Project Title

Title: Drones as Air Proscription - The case of South Arabia and Yemen in Comparative Perspective

Duration: 39.54 mins

Speakers:

David (Introductions)
Professor Clive Jones

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David

Good afternoon and welcome to this seminar series of the ICCS. Thank you for turning out this sunny day when you'd much rather be outside I'm sure, but the thrilling prospect of being part of this conversation is what's brought us together, which is great.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome Professor Clive Jones from the University of Durham. Clive's been at Durham since 2013 but, before that, he spent 17 years at Leeds, where he was also Head of Department there and before that he was at Aberystwyth where he completed his PhD.

Clive is a specialist in regional security over the Middle East. He's also a specialist in security studies particularly in counterinsurgency operations and in intelligence related matters and is also someone who is interested in the Gulf States and Israel in particular.

But today, he brings those skills together talking to us about the operation of drones in South Arabia and Yemen in comparative perspective. So drones as air proscription, which he's going to tell us all about now.

Professor Clive Jones

Thank you very much, David. And good to see one or two old friends from the past - if you get me drunk afterwards I'll tell you what Nick was like at Aberystwyth!

David

That's worth doing!

Professor Clive Jones

Just a bit of background. The reason I became interested in this particular subject and particular focus on Yemen was about ten years ago I wrote a book, which looked at Britain's covert involvement in the Yemen civil war in

the 1960s and the focus of the book was really about what Britain had got up to behind closed doors, actions and activities which they later went on to deny in Parliament.

But in writing the book, I came across a lot of material which looked at the role of air power in trying to control what one document called *The Rested Tribes* up country in places like the Radfan but also in the eastern and western protectorates. And it struck me then – and increasingly so with the advent with the so called war on terror – that there had been parallels drawn with how drones are used today with how air power was used by the Royal Air Force when South Arabia was part and parcel of the British dispensation across the Middle East.

Now some have suggested that there are lessons to be learned. These lessons are not necessarily easy to define, partly because I argue that the lessons to be learned are basically seen through a particular lens and that lens is of Weberian construct of the State.

So what I present for you today is to question that fact, the idea that we actually look what's taking place in Yemen today through this Weberian notion of the State. That is the State as a coherent whole and it has position over a monopoly of the use of violence.

The material that I want to offer you today is partly based on archival research, partly it's based on interviews with former colonial office officials and with political officers out in Aden in the 1960s. But, equally, with regard to today and ho[w drones are perceived by Yemenis through interviews with exile Yemenis though interviews I conducted with Yemenis in exile in Oman. And, indeed, through Yemenis from particular tribes and particularly the [Katabi 3.41] tribe, the [Mara] tribe and the [Yefari] tribes as well.

And before I start, I just came across the other day in the latest edition of *Air Power Review* a review of a booked called *Wings of Empire – The Forgotten Wars of the RAF* written by somebody called Barry Renfrew. And this has been reviewed by a former serving Air Force officer in the United States Air Force, someone called Richard Newton. I don't know Richard Newton, but this is what he wrote – and I'll quote this to you. "Most [4.08] examinations of air operations then and now" – that is in the period of the British Empire and the use of drones today – "have concluded that superficial similarities do exist. It's the same country, similar ethnic groups and comparable guerrilla tactics, but the 'ground' has changed to become more urban, a more ethnic homogeneity has been lost with the influx of foreign fighters and the guerrilla's actions are now driven by zealotry passion and extremism. More importantly, air control between the wars was a preventive strategy to maintain an otherwise stable and secure environment. Modern air operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen have been and are palliative, trying to cure and restore stability and security after fighting has erupted. The comparison between then and now, or the comparisons between then and now are thin at the very best".

And the question I want to ask really from that quotation is are they? And actually is it less about trying to compare the here and now rather than the benchmarking criteria that was used for our operations in the 1930s and 1940s and right through to 1960s and comparing that benchmarking criteria in the way that drones have been used today in Yemen.

Now other critics go further. Critics of a liberal world order and particularly those that criticise the use of drones, such as Gregoire Chamayou and his book *Drone Theory* see the issues of drones as indicative of the West who have been unable to subdue 'the other' and now look at least to contain dissonance at the margins and active neo-imperialism, he argues, in the very best traditions of formal empires of the past.

Now putting aside for one moment the reductive antipathy towards a West that continues to champion the repressive essence of global capitalism, the analogy with empires of the past is not so misguided. The use of airpower, as I mentioned earlier on, to subdue restive natives was indeed part of the aerial policing strategy developed by British colonial officials and openly embraced by the Royal Air Force in the aftermath of World War I as it looked to secure its future and to thwart the average designs of a British Army who saw its independence as a financial drain on an already diminishing defence budget.

Now the extent to which the deployment of RAF assets controlled the hinterlands of empire, most notably across the tribally based entities in the Middle East, certainly has echoes, I argue, of how drones are employed against comparable targets today, albeit it clearly with a longer global reach. And equally, the moral issues of remoteness stand comparison, the dropping of bombs on tribesmen from 3000 feet in the 1920s and the 1930s was as remote as it could get with similar comparisons to be made today over moral rectitude.

Now this concentration on norms in state sovereignty that dominates debate over the use of air power – and drones in particular today – has, I argue, obscured other lines of enquiry that offer alternative perspectives of over how air power might actually impact upon tribally based societies. Indeed, as far as I can see, there's only really been one long study by Akbar Ahmed – *The Thistle and the Drone* – which has attempted to do this.

In the contemporary era, most obvious is how effective are such strikes and do they actually necessarily alienate the target populations, not least when collateral damage and death to civilians follow on thereby, of course, ensuring support for a rebellion or an insurgency.

Now the obvious answer – and in some cases the correct one – might be an unambiguous yes. Equally, however, our implicit understanding of the political context in which such attacks take place are informed by a Weberian construct of the State. And the proposition I want to put here is that this might offer, <u>might</u> offer an inaccurate assessment over how airpower has been perceived and, indeed, utilised among some peoples in Yemen, where a sense of identity is parochial or, at best, regional and where the means of

mechanism of social cohesion, identity and legitimacy are more clan or tribally based than any over loyalty to State structures. And many people would argue that what is taking place today in Yemen is often testament to that.

In short, allegiance to a sovereign authority remains fragmentary at best. And what emerges therefore is what the late and, personally, I regard great [Yossi Kostina 9.01] called 'The Tribal Political Field' in which the internal balance between ruler and ruled is rarely static, rather it is constantly renegotiated or indeed contested amid a neo-patrimonial order that for so long, in Yemen at least, has privileged particular tribes to ensure regime longevity and has in the process extended or withheld material largesse to particular actors, be they tribal, political or religious, to ensure immediate gains. And while the use of airpower might be a necessary condition in alienating a targeted group, it might equally empower others whose interests, be they fleeting or longer term, often accord with those of the intervening actor.

So Yemen provides a particular case study, I argue, to test both the causal relationship between the tribal political field on the one hand and the impact of airpower on the other. And as that doyenne of coin theorist, David Kilcullen, has noticed, a perceived continuity exists here. And just to quote him, he said "many of the people the United States has bombed with unmanned aircraft in the 21st century, in the Horn of Africa, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen are members of the same groups, or even descend from the same individuals, who became involuntary guinea pigs on whom the British Empire – the superpower of its day – refined the air control techniques some 90 years ago".

So briefly, to look at the history of British use of airpower in Yemen from the 1920s to the 1960s, Britain developed and utilised airpower to control tribal unrest. And this has clearly been well documented and the most comprehensive account really is still to be found in the work of David Omissi in his work *Airpower and Colonial Control*. Just to remind people – I'm sure you're all well aware – but just remind people that air control [doctrine 11.00] itself developed organically out of successive British campaigns in Somali land in Iraq in the immediate aftermath of World War I and, in effect, it meant that the Royal Air Force was assigned responsibility for the defence and security of its new possessions in the Middle East under the auspices of the Air Ministry in London, primarily because it was cheap.

Air policing was therefore a natural outgrowth from this responsibility and broadly defined meant the use of air assets to maintain the internal security of a State. Air proscription represented the operational and tactical use of aircraft in a natural offensive role while air substitution was defined as the replacement of ground forces by aircraft where time, distance and expense negated the use of troops.

Now at a time when the Western construct of the State, let alone sovereign board, has remained anathema to many of the indigenous peoples, particularly in Southern Arabia, be they [11.55] or nomadic peoples unwilling to accept the boundaries imposed by colonial authorities, air control and the use of air proscription in particular offered a cheap and efficient way to

interdict tribes bent on cross board raiding or more seriously to disrupt any perceived threat to the new dispensations that had emerged as part of the post war settlement.

It was disruption brought by air proscription on this particular tribes – and I'll mention a few of them in a moment – rather than the outright destruction to lives and property, that it was argued would bring about order amongst these particular groups and ensure obedience if not loyalty to a central authority.

Others, particularly those Marxist scholars have gone further. Mark Neocleous has argued that the use of air policing was a form of 'primitive accumulation' meant to deny tribesmen alternative forms of livelihood outside the political economy being imposed by the colonial order. Now this construct of policing rejects the separate between law enforcement and military operations arguing instead that the practical articulation of air power, at least in its colonial setting represented the physical manifestation of both interlinked processes and designed to both enforce State power as well as being a key component in the building of a new colonial order.

Accordingly, the use of air power is always more than just a reactive punitive process, rather it was designed to ensure State consolidation through tax collection and control through surveillance and surveying. Now this may have been the case in Iraq where much of Omissi's work for example has been located.

But in the case of Aden and South Arabia, this was not necessarily the case. What Britain wanted to do and did introduce was a series of treaties with the tribal shakes and the hinterlands and what became the protectorates but, by and large, Britain left them to their own devices and only came to their aid when they were faced by tribes who refused to obey a particular tribal sheikh or sharif or, indeed, they were facing threats from the dominant power in the north which was the old imamate of Yemen.

Now the use of such measures was to be tightly controlled from Aden itself, that is air proscription, but the clear chain of command stretching from colonial officials to the final authorisation being granted by a high commissioner. In line with such guidelines, insurgents were to be issued with a clear ultimatum threatening air action which included a cut off date and time when air action, that is to say bombing, would then commence. It was meant to give a warning to the various tribes, these so called rested tribes, to get their women and children out of the way.

Now within the broad [14.54] of their control, this was very much defined as proscription bombing but as Sebastian Richie has noted, this also encompassed more than just inflicting punishment from the air. Across the Middle East and, indeed Afghanistan as well as in imperial India, the greater number of sorties flown by the RAF were for reconnaissance purposes - visual, armed and photographic – or for actually effecting the morale of particular tribes by overflights that demonstrated both capability and potential intent.

Now even so, taking this back to the focus of this study and looking at Aden and the protectorates, in terms of protecting Aden, indeed, upholding treaty obligations which I just briefly mentioned with particular tribal leaders in the hinterland and also a warning of the claims of the old Imam of Yemen, the application of air control in the interwar period was relatively successful.

Aside from direct bombing operations against Yemen which ceased actually in 1934, only 12 deaths were actually directly attributed to aerial attacks in the interwar period, which was a remarkably low level of attrition, given the often inaccurate technology involved in bombing at that time. and this led one commentator, an air commodore – Lesley Howard-Williams – to argue in 1937 that air control was a more human means for Britain to secure its interest across the Middle East avoiding, as it did, the large scale casualties that usually accompany the use of ground troops and, indeed, I came across one document in which the representatives of the [Kotabi] tribe in the Radfan adjacent to Yemen actually complained to colonial officers over the apparent inaccuracy of one particular RAF attack against their villages noting that it hardly – and I quote – "instilled the necessary respect or indeed confidence in Government authority from Aden", so here you have a tribe complaining that bombing wasn't accurate enough.

Now even so, the RAF were keen to ensure that irrespective of the nature of operations, intelligence regarding the tribal landscape informed both for planning and implementation of their operations. This was not always easy as the production of accurate and timely intelligence from tribal sources was difficult to obtain and often had to be treated with circumspection because of the inflation of threat was often used to describe the settling of more parochial scores amongst tribal leaders themselves.

Now here, we move to the role played by RAF field intelligence officers who, from the 1940s and 1950s onwards, were station up country and actually lived with, for extended periods of time, anything from three to six months, with the various tribes themselves. One intelligence report which I looked at described them as an RAF officer who spends all his time up country living with the bedu and trying to get intelligence back to HQ British Forces, that's in Aden, "they're a queer lot, most of them are more Arab than the Arabs, they are not really quite with us you might say".

Now putting aside the inevitable comparisons with Lawrence of Arabia, these FIOs immersed themselves in the tribal landscape with the protectorates, a role – if you read their diaries – that required them to be part warrior, part social anthropologist, part doctor, part explorer and part diplomat. And such men, as I mentioned, were deployed for periods of anywhere between three to six months, their sole contact with any other European being through radios and radio transmissions down to Aden itself.

Now of course their role was ultimately to decide when the use of air power, either in conjunction with ground forces or as air substitution might be justified in defending the interests of Aden colony. The one former political officer I

interviewed - a man called Steven Day who actually later went on to become the British Ambassador to Qatar and to Tunisia – recalled of his time serving in the western Aden protectorate in the late 50s and early 60s, that really the role of political officers rested on promoting what he called 3Bs – Bombing, Bribery and Bluff – or if you want to be impolite about it – Bullshit.

Now this might well be a telling commentary on the wider context of British policy in South Arabia that increasingly came under strain from the rising tide of Arab nationalism and, indeed, from 1961 was the neighbouring war in Yemen. But, even so, Day remained convinced that when applied judiciously and supported by intelligence that had been received from political officers and had been thoroughly assessed, that air proscription could and did bring about stability in the tribes.

In [Fudley 19.42] Province which today, by the way, is one of the essential areas under the control of AQAP, the mere threat of aerial action had kept the tribes onside and countered the propaganda of Arab nationalism which was broadcast through Radio Cairo. He said “our intelligence in the western Aden protectorate was good and targets could be pinpointed accurately, warnings dropped and buildings and livestocks targeted with low risk to life”.

Now viewed of course through a post-colonial prism, the role that air power played in sustaining the apparatus of colonial rule, not least in policing and, indeed, occasionally punishing recalcitrant tribes obviously jars today with our liberal sensibilities. But placing such antipathies to one side, there are perhaps lessons to be drawn, benchmarks to be drawn in how air power, certainly over South Arabia and what is today southern Yemen, was used.

Aside from a strict chain of command authorising such strikes, much was made t the need for reliable intelligence derived from human sources, human intelligence in deciding the most efficacious use of air proscription, be it actual or threatened.

And, indeed, at a time when the [20.56] bombing or rocketing of particular targets was at best vicarious, the available records suggest that the loss of life to such attacks was actually surprisingly low. To this extent, a lessons learned and lessons lost over how air power was deployed over Yemen and South Arabia, both in the interwar period and, indeed, up until 1967, might well illuminate more normative as well as practical debates of how drones have been deployed across the skies of Yemen in more recent times.

So what about Yemen today? Well it’s not hard to find critics of how drones have come to define the use of this technology in the war against terror, more specifically how they're being used in several theatres in prosecuting a war against Al-Qaeda type organisations.

I don't really want to go into the history of the emergency of AQAP in Yemen from 2009 onwards but suffice it to say its increased ability to blend with the mainly Suni and [Chafi 21.57] tribes in the south and east of the country and places such as [ ] and [ ] was the result of a fragmenting state and the

diminishing ability of a corrupt central Government led by Ali Abdullah Saleh to continue to use certain forms of patrimony in order to sustain a particular political order.

In a state where governance was memorably described by the ousted president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, as “like dancing on the heads of snakes” presenting himself as an indispensable ally of Washington in its war on Al-Qaeda, the Al-Qaeda franchise in the end was a mean by which Saleh at least hoped to benefit from American largesse. His successor – and still recognised internationally – is the legitimate head of the Yemeni Government – President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi – was even more candid in his support of drone strikes against Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula during a visit to Washington back in September 2012.

Now as part of this bargain, Saleh and later Hadi gave Washington carte blanche for carrying out air strikes using both manned aircraft, drones as well as on one infamous occasion cruise missiles against targets associated with Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. From a globalised perspective, this use of air power has a resonance of air policing, albeit it one where the distances are larger but time is compressed.

From the first drone strike in November 2002 that killed Abu Ali al-Harithi, was alleged to be the mastermind behind the attack on the USS Cole, the United States it is reckoned has carried out 16 air strikes and 132 drone strikes up to the end of February 2016, again, it depends which sources that you want to consult on this across Yemen, resulting in the death – according to the long war project – of 900 Al-Qaeda militants and up to or over 100 civilians mainly in the south and west of the country.

For critics of these drone strikes, there is little that compares with the aerial proscription of British colonial rule, although in terms of air substitution, that is the lack of actual boots on the ground to help prosecute operations against Al-Qaeda in the more remote regions of Yemen, but parallels are clearly obvious.

On the surface at least, this is a different kind of war, religious radicalism was not the prime motivating factor in tribal rebellions, for example in 1964 in the Radfan when British colonial rule was still exercised. And, equally, the increased ability of AQAP to ingratiate itself with the tribal landscape of Yemen has made it far harder in practice to differentiate tribal actors from militant players. Indeed, for many, they are now often synonymous but, as Christopher Swift notes in his [treatment 24.51] of the tribal landscape, what still drives tribal violence and, indeed, religious violence in Yemen is still overwhelmingly the economic poverty that many tribes actually face and with it the breakdown of the neo-patrimonial structures which creates a web of dependency in many areas on the largesse, which is offered by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsular. And, indeed, one tribal leader was quoted as saying that AQAP attracts those that cannot afford to run away.

Now the Government of Abyan Province, Ahmed bin [25.28] Mistry, for example claimed that a paucity of security forces in many parts of the south and west, particularly in the Hadhramaut region, has meant that AQAP is actively winning the battle for hearts and minds amongst the tribes. A situation that can only be alleviated – going back to the economic poverty – if targeted social development among the tribes, in effect propaganda by deed, is of a scale and intensity that can swamp that of Al-Qaeda itself.

To date, such development projects have yet to be realised and, indeed, in the more immediate threat from AQAP the kind of aid that has come from Washington has primarily been of the military type and it's reckoned, again depending on the figures, that Washington has given Yemeni Central Government something in the region of $500m by the end of 2010. Some people say it's nearer now $1bn which has been directed towards helping to fight AQAP in Yemen. Again, it depends on which sources you want to look at.

But while AQAP might see its longevity as best secured among the wider tribal environment, it is this environment which at the same time may offer the best means of at least containing this particular Al-Qaeda franchise. One sheikh from the [26.47] tribe, Abdullah al Jamilli, who is from the Al Jawf Province, openly admitted to a role in arbitrated between AQAP and the Government, a role no doubt replicated by other tribal groupings.

And, indeed, if one accepts this as part of the political field, the tribal landscape where tribal sovereignty is exercised, it makes perfect sense that elders of these tribes to engage in this particular form of negotiation if it protects the particular position of the tribe. And this, in turn, points to the possibility of longer term indigenous modes of containment, for while it's tempting to highlight the radicalisation of the tribes by AQAP, there reverse is equally as likely, as tension between tribal identity and a particular Salafi Wahabi world view that denies importance to such primordial identities inevitably clash. And, in short, the activities of AQAP in Yemen are as likely to be constrained by tribal bombs as by any external military intervention.

The question therefore is whether in fact drone strikes have had the opposite effect of what is often being termed 'blowback'. To use one example, in August of 2012, Salam Aham bin Ali Jabar, who was a 40 year old cleric from a small village called Kashmir in Abhi Nam Province, and a fierce critic of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula was incinerated in a drone strike that also killed three members of Al-Qaeda who had come to remonstrate with him.

And as *The New York Times* noted of the attack, Jabar was precisely the type of religious and tribal leader which is crucial to American efforts to eradicate Al-Qaeda in Yemen. This targeted assignation of AQAP ideologue and US citizen Anwal ala Largi in September 2011, however, it remains the most controversial case to use that awful phrase of putting warheads to foreheads, given that ala Largi himself had never been charged with any crime. And as Derek Gregory has argued in his books on the use of air power, the use of

drones in this respect has allowed “the expansion of the physical space of war” and the contraction of the moral space of war”.

What’s noted, again, what’s notable here is that others have conducted a series of interviews and, as well as I have, with tribal leaders, Salafis clerics and, indeed, Islamist politicians and, indeed, just to use the work of, again, someone like Christopher Swift, he interviewed a group of 41 tribal elders back in 2013, of those tribal elders only 5 expressed any criticism or reservation of the American use of drones per se on Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. But what they did say was that America’s efforts in using drones should be overwhelmingly matched by targeted development projects which could wean people off, their own tribes people off reliance upon AQAP itself.

Now whether in fact normative controls over the use of legal ordinance are any more relaxed for drone operators, to use the case of ala Largi, as they are for fast jet pilots or attack helicopter pilots or crews remains beyond the scope of this study. Rather, what I'm interested in is how they are used and that is of particular concern in the case of Yemen, not least because we know that the chain of command is rather opaque between the Pentagon and JASOC on the one hand and the CIA which operates and has for some time a separate programme. Whatever the control arrangements over the use of drones in Yemen – and Obama is said to approve the target list for both bureaucracies, that is JASOC and the CIA - it is a fact that such targets are framed through the prism of a counterterrorism campaign rather than a broader counterinsurgency strategy.

One particular study conducted by Leila Hudson identifies four particular forms of blowback that she argues are now manifest in Yemen. Firstly the ability of AQAP to recruit from among those whose friends/relatively have been killed in drone strikes. Secondly, the encouragement of retaliatory attacks on critical infrastructure. Thirdly, the lack of accountability of the US drone programme because of the grey areas surrounding responsibility which, she argues, denies a clear strategy. And fourthly, how the support of the elites in [Sanar 31.24] for drone strikes denies legitimacy to the various tribal leaders in places like Abyan and [Shabwar Amori] provinces.

And, indeed, many of the objections that have been expressed by tribal leaders to particular drone strike is not because they killed Al-Qaeda but they are a visible, if you like, demonstration of the weakness of the Yemeni state itself and, as one person remarked, it’s an affront to our national pride.

Now these, the first form of blowback has attracted the most attention and, as in Afghanistan and Pakistan, much is made of so-called signature strikes, the targeting of groups whose activity over a period of time and indeed perhaps as a target of opportunity, suggests involvement in militant activity. Now in a country such as Yemen awash with weapons, the carrying assault rifles for example by young males from the age of 10 upwards is a common occurrence.

Now these strikes which undoubtedly have claimed many innocent lives, highlight all to clearly the vagaries of dependence on technical intelligence in deciding targeting policy. Aside from their offensive capabilities, drones are in fact, as we all know, integrated aerial platforms that provide what's called ISTAR – Intelligence, Surveillance, Target, Acquisition and Reconnaissance. And in terms of targeting militants, this will often tell the operators a great deal about the capabilities of individuals and groups but little in the way of appreciating the wider cultural landscape when the carrying of weapons is as much a sign of tribal fidelity and indeed manhood as it is of any ill intent.

And, here, the contrast with the role of field intelligence officers and political intelligence officers of years gone by is striking since it was precisely their direct knowledge of the tribal areas in their responsibility that did allow for a more judicious use of their proscription usually with a clearly defined political end. This use of reliable human intelligence has been largely missing, certainly the initial stages, of the US drone campaign in Yemen, which has meant that intelligence received from the Yemeni Government cannot always be cross referenced or verified.

Just to give you one example, in May of 2010, the United States killed what they initially believed was a high ranking Al-Qaeda commander, [33.40] following an intelligence tip off from the state led political security organisation led by Ali Abdullah Saleh's nephew. Instead, this particular drone strike killed the deputy governor of [], [] who was a distant cousin of the militant and of his bodyguards who'd actually arranged a meeting with Al-Qaeda members with a view to negotiating their surrender.

And given that [Shabwani] was regarded as a political rival to Ali Abdullah Saleh, many senior officials in the Whitehouse felt "they had been played by the regime". Now most intelligence leading into targeting decisions has been gathered from Yemeni Government sources and, again, the voracity of these sources cannot always be checked or, dare I say it, in a technical innovation first developed and used in Iraq, that is through the tracking and use of mobile phones to try to construct the scope and scale of a particular network. It's overly reliant upon technical intelligence.

Few cases of targeting of AQAP militants in Yemen have actually been directly attributed to the use of human intelligence. The case of Anwar Ala Largi by the way may be one such case. It's been alleged that he was at least partially pinpointed by the Danish Muslim convert [Morton Storm].

Leila Hudson in her study, again, which I mentioned just a moment ago, goes further. And she argues that signature strikes [35.20] civilian casualties have only contributed to the fragmentation of Yemeni sovereignty. And she says that when State power is exercised from the sky, it leaves a vacuum to be filled on the ground. And drones in this regard only serve to undermine the already weak legitimacy of central Government because however technologically sophisticated, they remain limited to a one dimensional role in the administration of State justice.

Now this is a powerful argument, yet supporters of the counterterrorism role of drones in Yemen point out two things: first of all, sovereign authority in Yemen may be weak, it may be fragmented but, nonetheless, a legitimate or internally recognised Yemeni Government invited and, indeed, supported the use of US drones over its own sovereign territory. And, as I mentioned, not all tribes are necessarily opposed to the use of drones. And since 2011 – this comes from a very US perspective – and despite AQAP stated global intent at targeting the United States – there have been no attacks on American targets emanating from Yemen.

And this, in turn, points to what supporters of drones, such as Daniel Byman, see as their efficient use, the killing of high value targets that undermine the planning capabilities of AQAP and the disruptive impact that the very presence of drones has upon the ability of AQAP to organise effective operations in much the same way that air strikes back in the 1920s and 1930s prevented particular tribes from launching raids against British supported Sheikhs and Amirs.

For example, we have one drone strike that killed Sal Ali Al Sheri in January of 2013, he was a deputy of the Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsular. And actually his killing was met by approval, particularly amongst tribes in the [Marib] Province, not least because AQAP had launched a series of attacks in the capital Sanar including a suicide bomb attack on a military parade which had killed over 100 people and, indeed, over 100 Police recruits, all of which had come from [Marib] Province.

If you compare and contrast that therefore with signature strikes which have produced a tribal backlash against both United States and indeed the central Government authorities precisely because even if those killed or wounded have Jihadi affiliations, such individuals tend to be recruited locally and have broader identifies upon purely a fidelity to an Islamist group. And, as Christopher Swift has observed, again it goes back to a point I made earlier, the push of poverty as much as the pull of militancy determines association with Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsular.

So briefly to conclude. Clearly, a moral ambiguity undoubtedly hangs over, certainly in the historical sense, the use of air control by the British in defence of its imperial interests, not least of course in Yemen and the wider Middle East. But the principles of air control were framed by an attempt to understand the local environment, even if at times such framing was informed by racial stereotypes and a rather paternalistic attitude towards the idea of “the noble Arab”.

By contrast, the use of drones today in Yemen has been devoid, for the most part, of such local understanding, has often been too reliant on intelligence derived from technical means and surveillance, that often inputs in intent to patterns of repeat behaviour.

And I argue that by looking back on how the past principles of air [39.15] on the ground in South Arabia and by appreciating that Yemen does not conform

to Weberian construction of the State, Washington might well be better suited to marry air control more effectively to development projects on the ground and, indeed, to better governance on the ground, rather than trying to restrict the exercise of State power in this fragmented entity across so much of Yemen purely relying on an aerial platform.

David

Thank you very much.

[Applause]

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