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DRONEFARE The normality of governance and state crime

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Introduction

Unmanned aerial vehicles (i.e. drones) are quickly being adopted by many countries, corporations, international organizations, police and immigration forces and by the general population. Consider that you can now buy a drone to fly, spy and record for as little as US$300. Although public purchase and use of drones is an important area of research, our focus is on the large unmanned aerial vehicles, hereafter referred to as drones, that are equipped with missiles and bombs that have progressively become the newest wave in ‘warfare’.

Historically, drones have been used primarily for surveillance and reconnaissance purposes. This includes drones used in World War II, Vietnam, the Israeli/Syrian conflict, and the Persian Gulf War. The use of drones, however, has increased since the US began using them in the war on terrorism in Afghanistan (2001) for reconnaissance, and in 2002 when an unmanned Predator drone was used to carry out a targeted killing. Consider that since 2007 the United States has carried out attacks and targeted killings in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, the Philippines, Mali, Somalia and Yemen. Israel has used drones in air strikes in Egypt and Sudan as well as the occupied territories (Cole 2013). The technological advances being made and the growing numbers of ‘battle-equipped’ drones being bought and used by countries have prompted non-governmental agencies, military units and journalists to praise as well as criticize their capabilities and the government policies guiding their use. However, until lately social scientists have generally neglected to pay attention to this growing phenomenon. We hope to begin to address this glaring gap by suggesting that the use of these drones for targeted assassinations is a normality of governing a modern capitalistic state. Our primary focus is on the United States as it is and continues to be the global leader in terms of using and legitimating this new technology in its war against terror.

In order to understand the use of drones in modern warfare, the authors place the rise of drones in the context where crisis, exception and emergency are not sporadic events for states in the context of war but a constant choice of political management/administration in the exercise of violence. As noted by Neocleous (2006), over the course of the twentieth century and up to 4 September 2011 the US has declared thirty national emergencies. Further, it is through law that violent state actions and policies, such as the use of drones
and targeted assassinations, conducted in ‘emergency conditions’, become legitimated, legalized and normalized. Simply, we suggest that the use of drones for targeted assassinations is one small example of state violence that is increasingly becoming an accepted and regular exercise of US power that works alongside and within the rule of law as a political strategy in the ongoing construction and reification of social order. As Singer (2009: 19) rightly notes, ‘[a]n amazing revolution is taking place on the battlefield, starting to change not just how wars are fought, but also the politics, economics, laws, and ethics that surround war itself’. As Neocleous (2006) rightly notes, examination of the laws of war reveals that, despite rhetoric to the contrary, the laws of war have been articulated to privilege military necessity at the cost of humanitarian values. ‘As a result, the laws of war have facilitated rather than restricted wartime violence’ (Jochnick and Normand 1994: 50). Prior to discussing this process further, the following section provides the theoretical frameworks drawn on here.

**Theoretical frameworks**

The current geopolitical sphere, where powerful states frequently exercise their violence and power consistently evokes uncertainty, anxiety and risk, which is a common condition of governing in this highly capitalistic-driven era of late modernity (Giddens 1990; Hier 2003; O’Malley 2010). ‘This is not a natural state but is driven by a pervasive logic of manufactured uncertainty where risk becomes a permanent condition of modern life through neoliberal modes of governance’ (Adam et al., 2000: 5). In other words, we suggest that, while it is not a natural state, it is manufactured as an environment of risks and ‘emergencies’ to legitimate state violence that is a condition of normality of political power and governance. The process of manufactured uncertainty is created through state policies and practices as well as reified in official discourse. For example, one can consider outright deception through discourse as a means to create an environment of uncertainty and risk, legitimating the war on Iraq, as was the case with former President George W. Bush’s regime and the threat of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction. On the other hand, risk and uncertainty are the result of state policies. Consider the United States’ support and training of the Afghan mujahideen militia against Russia in Afghanistan that resulted in the Taliban eventually seizing Kabul and the training of individuals including Osama Bin Laden. Likewise, the current use of drones in Yemen has created a significant backlash.

As noted by one of the invited participants to the United States Senate Hearing in *Drone Wars: The Constitutional and Counterterrorism Implications of Targeted Killings*, Farea al-Muslimi:

> the pretext that targeted killings would make the United States safer from foreign terrorists has had the “unintended effect of driving overseas populations into the hands of al-Qaeda . . . What a violent militant had previously failed to achieve, one drone strike accomplished in an instant: There is now an intense anger against America. (NODRF et al. 2013).

An example of the convergence between the normalcy of ‘emergency’ and times of ‘exceptions’ with manufactured uncertainty and control can be seen in some government responses to 9/11 that justified strong military actions that blurred the boundary between national security and the posed threat (McCulloch and Pickering 2009). As a reaction to the terrorist threat, strong domestic and military measures, including pre-emption, were
introduced. Law served to legitimate state violence conducted in ‘emergency conditions’ and the removal of civil liberties (Neocleous 2006).

The characteristics of risk and uncertainty coincide with the culture of control that has come to dominate in the late modernity era. This culture of control can be translated beyond the discourse of law, crime and the criminal justice system to the sphere of the military, where the same discourse of control is used to respond to insecurity, risk and uncertainty by creating a symbolism of precautionary logics (Zedner 2007) and extreme security strategies (Ericson 2007). As Ericson (2007) rightly noted, late modernity involves efforts to pre-empt imagined sources of harm, and to manage risk and uncertainty by adopting future-oriented strategies of control. These policies or strategies, including the ambiguous ones, embody the notion of pre-crime, shifting the temporal perspective from reactive to anticipatory. The ambiguous nature of policies and strategies allows for more events and individuals to be captured in an ever-widening net (Ericson 2007). Here pre-emption remains a response to uncertainty that reflects the culture of control of late modernity (Garland 2001).

An important aspect of neoliberal risk management is the use of technology (Beck 1992). As noted by Wall and Monahan (2011: 239), ‘[t]he corporeal politics of space, place, and identity are powerfully inflected by technological systems’. Technophilia (i.e. strong positive sentiments towards the use of technology) is characteristic of the ‘revolution in military affairs’ (Parenti 2007: 88) which has been widely supported for the reduction of risk associated with the strategy. In this way, the normality of state violence, in this case the use of drones and targeted killing, becomes a way to exercise political administration through risk management and the exercise of violence.

If we accept the characteristics of late modernity and state responses to risk and uncertainty, we can then draw from Foucault’s concepts of biopolitical and biopower to transcend geopolitical interests and actions (Gregory 2011). For Foucault, biopolitics is about governing bodies . . . living or dead. Biopower includes the managing of deaths and reproduction of a population. Biopower functions through dividing people into those who should live and those who must die. This power defines itself in relation to a biological field that it controls. According to Foucault, the sovereign right to kill (droit de glaive) and the mechanisms of biopower are inscribed in the way all states function and are constitutive elements of state power in modernity (Foucault 1977). As Welch (2009: 230) noted in reference to the war on Iraq, “the regime of biopower is directed not only at eliminating the dangerous enemy (destructive power) but providing security and protecting the innocent lives (constructive power). In pursuit of such ‘noble’ causes, that dual form of biopower is embraced by advocates of the ‘lesser evil’ approach to counterterrorism’.

During the normalcy of political administration of power and the exercise of violence, there are pleas to exceptions and emergency while the state simultaneously labors to produce that same exception and emergency (Mbembe 2003: 16). Here, combining the conditions of late modernity and risk management, the use of drones and targeted killing becomes a form of risk management and an act that reproduces the power of the sovereign into enhanced spheres through the exercise of biopolitics and biopower.

The exercise of state violence with emerging technologies, then, is legitimated and neutralized by ‘knowledge’ that undergirds a regime of truth. Power produces knowledge that organizes information. The knowledge gathered further reinforces the exercise of power and state violence. This is done through ‘truths’ and a ‘regime of truth’. The ‘regime of truth’ and ‘truth’ are embedded in state governance. A Foucauldian understanding of ‘truth’ is that it is produced within the dominant relations of power structures as part of a public discourse. The material reality is determined by an array of players which encompasses
more than just fact v. fiction. Therefore ‘truth’ is relative because what constitutes ‘truth’ is not universally established but is predetermined by state powers during the normalcy of political administration and is left ambiguous to adapt to the ever-changing manufactured uncertain risk society. In the case at hand, this truth is reflected in discourse of national security and managing pre-emptively the risks and uncertainty of late modernity. The idea of discourse, according to Foucault, includes a statement of how security and risk management are defined, followed by the rules guiding the ways they are discussed – including necessity based on ‘emergency’ or ‘exceptional times’, and this then frames the authority of ‘truth’ about the subject (Foucault 1980). This truth would include the legitimization of drones as precise, cost efficient and as a saver of lives. As noted by Wall and Monahan (2011: 250), drones “are woven up in myths of technological superiority, objectivity, and control that help support their adoption.”

With Foucault, it is not the statement of ‘truth’ that decides about the functionality, acceptance and/or effectiveness of definitorial powers; it is the ‘material reality’ of a societal ‘regime of truth’, in this case the state (Foucault 1980: 131). This ‘material reality’ can be said to be represented by the interactions of players (Ewald 2008), in particular, the apparatus of security (e.g. the military, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Department of Defense). The ‘regime of truth’ then guides the practice within the state for dealing with the subject (security and risk management) that is embedded in a system of power. It is reinforced with political discourse, in this case designed to legitimate policies and normalize the use of drones and targeted killings. This then comes to be seen as a generalized way of thinking that becomes dominant in a certain era, reflecting not only what is to be known but also what should be and is to be done. This truth serves to ‘valorize the status quo while enforcing an exclusionary politics that denies or subjugates alternative ways of knowing’ (Wall and Monahan 2011: 243).

In summary, we suggest that by drawing on the late-modernity concepts of manufactured risk/crisis, the normalcy of a ‘state of emergency’ or ‘exceptionalism’ is justified and legitimated through law and a culture of control. We can see how through the use of ‘truth’, and the subsequent regime of truth, the United States’ use of drones and targeted assassinations in the war on terrorism is legitimated, neutralized and justified, becoming another component of normal political administration and the exercise of state violence.

**Dronefare**

The United States’ use of drones and targeted assassinations has significantly increased over the course of the past decade and especially so under the Obama administration (see Appendix A). As noted by Miller (2012: 2), “over the past few years, the Obama administration has institutionalized the use of armed drones and developed a counterterrorism infrastructure capable of sustaining a seemingly permanent war”. Despite a lack of official statistics, data collected by independent sources, based on a variety of methods, indicate that the US currently has 60 military and CIA bases across the globe directly connected to the drone programme, with 375 armed drones operating in the Middle East (e.g., Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Yemen) and Africa (e.g. Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria, the Seychelles and Somalia) (Cole 2013; Wood 2013). Consider that since 2004 there have been 350 known drone attacks carried out in Pakistan, 55 in Yemen and Somalia (*Washington Post* 2013). The number of ‘high-level’ targets killed as a percentage of total casualties is estimated to be extremely low – at just 2% (Bergen and Braun, 2012). Table 1 shows the numbers of casualties by country estimated by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism (2013).
The precision of these attacks, not to mention the alleged target, have been in question since the first use over a decade ago, though rarely acknowledged by the US government. Rather, the political statements tend to ignore and downplay any civilian deaths with statements such as ‘there have been “no” or “single digit” civilian casualties’ (C-SPAN 2011). However, consider the following case:

On the morning of March 17, 2011, more than three dozen village elders and local government leaders gathered in an open-air bus depot in the town of Datta Khel, in North Waziristan, Pakistan. Under discussion: how to avoid being drawn into the insurgency raging there and across the border in Afghanistan. At about 10:45 a.m., a drone hovering overhead fired a supersonic missile into the gathering. One man remembers hearing a slight hissing noise before the blast threw him, unconscious, several yards away. An immediate second strike killed many of the wounded.

(Wood 2013: 2).

In many cases, drones hover twenty-four hours a day over communities, particularly in northwest Pakistan. ‘Those living under drones have to face the constant worry that a deadly strike may be fired at any moment, and the knowledge that they are powerless to protect themselves. These fears have affected behavior’ (Living under Drones 2013). On 7 January, 2013, eight people were killed in similar attacks in the village of Haiderkhel in the Miranshah district of North Waziristan. Sixteen people had been also killed in a killer drone strike on South Waziristan a day before’. The London-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism said in a report released in February that the ‘United States has carried out more than 360 assassination drone attacks in Pakistan since 2004, killing nearly 3,500 people’ (Press TV 2013).

The use of these drones for targeted assassinations has reached the level where the administration holds what have been deemed ‘Terror Tuesday Sessions’ where kill lists are given to President Obama for approval and overseeing the Predator drones (Scahill 2013). A disposition matrix is used, (see Figure 1) which is a system to codify and streamline the killings that are carried out by drones (Miller 2012). It was developed by a group of military and intelligence officers and is now overseen by the Director of the CIA, John Brennan (Miller 2013). In 2012 President Obama granted a CIA request to launch drone attacks even if the identities of those who are to be killed are unknown. They refer to this as a ‘signature’ strike policy (Democracy Now, 2012). Given that the use of drones is group and the number being purchased by the US government is increasing, the question remains how such targeted killing is being legitimized and routinized by the dominant global superpower and the subsequent potential consequences.
The legitimation of drones and targeted killings

The process of legitimating acts of war or new technological advances is not new. As Kramer (2009: 79) notes, in ‘the massive violence of the global human catastrophe that was World War II, the illegal bombing of civilian populations became both commonplace and morally acceptable’ through the processes of the normalization of deviance. We suggest that this is not a matter of the normalization of deviance, but rather the continuation of normalcy of political management and the exercise of state violence in an evolving era of technophilia.

As has been previously noted by several scholars, the attacks of 11 September 2001 provided an opportunity for the US to claim another state of emergency and exceptionalism to expand and enhance its military presence in the Middle East and Africa in particular (Agamben 2004). This presented an opportunity to highlight the level of uncertainty and,
most importantly, risk. We suggest that 11 September (and later the 2013 Boston bombing) allowed the political apparatuses, both the former President George W. Bush’s and President Barak Obama’s administrations, to continue the manufacturing of an ongoing sense of risk, uncertainty and a state of ‘emergency’. This could be seen immediately after the 11 September 2001 attacks and in the build-up to the war on Iraq (Rothe and Muzzatti 2004), and today, where still be seen an omnipresent threat is presented to the populace. A press release by the former President Bush’s Press Secretary, Ari Fleischer (2001), stated, ‘The al Qaeda organization is present in, as you’ve heard from the President, more than 60 countries, and its links are – its links are amorphous.’ This continued through the Obama administration where the use of targeted assassinations significantly increased and the threat continued to expand. ‘We have real enemies in the world. These enemies must be found. They must be pursued and they must be defeated’ (Washington Post, 2004). In June 2011, Obama stated, ‘we continue to face a significant terrorist threat from al-Qa’ida, its affiliates, and its adherents’ (United States White House Office 2011).

The production and reproduction of such pieties occurred over the course of 12 years, waxing and waning, yet they are an important discursive practice insofar as they serve to re-establish order and meaning by reinforcing state power and the exercise of violence, creating a truth to undergird the regime of truth and subsequent policies: the global war on terror and the use of drones for targeted assassinations as a necessary action to preserve ‘security’ and remove potential terrorist threats. This also resulted in the US formal policy of pre-emption, another example where through law the normalization of the exercise of state violence is enhanced. Consider the wording of the 18 September, 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force Act:

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Whereas, in light of the threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States posed by these grave acts of violence; and Whereas, such acts continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States; and Whereas, the President has authority under the Constitution to take action to deter and prevent acts of international terrorism against the United States.

(Public Law 107–40; 107th Congress)
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The ‘global war on terror’ has also been used to legitimize an expansion of the culture of control, as has been witnessed with the passing of other legislation, most notably the US PATRIOT Act, in which the net widening for those deemed a terrorist was greatly expanded and individual rights and freedoms were reduced. The ‘targets’ have expanded from the initial ‘al-Qaeda terrorist’ to ‘terrorist’ to ‘terrorist like group’, to ‘associated with a terrorist or terrorist like group’ including US civilians. Terrorists, those associated with or perceived to be, fall under the scope of national security risk management. As noted in the United States Department of Justice White Papers (2011: 2), while ‘we recognize that there is no private interest more weighty than a person’s interest in his life that interest must be balanced against the United States’ interest in forestalling the threat of violence and death’. The reduction of each drone strike to a separate decision-making act ‘obscures the systematic and cumulative nature of the campaign’, and represents it as a singular necessary act (Gregory 2011: 241). The violence of this reduction is then legitimated through a ‘series of cultural productions that use the language of war (Geogre 2011: 244). The White Papers continue: ‘The threat posed by al-Qaeda and its associated forces demands a broader concept of imminence in judging when a person continually planning terror attacks presents an imminent threat.’
also ‘requires’ that since ‘the terrorist adversaries have shown themselves to be agile and adaptive; defeating them requires that we develop and pursue a strategy that is even more agile and adaptive’, meaning the use of drones and targeted killings (Obama 2011).

No where are the preemptive policies and the normalcy of state violence and the exercise of biopower more notable than with the “Terror Tuesday Sessions”, the use of a disposition matrix to codify and streamline the killings that are carried out by drones and what has been dubbed the “signature” strike policy. Not only has the net been widened for who may be considered a target, but this process is based on a state of emergency in a never ending war against terrorism: a ‘war without end’ and wherein the “theatre of war has become the entire globe” (Horton in Scailhill 2013: 173). Brennan, speaking on behalf of the Obama Administration states (in Scailhill 2013: 354), noted that we ‘will take the fight to al-Qaeda and its extremist affiliates wherever they plot and train. In Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and beyond.’ This also reinforces and creates a fluid and ambiguous global environment to continue to respond to the manufactured uncertainty of late modernity through a constant and expanding redefining of the other, an expansive culture of control that creates, reinforces and legitimizes state policy.

As part of the broader culture of control, the use of drones for targeted killings of the ambiguously defined ‘terrorist’ was unacknowledged by both the Bush and Obama administrations until late 2012. As former White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs revealed in an interview on MSNBC Up with Chris Hayes on Sunday, 24 February 2013:

> When I went through the process of becoming press secretary, one of the first things they told me was, ‘You’re not even to acknowledge the drone program. You’re not even to discuss that it exists. . . . Here’s what’s inherently crazy about that proposition: you’re being asked a question based on reporting of a program that exists. So you’re the official government spokesperson acting as if the entire program . . . pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.

(Gentile, 2013).

On 13 May 2013 Obama spoke at the National Defense University where he publicly disclosed the use of drones and the killing of four Americans. In his speech, he reified the ‘ominous’ threat, state of ‘emergency’ and attempted to lay the framework for the need and benefits of using drones and targeted strikes – attempting to legitimize their use and the sanctioning of state violence.

> Our nation is still threatened by terrorists. From Benghazi to Boston, we have been tragically reminded of that truth . . . With a decade of experience to draw from now is the time to ask ourselves hard questions – about the nature of today’s threats, and how we should confront them . . . what we’ve seen is the emergence of various al Qaeda affiliates. From Yemen to Iraq, from Somalia to North Africa, the threat today is more diffuse, with Al Qaeda’s affiliate in the Arabian Peninsula . . . Unrest in the Arab World has also allowed extremists to gain a foothold in countries like Libya and Syria . . . We must take these threats seriously, and do all that we can to confront them.

The following quotation provides the ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’ about the costs of traditional war and how the threat is more global, requiring a new strategy, thus legitimating the use of drones and targeted killings as a necessary ‘evil’ in these ‘exceptional’ times.
For over the last decade, our nation has spent well over a trillion dollars on war, exploding our deficits and constraining our ability to nation build here at home . . . Nearly 7,000 Americans have made the ultimate sacrifice. Many more have left a part of themselves on the battlefield, or brought the shadows of battle back home . . . In an age in which ideas and images can travel the globe in an instant, our response to terrorism cannot depend on military or law enforcement alone. We need all elements of national power to win a battle of wills and ideas . . . Beyond Afghanistan, we must define our effort not as a boundless ‘global war on terror’ – but rather as a series of persistent, targeted efforts to dismantle specific networks of violent extremists that threaten America . . . It is also not possible for America to simply deploy a team of Special Forces to capture every terrorist. And even when such an approach may be possible, there are places where it would pose profound risks to our troops and local civilians – where a terrorist compound cannot be breached without triggering a firelight with surrounding tribal communities that pose no threat to us, or when putting U.S. boots on the ground may trigger a major international crisis. . . . small Special Operations carry enormous risks. Conventional airpower or missiles are far less precise than drones, and likely to cause more civilian casualties and local outrage.

Obama’s speech was well crafted to convey a ‘knowledge’ to reinforce a ‘truth’ that serves to 1) crystallize the ongoing risk, uncertainty, fear; 2) legitimize the state’s policy of violence and killing through the use of drones; and 3) reinforce the need to continue to carry out targeted strikes during these ‘times’ of threat to maintain security.

Other discourses used to justify the use of these drones for targeted assassinations include their ability to be life-saving, concise and cost efficient. As noted by John Brennan, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, in a speech at the Woodrow Wilson Center (30 April 2012), ‘They [drones] can be a wise choice because they dramatically reduce the danger to U.S. personnel, even eliminating the danger altogether’. The process of legitimating the use of drones is therefore carried out by creating truths of their concise nature, cost-efficiency and ability to save American lives and collateral damage (i.e., all innocent people killed). Where the state is able to refrain from ‘deploying large armies abroad but [are] delivering targeted, precision surgical pressure to the groups that threaten us’ (Brennan, in Scahill 2013).

This discourse is imbued with hegemonic overtones that stress the production and reproduction of legitimation wherein drones ‘are woven up in myths of technological superiority, objectivity, and control that help support their adoption’ (Wall and Monahan 2011: 250). This ‘truth’ of efficiency, conciseness, and saviour of ‘our boys’ lives obfuscates the underlying exercise of state violence. This then undergirds the ‘regime of truth’ that guides policy. As stated by White House Press Secretary Jay Carney on 5 February 2013, ‘We conduct those strikes because they are necessary to mitigate ongoing actual threats—to stop plots, prevent future attacks and, again, save American lives. These strikes are legal, they are ethical, and they are wise’ (Euronews 2013). Such rhetoric reinforces our suggestion that law is not being ignored or violated but, rather, it is through law that the legitimation process occurs. As Neocleous (2006: 205) emphasizes, ‘states constantly employ lawyers to explain and defend emergency tactics that might appear unlawful’ to evade legal difficulties. ‘This evading often involves some real casuistry’ that includes efforts to interpret the law from within. This manipulation of the ‘meaning’ of legal terminology, however, does
not negate the operationally of law; rather, it shows the importance of the rule of law in legitimating the exercise of state violence.

Consider the words of Obama’s legal advisor Harold Hongju Koh, when he stated in a speech to the US Department of State in 2010, “it is the considered view of this Administration—and it has certainly been my experience during my time as Legal Adviser—that U.S. targeting practices, including lethal operations conducted with the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, comply with all applicable law, including the laws of war.’ The administration adheres to ‘the principle of distinction, which requires that attacks be limited to military objectives and that civilians or civilian objects, shall not be the object of the attack.’ A second principle adhered to is ‘the principle of proportionality, which prohibits attacks that may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, that would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated’. The process of neutralizing and justifying the use of drones and assassinations or extra-judicial killings continues, as Koh states that ‘some have argued that the use of lethal force against specific individuals fails to provide adequate process and thus constitutes unlawful extrajudicial killing. But a state that is engaged . . . in legitimate self-defense is not required to provide targets with legal process before the state may use lethal force.’ Here the evading of legal difficulties and manipulating the law from within shows that, rather than law being suspended, it is through law that, in the process of the normality of political administration, the use of drones and targeted assassinations, conducted in ‘emergency conditions’, become legitimated, legalized and normalized. After all, the exercise and legitimation of biopolitics requires a legal framework to authorize and legitimize its interventions (Gregory 2011).

The end result of the processes, from the creation of knowledge, ‘truths’ the enactment of policies undergirded by the ‘regime of truth’ and through law, the exercise of biopolitics and biopower, is normalized and institutionalized into ‘Irregular Warfare Capabilities’ – dronefare is achieved.

Concluding thoughts

We have suggested that the United States use of drones and the practice of targeted killings should be seen as the normacy of political management and the exercise of biopolitics, biopower and violence. It is presented as necessary during this ‘time of emergency’ that is a condition of normacy. To legitimize the use of drones for these killings, discourse is used to portray a global and ominous risk that comes to be understood as knowledge and truth. It is legitimated then through the regime of truth that is grounded in a constructed truth and discourse of drones as concise in nature, cost efficient and necessary. As stated by Senator Durbin, ‘The use of drones has, in stark terms, made targeted killing more efficient and less costly—in terms of American blood and treasure’ (Londoño 2013). The use of the drones and targeted assassinations is further legitimated, not through the suspension of law, but through the support of law.

All of these constructions of reality are embedded within late modernity, where the geopolitical environment is uncertain, filled with manufactured risk and fluidity. Yet, as noted in the United States Judiciary Subcommittee hearings titled ‘Drone Wars: The Constitutional and Counterterrorism Implications of Targeted Killings’, on 23 April 2013, ‘current drone policy has left us in a position where we are generating more problems than solving them’ (Leahy, 2013).

Given that the US is a global leader, often setting standards and precedence for other states to adopt, the legitimization of the use of these drones and targeted killings should
be of utmost concern. As noted by Cole (2013: 1), ‘as this technology proliferates, as it is sure to do, the prospect of many different countries around the globe remotely controlling armed drones to carry out lethal attacks is nothing short of terrifying’. As stated by Wall and Monahan (2011: 247), ‘knowing when to say “when” is not a “decision” that is made in a vacuum but is rather a sovereign act shaped by social and political norms, which are encoded in both the institutional practices and technological systems of drones’. It is a normalcy of the political administration of the state in the exercise of state violence and governing the social order. As such, we suggest that Pandora’s box has indeed been opened and the use of drones for targeted killings may well become globally legitimized through law – including international law – leading to an enhanced globalized production of dronefare.

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VARIEIDES OF STATE CRIMES

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