

From Humanitarian Precision to Necropolitical Violence: Drone Warfare in the Middle East

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ABSTRACT: *This article examines drone warfare in the Middle East through the theoretical frameworks of biopolitics and necropolitics. The study aims to analyze the extent to which drone warfare, frequently justified as a precise and humanitarian form of military technology, actually operates as a form of necropolitical power that regulates life and death in conflict zones. In particular, the article investigates how the narratives of technological precision and ethical warfare may obscure broader structures of violence, surveillance, and domination embedded in the use of drones in the region. This research employs a qualitative approach using critical discourse analysis and theoretical interpretation. The study draws on the concepts of biopolitics developed by Michel Foucault and necropolitics proposed by Achille Mbembe as analytical frameworks to examine drone warfare practices. Data sources consist of academic literature, policy documents, reports on drone operations, and existing studies on targeted killings and remote warfare in the Middle East. Through this approach, the article analyzes key operational practices such as targeted killing, pattern-of-life analysis, and signature strikes, as well as the discursive construction of drones as precise and humanitarian technologies. The findings suggest that drone warfare extends beyond the narrative of humanitarian precision and instead functions as a form of necropolitical governance that categorizes certain populations as disposable or “killable bodies.” The reliance on data-driven targeting systems transforms individuals into algorithmic profiles, often blurring the distinction between combatants and civilians. Furthermore, claims of technological precision do not eliminate civilian casualties and may obscure the structural violence embedded in remote warfare. The study concludes that drone warfare in the Middle East reproduces broader historical patterns of imperial and colonial power through surveillance, control, and the remote administration of death.*

Artikel ini mengkaji peperangan drone di Timur Tengah melalui kerangka teoretis biopolitik dan nekropolitik. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis sejauh mana peperangan drone, yang seringkali dibenarkan sebagai bentuk teknologi militer yang tepat dan humanis, sebenarnya beroperasi sebagai bentuk kekuasaan nekropolitik yang mengatur hidup dan mati di zona konflik. Secara khusus, artikel ini menyelidiki bagaimana narasi tentang ketepatan teknologi dan peperangan etis dapat mengaburkan struktur kekerasan, pengawasan, dan dominasi yang lebih luas yang tertanam dalam penggunaan drone di wilayah tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan menggunakan analisis wacana kritis dan

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interpretasi teoretis. Studi ini mengacu pada konsep biopolitik yang dikembangkan oleh Michel Foucault dan nekropolitik yang diusulkan oleh Achille Mbembe sebagai kerangka analitis untuk mengkaji praktik peperangan drone. Sumber data terdiri dari literatur akademis, dokumen kebijakan, laporan tentang operasi drone, dan studi yang ada tentang pembunuhan terarah dan peperangan jarak jauh di Timur Tengah. Melalui pendekatan ini, artikel ini menganalisis praktik operasional utama seperti pembunuhan terarah, analisis pola kehidupan, dan serangan berdasarkan tanda tangan, serta konstruksi wacana drone sebagai teknologi yang tepat dan humanis. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa peperangan drone melampaui narasi ketepatan kemanusiaan dan malah berfungsi sebagai bentuk pemerintahan nekropolitik yang mengkategorikan populasi tertentu sebagai "mayat yang dapat dibuang" atau "mayat yang dapat dibunuh." Ketergantungan pada sistem penargetan berbasis data mengubah individu menjadi profil algoritmik, yang seringkali mengaburkan perbedaan antara kombatan dan warga sipil. Lebih lanjut, klaim ketepatan teknologi tidak menghilangkan korban sipil dan dapat mengaburkan kekerasan struktural yang tertanam dalam peperangan jarak jauh. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa peperangan drone di Timur Tengah mereproduksi pola historis yang lebih luas dari kekuasaan imperial dan kolonial melalui pengawasan, kontrol, dan administrasi kematian jarak jauh.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), commonly known as drones, have become central instruments of contemporary warfare, particularly in the Middle East. Initially developed for surveillance purposes, armed drones such as the MQ-9 Reaper are now widely used in targeted killing operations. Supporters of drone warfare frequently portray these technologies as precise, efficient, and humanitarian tools capable of eliminating threats while minimizing civilian casualties (Gregory, 2011). Critics, however, associate drones with civilian deaths, constant surveillance, and the normalization of remote killing. This article critically examines how drone warfare should be understood through the concepts of biopolitics and necropolitics. While drones are often framed as technologies that protect life by eliminating threats with precision, this paper argues that such representations obscure their fundamentally necropolitical character, particularly in the context of the Middle East (Schwarz, 2016, 2018). The central question guiding this article is, therefore, to what extent does drone warfare, often justified as precise and humanitarian, function instead as a form of necropolitical power in the Middle East? Rather than serving primarily as instruments of life protection, drones function as mechanisms through which certain populations are exposed to death and permanent surveillance (Boyle, 2015).

The article proceeds in three parts. First, it outlines the theoretical foundations of biopolitics and necropolitics, drawing primarily on the works of Michel Foucault and Achille Mbembe. Second, it critically examines claims and discourse about drone

precision and humanitarian warfare, demonstrating how these narratives overlook civilian casualties and the transformation of individuals into data-driven targets. Third, the article situates drone warfare within broader histories of imperial and colonial control in the Middle East, showing how contemporary aerial surveillance and targeted killing reproduce earlier forms of domination. The article ultimately argues that although drone warfare is frequently justified as a life-preserving security practice, its operation in the Middle East reveals a form of necropolitical governance in which populations are subjected to continuous surveillance and the persistent possibility of death from above.

II. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design using a library research approach with a normative–critical orientation. The research focuses on a conceptual and critical analysis of drone warfare practices in the Middle East through the theoretical frameworks of biopolitics and necropolitics. This method is used to examine how drone warfare is framed as precise and humanitarian while simultaneously exploring how such practices may operate as mechanisms of power that regulate life, death, and violence in contemporary conflict (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study applies two main approaches: the conceptual approach and the critical approach. The conceptual approach is used to analyze key theoretical concepts, particularly biopolitics as developed by Michel Foucault and necropolitics as proposed by Achille Mbembe. These concepts serve as analytical tools to understand how power operates through modern military technologies such as drones. The critical approach is employed to examine drone warfare within broader political, security, and historical contexts, particularly in relation to power relations, surveillance, and remote violence in the Middle East.

The research relies on secondary data. Data sources include academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, international organization publications, and scholarly analyses related to drone warfare, targeted killing, and security studies. These sources provide theoretical insights as well as empirical discussions regarding the use of drones in military operations (Emzir, 2014).

Data collection is conducted through literature review, involving the identification, selection, and systematic examination of relevant scholarly works and documents. The collected data are then analyzed using qualitative interpretative analysis, focusing on discourse, conceptual interpretation, and critical examination of the narratives surrounding drone warfare.

To ensure the validity of the data, this study applies source triangulation, comparing and cross-examining multiple scholarly and institutional sources to ensure the consistency, credibility, and reliability of the research findings.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Biopolitics and Necropolitics

Biopolitics entered the political discourse with the emergence of views that the state can exercise power not only through law and coercion, but also through controlling the biological characteristics of human life. Biopower was considered the primacy of sovereign power, which was the dominant form of power until the 18th century, and distinct from it, biopower focused on population health, birth, migration, living conditions, and overall well-being. Although he did not introduce the term ‘biopolitics’ into science, Foucault is credited with developing its foundations by redefining and reproposing it (Bourassa, 2019; Esposito, 2008). According to Foucault (1981), biopolitics works in the form of population management or control, as he states, ‘to ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order.

Biopolitics is often linked to liberal forms of governance. Foucault himself argues that liberalism can be a general framework for biopolitics Foucault (1981) cited in Mavelli (2016). Liberalism considers civil society, the economy, and family relations to be non-political spheres and emphasizes that they should be separate from the sovereign government, but also recognizes the importance of the issue of well-being for successful governance (Grayson, 2016). In this sense, modern governance increasingly focuses on protecting and sustaining life while simultaneously identifying and neutralizing perceived threats to it. Biopolitical governance therefore involves practices of surveillance, prediction, and prevention aimed at securing populations against risk. Evans cited in Schwarz (2018) argues that since life remains inherently unpredictable, security strategies seek to anticipate potential threats before they materialize. Individuals may thus become targets not for crimes committed, but for risks they are believed to pose. Biopolitics, as Grayson (2016) notes, simultaneously enables and eliminates forms of life in the name of protecting the population.

Yet Foucault also acknowledged that the protection of life within biopolitics can coexist with the power to kill, particularly when certain populations are constructed as threats. Under conditions of racism or exclusion, the elimination of some lives becomes framed as necessary for the survival of others (Veltman, 2019). Building on this tension, Mbembe (2003) introduces the concept of necropolitics to describe forms of power in which the subjugation of life to the power of death becomes central. Necropolitics, Mbembe argues, concerns contemporary forms of sovereignty in which political authority determines who may live and who must die.

Mbembe (2003) therefore questions whether Foucault’s notion of biopower alone is sufficient to explain contemporary forms of warfare and counterterrorism, in which the destruction of enemies becomes a primary objective. In many contemporary conflict zones, populations are subjected to conditions in which death, exposure to violence, and permanent insecurity become normalized aspects of governance. Necropolitics thus helps explain how certain spaces and populations become zones where killing is rendered acceptable or routine (Hutta, 2025).

Understanding the relationship between biopolitics and necropolitics is therefore crucial for analyzing contemporary security practices, including drone warfare, where technologies justified in terms of protecting life may simultaneously expose particular populations to systematic violence.

Drones, Biopolitics and Necropolitics

Drones have transformed contemporary warfare by introducing new forms of surveillance and targeted killing. Initially developed for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, armed drones such as the Predator and Reaper are now widely used to eliminate suspected threats. For liberal democracies such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Israel, drones are often presented as advanced technologies that enable precise and efficient targeting while minimizing civilian casualties. Liberal democracies represent drones as ‘virtuous’, ‘humanitarian’, ‘legal’, ‘ethical’, and ‘wise’, emphasizing their ‘surgical’ precision (Center, 2012).

From a biopolitical perspective, drones can be understood as technologies designed to manage and secure populations by identifying and eliminating potential threats. Modern security practices increasingly rely on technological systems that monitor, classify, and evaluate individuals based on their perceived level of risk. Schwarz (2016) argues that drones enable the depoliticization of targets by transforming human beings into data that can be analyzed, categorized, and acted upon. Through advanced surveillance technologies, individuals are reduced to measurable and observable patterns, allowing security authorities to intervene preemptively in the name of protecting the population.

One of the clearest manifestations of this logic is the practice of ‘signature strikes’. Unlike ‘personality strikes’, which target identified individuals, signature strikes are based on patterns of behavior rather than confirmed identity (Veltman, 2019). These strikes rely on ‘pattern of life’ analysis, in which individuals are monitored over time and assessed according to behavioral indicators considered suspicious. Schwarz (2016) compares this process to biomedical risk profiling, where intervention is justified based on the prediction of future threat rather than evidence of past actions. In this context, individuals may be targeted not for what they have done, but for what they are believed to potentially do.

If a person is suspected within the framework of a pattern of life analysis, their life indicators, such as daily behavior, agenda, and locations, are monitored. Foucault illuminates the power of biopolitical strategies to control the physical body through various elaborate methods Foucault (1981) cited in Schwarz (2018). According to him, the natural body becomes a target; various mechanisms and methods make the body ‘analyzable’ and ‘manipulable’. To effectively implement this power on the body, he states, the natural body needs to be reduced to mathematical and numerical representations. Drones hovering over the skies of the Middle East are also engaged in mathematizing or codifying the natural body of the population. Pugliese explains the combination of algorithmic and biological knowledge as follows:

The human subject detected by drone's surveillance cameras is, in the first scientific schema, transmuted algorithmically into a patterned sequence of numerals, the digital code of ones and zeros. Converted into digital data coded as a 'pattern of life', the targeted human subject is reduced to an anonymous simulacrum that flickers across the screen and that can effectively be liquidated into a 'pattern of death'. Pugliese (2014) quoted in Schwarz (2016).

Thousands of hours of video footage from drones can also help chart the thermal images of individuals. Such thermal imagery creates the ‘heat signature’ of potential targets. Such a ‘heat signature’ reduces the human body to an anonymous heat-emitting entity (Veltman, 2019). These techniques produce ‘killable bodies’ for future drone strikes. In order for the human body to ‘reach’ the level of ‘killable body’, its life undergoes

informationalization. Veltman (2019) argues that although the informationalization of life is a biopolitical endeavor, it reflects a necropolitical rationale. That is, he claims this rationale is manifested in the objectification and dehumanization of the Other's life through drone surveillance.

Rasmussen (2011) cited in Allinson (2015) considers drones as a precise instrument for population management, delineating a 'caesura' between worthy and unworthy life. The criteria used to determine legitimate targets further highlight this necropolitical dimension (Feldman, 2018). Becker & Shane (2012) revealed that in some US drone strike zones, all military-age males could be considered potential targets unless proven otherwise. Such assumptions significantly expand the category of individuals exposed to lethal force. In these contexts, behavior and location become sufficient grounds for targeting, regardless of confirmed identity or involvement in hostile activities. As Chamayou (2015) notes, activity increasingly becomes a substitute for identity, reinforcing a system in which individuals are judged and targeted based on algorithmic patterns rather than personal responsibility. This transformation reflects the convergence of surveillance, data analysis, and sovereign violence. As Allinson (2015) cited in Veltman (2019) argues, drones represent a form of necropolitical power that combines technological surveillance with the authority to determine who may live and who must die. While drones are often justified as tools of protection and security, their operation demonstrates how technological systems designed to manage life simultaneously produce new mechanisms of death. In this way, drone warfare illustrates the overlap between biopolitical governance and necropolitical violence in contemporary security practices.

Myths on Precision

Due to their advanced technological capabilities, drones are frequently portrayed as precise and humanitarian instruments of warfare (Rogers, 2014). This perception is central to their ethical and legal justification, particularly in liberal democratic states. But are drones really precise enough to prevent civilian deaths? What exactly does precision mean? Drone warfare is often presented as enabling the elimination of threats while minimizing civilian casualties, thereby positioning drones as tools that enhance the protection of life. However, the assumption that drone strikes are inherently precise and humanitarian requires critical examination.

Political and military officials have consistently emphasized the precision of drone technology. For example, John Brennan, former White House Counterterrorism Advisor, described drone strikes as capable of targeting enemies with 'surgical precision' while minimizing harm to surrounding populations (Center, 2012). Such representations frame drone warfare as a controlled and ethical form of violence. Yet, as Chamayou (2015) argues, the concept of precision itself is ambiguous. According to him the concept of 'precision' has three meanings that are close to each other but not synonymous: the accuracy of firing, the extent of its impact, and the adequacy of the identification of its target. Precision may refer to the technical accuracy of hitting a target, but this does not necessarily ensure the accurate identification of the target or the absence of collateral damage. In other words, Chamayou points out that there is a significant difference between hitting the target and hitting only the target. The Hellfire AGM-114 missiles commonly used by Predator drones have a 'kill zone' of approximately 15 meters, placing anyone within that area at serious risk of death. This radius is much more lethal in densely populated Middle Eastern cities. It is a

contributing factor to the high number of civilian casualties resulting from Israeli drone strikes in Gaza. As Rogers (2014) notes, despite the use of so-called precise technologies during Israel's Operation Protective Edge in Gaza in 2014, 53 to 70 percent of casualties were civilians. This demonstrates that technological precision does not eliminate the risk of civilian harm.

The difficulty of distinguishing between civilians and combatants further complicates claims of precision. In many conflict zones, particularly in counterinsurgency environments, militants and civilians often coexist within the same spaces. An analysis of the aftermath of Britain's drone strikes in Raqqa and Mosul shows that it is indeed difficult to distinguish between militants and civilians. Experts were pessimistic about the RAF's analysis of drone strikes using only aerial imagery. Center (2012) cited in Veltman (2019) highlights that aerial imagery cannot reliably distinguish between fighters and civilians when buildings have collapsed on the top inhabitants, and on the ground, independent reporting is impossible. As Chamayou (2015) argues, the presence of a weapon capable of precisely hitting a target does not ensure that the correct target has been identified.

The practice of signature strikes intensifies this uncertainty. These strikes rely on behavioral patterns rather than confirmed identity, meaning that individuals may be targeted based on perceived threat rather than verified involvement in hostile activities. In regions where carrying weapons is common, behavioral indicators alone provide an unreliable basis for lethal action. As one Yemeni official noted, in a society where many civilians are armed, distinguishing militants from non-combatants becomes extremely difficult. Entous, Gorman and Barnes cited in Chamayou (2015). This reliance on predictive targeting increases the risk of civilian casualties and undermines claims of precise and ethical warfare.

Empirical evidence further challenges the narrative of drone precision. Zenko & Wolf (2016) found that drone strikes in non-battlefield settings such as Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia resulted in significantly higher civilian casualty rates compared to conventional airstrikes in declared war zones. Factors contributing to these outcomes include the frequent hiding of militants among civilians and the use of 'signature strikes'. These findings suggest that the humanitarian justification of drone warfare rests on contested assumptions rather than consistently demonstrated outcomes.

Beyond their physical impact, drone technologies also contribute to processes of dehumanization. Surveillance systems reduce individuals to digital signatures, behavioral patterns, and heat-emitting biological entities. This transformation facilitates their treatment as objects of technological management rather than human subjects. As Gregory (2011) observes, drone warfare creates forms of distance that separate the act of killing from its human consequences. The reason is that, firstly, they are operating from a distance of thousands of kilometres, making it impossible for him to look directly into the target's eyes or discern their personality. The people under the target are entities in the form of data for the operator, tiny spots on the screen or coded units. Second, the prevailing belief that drones are morally acceptable may lead operators to overlook the fact that their actions include taking lives (Fanahei, 2022).

The perception of drones as precise and humanitarian technologies therefore obscures their necropolitical dimension. The reduction of individuals to data and behavioral patterns enables their classification as legitimate targets, facilitating their exposure to lethal force. Rather than eliminating violence, the discourse of precision contributes to

its normalization by framing drone strikes as controlled, ethical, and necessary. In this way, the narrative of precision plays a central role in enabling forms of violence that expose certain populations, particularly in the Middle East, to continuous surveillance and the persistent possibility of death.

Drones and Imperialism/Colonialism

Contemporary drone warfare in the Middle East cannot be understood solely as a technological development in military strategy. Many scholars argue that drone operations are embedded within longer histories of imperial and colonial forms of violence. Rather than representing a completely new form of warfare, drones often reproduce earlier practices of remote control, surveillance, and domination exercised by external powers over colonized or marginalized populations. Gilbert et al. (2018) argue that drone warfare should be situated within broader histories of colonial violence. They note that drone operations are frequently integrated with other mechanisms of control such as checkpoints, curfews, surveillance systems, and broader security infrastructures. They further argue that drone strategies result in pre-emptive and racialized governance similar to imperial strategies in the 20th century Middle East. Satia (2014) also connects today's use of drones as a counter-insurgency tool with Britain's use of aerial policy in Iraq in the 1920s and evaluates it as 'a new type of covert colonial control'. Stahl cited in Liaqat & Raza (2021) argues that drones are a continuation of a long-standing imperialist vision that divides the world into 'rightful subjects' and 'puny objects'.

Drone warfare has also been interpreted through the lens of Orientalism. Allinson (2015) cited in Cachelin (2022) argues that the assumption that military-age men in the Middle East can be treated as potential targets reflects deeply rooted orientalist representations of the region as inherently violent and threatening. Such representations contribute to the construction of certain populations as legitimate objects of surveillance and lethal force. As famously argued, Orientalist discourse historically represented Middle Eastern societies as irrational, backward, and inferior, thereby producing forms of knowledge that helped legitimize Western authority and domination over the region. Accordingly, Espinoza (2018) stresses the clear manifestation of 'colonial gaze' and 'orientalism' in targeted killing and surveillance operations in the Middle East.

The logic of necropolitics further reinforces these dynamics. Mbembe (2003) cited in Veltman (2019) describes colonial rule as a form of power that does not clearly distinguish between combatants and civilians, thereby exposing entire populations to violence. Drone warfare reproduces similar conditions by expanding the range of individuals who may be considered legitimate targets. Mbembe also highlights the spatial transformation of power under conditions of colonial domination. While colonial authority historically relied on the occupation of territory, contemporary technologies increasingly enable control from above. The ability to dominate airspace allows states to project power without permanent physical presence on the ground. Drone warfare exemplifies this shift, as control of the skies enables surveillance and targeted violence across entire regions.

Another factor that gives drones an imperialist, colonialist, orientalist gaze is their influence on the daily life and psychology of people in the Middle East. Against the backdrop of the terrible physical damage caused by drones to civilians, psychological factors should not be overlooked. Cachelin (2022) argues that the psychological trauma inflicted by drones is not a new or unique feature, but a reproduction of the colonial experience. She notes that throughout history, empires have used air power not only to

inflict physical damage but also to create 'mental torment' in the population. The objective is to generate fear and uncertainty that creates a sense of helplessness among the population and ultimately encourages obedience.

It has been noted that living in fear of the fatal damage that drones can cause in any place and in any situation, taking their sound as a sign of possible disaster, has seriously affected the psychological condition of the people of the Middle East (From the Sky, 2014; Living Under Drones, 2012). Such surveillance and monitoring become a means of constantly reminding the population of the power of the empire, or, as Afxentiou (2018) states, it reminds us of the 'omnipresence of imperial power'. This condition also recalls Bentham's concept of the Panopticon, in which the possibility of constant observation produces self-discipline and obedience among those being monitored. Drone surveillance creates a similar effect: populations are aware that they may be watched at any moment but cannot determine when or where observation is occurring. In this way, drones reinforce asymmetrical relations of power between those who control surveillance technologies and those who are subjected to them. Drone's total surveillance, as Braidotti & Hlavajova (2018) quoted in Liaqat & Raza (2021) state, deprives people of the 'privileges of being considered fully human'.

Taken together, these dynamics suggest that drone warfare in the Middle East reflects not only new technological capabilities but also the persistence of imperial and colonial forms of power. By enabling distant states to monitor, control, and kill individuals across sovereign territories, drones extend historical practices of domination into the technological conditions of contemporary warfare.

Drone's Imaginative Boundaries

Drones have also transformed the notion of space, becoming a tool of imperial power. Drones can generate images of the earth and influence geographical imaginaries and material practices (Gilbert et al., 2018). Geographical boundaries on the ground do not matter to drones; they can draw their own boundaries from the sky. In the context of the war on terror, Chamayou (2015) represents the war between drones (and the powers that employ them) and militants in terms of the hunter-prey relationship. According to him, the war between hunter and prey is not limited by geographical boundaries. Where the prey goes, the hunter fights there. In other words, the enemy/prey carries with it the hostility of the mobile zone. According to Chamayou, such a situation gives the hunter invasive power and a unique right.

A right of universal intrusion or encroachment that would authorize charging after the prey wherever it found refuge, thereby trampling underfoot the principle of territorial integrity classically attached to state sovereignty (Chamayou, 2015).

Drones, with their operations in the sky, destroy the traditional view of territorial sovereignty as territory surrounded by borders. Imperial power has changed its attitude towards space and now begins to control territories by mastering the sky rather than occupying them. Weizmann (2007) quoted in Chamayou (2015) states Israel's strategy in Gaza and the West Bank 'politics of verticality'. This verticalization 'enable the application of power from sky to ground, across patches of earth, within life world, and on bodies' (Gilbert et al., 2018). Such verticality allows Israel to control everything in Gaza and the West Bank, or, as Weizmann (2007) quoted in Mbembe (2003) notes, 'settlements could be seen as urban optical devices for surveillance and exercise of power'. Mbembe claims that such verticality causes violence to increase and creates favorable conditions for targeted killing. Mbembe's views on the rise of violence find

expression in the ‘kill box’ described by Chamayou. Perhaps ‘kill boxes’ are the most necropolitical form of respatialisation that drones can carry out. In the ‘kill box’, the operational spaces are divided into squares, not as a whole, to make fighting easier. Chamayou (2015) states in ‘kill box’, ‘one should imagine a theatre of operations portrayed on a screen in 3-D as a set of cubes laid on a surface divided into squares’. Turning a specific area into a ‘kill box’ allows operators to perform an unlimited number of operations there. No bureaucratic system works. Chamayou (2015) referred to a kill box as ‘a temporary autonomous zone of slaughter’ (Todeschini, 2023).

The spatial logic of drone warfare therefore reflects more than technological innovation. It represents a transformation in how violence, sovereignty, and territorial control are organized in contemporary conflict. By enabling continuous surveillance and the projection of force across borders, drones produce new forms of spatial domination in which entire regions may be transformed into zones of potential targeting and exposure to death. In this sense, the spatial practices of drone warfare reinforce the necropolitical conditions through which certain populations are rendered permanently vulnerable to violence from above.

IV. CONCLUSION

This article examines drone warfare in the Middle East through the concepts of biopolitics and necropolitics. It asks to what extent drone warfare, often presented as precise and humanitarian, functions instead as a form of necropolitical violence. Although drones are frequently justified as technologies that protect life by eliminating threats with precision and minimizing civilian casualties, this study argues that such narratives obscure broader systems of violence, surveillance, and domination embedded in drone warfare. The analysis shows that drone operations operate within biopolitical logics of surveillance, prediction, and risk management. Practices such as pattern-of-life analysis and signature strikes transform individuals into data-driven targets whose behavior is constantly monitored and assessed. At the same time, these practices create necropolitical conditions in which certain populations are exposed to death through remote and technologically mediated violence, effectively turning individuals into “killable bodies.” The study also critically evaluates claims about the precision and humanitarian character of drone warfare. While drones are often described as enabling surgical strikes, technological accuracy does not eliminate civilian casualties nor resolve the difficulty of distinguishing combatants from civilians in complex conflict zones. The discourse of precision therefore contributes to the normalization of violence by framing drone strikes as controlled and ethical forms of warfare.

Finally, the article situates drone warfare within broader histories of imperial and colonial power in the Middle East. Contemporary drone operations reproduce earlier forms of aerial surveillance and domination that allow states to project power across borders. Viewed through the relationship between biopolitics and necropolitics, drone warfare emerges not only as a security practice but also as a technology of control, violence, and domination.

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