks will play in the media.[39] Even on Pentagon figures, the vast majority of drone-strike victims have been innocents.

The US press was pliantly complicit in this programme of killing: an analysis of all the 2009 reports from *The New York Times* and *The LA Times* showed that all but one emphasised the deaths of militants, while none placed weight on civilian deaths.[40] Drones—usually invisible to victims and the media alike—launch missiles to blow up people who have no access to social media. It is hard to imagine the US government exploding a bomb in a mall in Bristol or Vancouver because they suspected that terrorists are shopping there. But in the shrinking areas where the communities are exclusively of poor, brown-skinned people without access to cameras or phones, slaughtering anyone in the vicinity of the suspects is just fine. Among those people, even US citizens can be murdered on the order of the President.[41]

The experience of living under drones is rarely discussed in the mainstream press. People live in continual fear, and when drones can be heard, this fear rises to terror. This Sword of Damocles, which may fall at any time, is the reverse of that in legend for it hangs over the heads of the powerless, not that of the tyrant. The results are widespread trauma that manifests in

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[36] Medea Benjamin, *Drone Warfare: Killing by Remote Control*, Verso, London 2013, pp. 18, 57-8. See also Cafruny/ Lehmann, 'The US and Iraq', pp. 5-8.
[37] Scahill, *Dirty Wars*, pp. 183, 249; Benjamin, *Drone Warfare*, p. 131; Cockburn, *Kill Chain*, p. 217.
[38] Scahill, *Dirty Wars*, pp. 250-1, 513; Cockburn, *Kill Chain*, ch. 12.
[39] Cockburn, *Kill Chain*, p. 139; Weizman, *The Least of All Possible Evils*, p. 132.
[40] DiMaggio, *When Media Goes to War*, p. 305.
[41] Scahill, *Dirty Wars*, pp. 392, 367-8.

sleeplessness, depression, PTSD and suicide. Any gatherings—even those at schools—are targeted, so social life breaks down.[42] Even coming to the aid of the wounded is dangerous because 'double tap' strikes are regularly launched, in which the first missile is followed by a second sent to kill the rescuers.[43]

This largely secret programme of murder from the air is occasionally illumined by the perpetrators themselves to claim another head on the wanted list. YouTube carries hundreds of hours of drone-kill video footage from Iraq and Afghanistan, put up by the Department of Defense as promotional material for the drone programme and to intimidate the enemy.[44]

The most effective riposte to this routine programme of mass murder is to drag it into the light of the media, where it may shrink and die. A few exceptionally courageous and resourceful photographers have worked in the drone campaign areas, gathering images and stories, while facing dangers from both militants and the military. For example, Abdulelah Haider Shaye, an investigative journalist, showed that one scene of notorious mass-murder by drone in the Yemeni village of al Majalah was a US strike (not a Yemeni one, as first claimed) by photographing missile parts. US media organisations were pressured by the state not to work with him. He was later kidnapped and tortured by the Yemeni authorities.[45] In Pakistan, Noor Behram has taken photographs of blown-up buildings, villagers holding up missile parts, along with dead and wounded children. He could not at first get his images into the press and had to show them on the streets in Pakistan.[46] These grisly spectacles are of course hard to verify by the standards of the mainstream press that generally shuns them.[47]

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[42] Benjamin, *Drone Warfare*, pp. 119-21; see also Cockburn, *Kill Chain*, pp. 226-7.
[43] Benjamin, *Drone Warfare*, pp. 26, 120, 135. See also International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic (Stanford Law School)/ Global Justice Clinic (NYU School of Law), *Living Under Drones: Death, Injury, and Trauma to Civilians from US Drone Practices in Pakistan*, September 2012, pp. 80-8.
[44] Benjamin, *Drone Warfare*, p. 158.
[45] Ibid., pp. 307, 382-5. The attack took place in December 2009, killing over forty people, mostly women and children.
[46] Noor Behram's work was shown at Beaconsfield art space, London in 2011. See http://beaconsfield.ltd.uk/projects/gaming-in-waziristan/
[47] See Spencer Ackerman, 'Rare Photographs Show Ground Zero of the Drone War', *Wired*, 12 December 2012; http://www.wired.com/2011/12/photos-pakistan-drone-war/ The article reflects on the uncertainties surrounding the photographs and offers a defence of the editorial decision to publish them.

Figure 46: Noor Behram, Noor Syed, aged eight, killed in drone strike Ob03, 14 February 2009.

Various artists have also tried to find ways of visualising the programme. Sometimes they imagine or fictionalise what is only scantily documented. Many artists, including James Bridle, Raphaël Dallaporta, Haroun Farocki, Mishka Henner, Louise Lawler and Jay Zehngebot, using diverse means and media, have worked to highlight the drone campaign and its associated technologies.[48] Some, including Edmund Clark and Lisa Barnard, have worked with Reprieve, a charity which assists victims in legal actions against the drone campaign.[49]

So, in a simple intervention, a group made a very large-scale portrait of a child in Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa, laid out on the ground and designed to be seen by drone operators. It was a way of reminding the pilots and all others who reviewed the drone footage that the people who live

[48] For an account of artists dealing with drones, see Paul Wombell, ed., *Drone: The Automated Image*, Le Mois de la Photo à Montréal, Kerber Verlag, Bielefeld 2013. On Lawler, see Mignon Nixon, 'Louise Lawler: *No Drones*', *October*, no. 147, Winter 2014, pp. 20-37.
[49] See the Reprieve website: https://www.reprieve.org.uk/topic/drones/

there are (in the words of the work's title) Not Bug Splat.[50] The project's wide circulation on social media is also designed to provoke opposition to the murder programme.

An utterly different approach was taken by Omer Fast who interviewed a drone pilot about his work and life, and in a complex video, *5000 Feet is the Best*, dramatised his weird shuttling between civilian normality and death-dealing shift work. The work also imagines an alternative reality in which US citizens live under Chinese occupation and continual surveillance, and are arbitrarily killed from the sky.[51]

In much of his work, Trevor Paglen has highlighted the operations and the invisibility of the secret shadow state, the vast and lavishly funded spying and military apparatus that lies outside of democratic oversight, a Praetorian Guard of immense power that lies at the beck and call of the president. His work *Drone Vision* (2010), for example, uses as its source material video intercepted by an amateur satellite hacker, alternating blurry and painterly landscape scenes with infrared footage, both overlaid with data feeds.

Lisa Barnard, as part of her photographic account of military systems and technology, has also sought to make the drone campaign visible. She has interviewed victims of missile attacks and drone pilots along with leading psychologists who work with the US Air Force, salving mental trauma. In a distinctive series, 'Primitive Pieces', Barnard has photographed Hellfire missile fragments, picked up from murder sites in Waziristan and brought to Islamabad by Noor Behram. While most of Barnard's work deliberately eschews visual drama, here she photographs the fragments in monochrome, against black backgrounds, lit as if they were pieces of sculpture. Some look like mutilated skulls or helmets, and the distorted and torn steel is a ruin that has created ruins, and displays the force that blew it and other bodies and structures apart. The results are reminiscent of modernist sculpture, particularly Anthony Caro bronzes of the 1970s and 1980s. The modernist aesthetic lives blithely on in the military, where the image of intimidating power is as important as force itself (or rather, is another kind of force); and a mordant abstraction hangs about the entire system of drone killing, as the targets remain mostly abstract in the public mind, at least in the nations that launch the missiles, and the system of abstract calculation is untainted by what is implied by these distressed surfaces: chaos, blood, trauma and grief.

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[50] See http://notabugsplat.com/ The project used JR's Inside Out Project Inside which provides facilities for communities to represent themselves with posters in the artist's style. It has been used by a variety of groups with political agendas. See http://www.jr-art.net/projects/inside-out-project-group-actions

[51] See Omer Fast et al., *5000 Feet is the Best*, Sternberg Press, Berlin 2012.

Figure 47: Lisa Barnard, Primitive Pieces #4, 2011.

Such work, accompanied by investigations by journalists, lawyers and human rights activists, has had an effect. As the programme was increasingly exposed to scrutiny, and perhaps because of a

growing realisation that it did little but create enemies, Obama killed more sparingly in his second term, using drones only in declared war zones and doing more to protect civilians.[52]

Seeing the Unseen

The complement of the drone is the death squad, and there is remarkably little public documentary photography and video of JSOC teams, let alone of their operations. Photographs circulate that purport to be of JSOC squads and insignia, but none can be verified. The official page for US special ops photographs does not even list the entity.[53] Of course, there are plenty of images of their component units, and they have been fully imagined and idealised in numerous movies and TV dramas which tend not to dwell on the programme's incompetence and the deaths of innocents.

The play of secrecy and visibility came to a head with the JSOC operation in 2011 to kill Osama bin Laden, which the Obama administration certainly wanted advertised—at least after the fact, and without letting the death squads step too far into the light. The operation was primarily a PR exercise, staged as Seymour Hersh put it as 'political theatre designed to burnish Obama's military credentials'.[54] As Hersh has also shown, it is likely that the loss of a helicopter in the raid botched the original plan, and a new story with its attendant publicity had to be rushed into place.

Aside from its unusual PR aspect, the raid was straightforward from the JSOC point of view. As its commander of the time, Admiral William McRaven, claimed: 'We do these ten, twelve, fourteen times a night.' [55] Yet publicity was a definite problem for operations used to the shadows. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates was angered at the leaks about the operation to kill bin Laden, believing that precisely because it used regular techniques, tactics and procedures, publicity would endanger future killings.[56]

The fraught issue of images was in the killers' minds. SEALs preparing for the mission apparently joked about not shooting Bin Laden in the face, since 'Everybody is going to want to see this picture.' Yet in fact, they did just that, several times, and as the SEAL who fired the first

[52] David Cole, 'The Drone Presidency', *New York Review of Books*, 18 June 2016.
[53] See http://www.americanspecialops.com/photos/
[54] Hersh, *The Killing of Osama bin Laden*, p. 47.
[55] Scahill, *Dirty Wars*, p. 436.
[56] Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, Knopf, New York 2014; cited in Seymour Hersh, 'The Killing of Osama bin Laden', *London Review of Books*, 21 May 2015.

shot said, 'the American public doesn't want to know what that looks like.'[57] The administration agreed, so the images of the corpse taken by the JSOC team were never released, while the body itself was made to vanish. Of this decision, Obama said:

> It is important for us to make sure that very graphic photos of somebody who was shot in the head are not floating around as an incitement to additional violence or as a propaganda tool.[58]

This is an extraordinary statement which sidelines the fact that violence breeds violence in and of itself, with or without pictures; and in the use of the word 'additional' cleverly elides the thought that it is his regime's own violence which may be added to. It glosses over, too, the many thousands of other JSOC death images, kept from public view.

Figure 48: Pete Souza, President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden, along with members of the national security team, receive an update on the mission against Osama bin Laden in the Situation Room of the White House, 1 May 2011.

[57] Scahill, *Dirty Wars*, pp. 440, 447-8.
[58] Brian Montopoli, 'Obama: I Won't Release Bin Laden Death Photos', *CBS News*, 5 May 2011.

Of course, one image was released that acted as a proxy for the bullet-ridden corpse. It shows a group of military and civilian officials watching the murder of a suspect who could have been captured and brought to trial. Uploaded to the photo-sharing site Flickr, it swiftly became one of its most viewed images, and was also widely published in leading newspapers globally.

The photograph was taken by official White House photographer, Pete Souza, the favoured visual servant whose job it was to humanise the operations of the President and his office, leavening the administration with images of the man and his family.[59] Such photographs of Obama are a co-operation between the photographer and the presidential PR machine, which has arranged his dress, coached him in pose and expression, and set up suitable backgrounds and venues. The authorship of the resulting images lies between the photographer, the PR people and Obama himself. Many commentators noted the lack of apparent hierarchy in what became known as the 'Situation Room' image, and this is of a piece with Obama's carefully calculated image of informality, which has included photographs of him shooting hoops in the Oval Office and putting his feet up on its antique desk.

This spectral equality is partly to do with the character of the room itself, a secret and secure chamber, insulated from electronic interference, and as such a bland, functional, windowless office, far from the grandeur of those in which guests are received. In a strange reversal, exceptional White House business is conducted, not in a dark and dramatic war room of the kind imagined since Kubrick's *Doctor Strangelove*, but in a dull room familiar to many millions of office workers worldwide. It may be that this air of normality, set against the facial expressions of the players, assures the viewer that even in this exceptional killing, all proceeds as usual, in a clean, efficient, open and democratic act of killing.[60]

Yet, of course, it is far from open. Judicial Watch brought a Freedom of Information case to get all the photographic and video material from the assassination released, but the regime argued successfully that this should be denied on national security grounds.[61] Alfredo Jaar's installation piece, *May 1, 2011*, pairs the Situation Room image with a glaring blank screen, which stands in for all that we imagine but are forbidden to see.

The Situation Room photograph was carefully altered to play up salient elements. The campaign ribbons of Brigadier-General Marshall B. Webb, a JSOC commander, are brightened to draw the

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[59] 'Lightbox: Pete Souza's Portrait of a Presidency', *Time*, 8 October 2012; http://time.com/3445820/pete-souzas-portrait-of-a-presidency/

[60] See Jothie Rajah, 'Law as Record: the Death of Osama bin Laden', *No Foundations: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Law and Justice*, no. 13, 2016, p. 60.

[61] Ibid., p. 61.

eye to the record of the main military presence in the room. Documents are blurred to prevent them being read. The greatest amount of manipulation is centred on the figure of Hillary Clinton who is brought into greater illumination, highlighting her reaction as the main focus of the image.[62] Clinton, who appears the most perturbed by what she sees, offering a flicker of humanity to set against the banal operation of the killing machine, was in fact one of the most enthusiastic war-mongers, who gloried in the torture and death of Gaddafi after his regime crumbled under NATO air attack: 'We came, we saw, he died'.[63]

Iraq was opened to murderous destruction, in a highly lethal combination of fast and slow violence. We have seen that changes in media management by the military, in the character of the media itself, in the power of government to set news agendas, censorship and the dangers of sectarian violence all contributed to a muted representation of Iraq's condition, which at its worst tended to invisibility. While photojournalists, Iraqi and foreign, assembled between them a complete and compelling image of the war as it was fought, little of that was seen in the mainstream media in the West.

This was partly because of the lack of a plausible and coherent alternative narrative into which these images might fit. Leftist and nationalist ideologies had lost much of their power with the fall of actually existing Communism, along with the corruptions and failures of many post-colonial states. Radical Islam appealed only to a few, and was plausibly represented as an atavistic and irredentist response to globalisation. What sense, then, could be made of the fate of Iraq? The scale of suffering could have hardly been more severe. Sectarian violence was knowingly cultivated by the occupiers, leading to the establishment of an Iraqi government that would govern in Shia interests alone. As civil war was unleashed—and before that, years of mass killing on a barely conceivable scale—the nation was in an even worse state than postwar Vietnam: its infrastructure largely dysfunctional, many of its educated and professional citizens dead or in exile, and most people lacking any form of security, being trapped between violent militia forces and an equally violent government.

So once again, a nation was publicly wrecked—but with the great difference that, following the removal of Saddam Hussein, this was of an ostensible and undivided ally, a nation that, far from

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[62] See the analysis Anon., 'Mort de Ben Laden: la photo de la 'situation room' a été retouchée par la Maison Blanche', *Les Observateurs*, 13 May 2011; http://observers.france24.com/fr/20110513-mort-ben-laden-photo-situation-room-retouchee-maison-blanche-tungstene-logiciel

[63] The remark was widely reported: see for example, Corbett Daly, 'Clinton on Qaddafi: "We Came, We Saw, He Died"', *CBS News*, 20 October 2011.

being held up for exemplary destruction, was supposed to become a model for liberal democracy and unfettered capitalism in the Arab world.

Moreover, between the Vietnam and Iraq conflicts, the balance had shifted when it came to killing for show. The world had become more connected internationally through tourism, emigration, satellite TV and online communication. The unthinking racism that had seemed mere common sense to many white people, and that was coming under widespread challenge in the 1960s, had given way to a situation in which racist attitudes, while far from rare, had to skulk in the shadows. The deliberate killing of an 'enemy' people could not be openly celebrated. Declining faith in the motives and integrity of the state and the media alike meant that humanitarian feelings were more likely to trump political justifications. In the mainstream Western media, the result was generally a bloodless and falsified image of the Iraq War. The work of amateurs, however, was something else entirely.