The Newport Papers

"ARE WE BEASTS?"

Churchill and the Moral Question of World War II "Area Bombing"

by Christopher C. Harmon

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ABSTRACT

This historical reassessment of the World War II British bombing campaign notes that though in 1940 Churchill declared that he was waging "a military and not a civilian war" to destroy "military objectives" and not "women and children," within eighteen months both types of targets would be struck by Bomber Command. The author searches for the reasons in "three contiguous realms" of strategic influence: moral (and legal), political, and military. The study concludes that although for much of the war "area bombing" of cities was a "tragic necessity" meeting the "'reasonable man's' standard of what was decently allowable given the blunt weapons the Allies had" and the evils they faced, nonetheless Allied leaders could have and should have abandoned indiscriminate bombing in the last phases of the conflict, when more precise means were at hand and "Nazi power had been overmatched."

THE AUTHOR

Dr. Christopher C. Harmon, formerly foreign policy advisor to a member of the House Armed Services Committee, has served since 1988 as an associate professor of strategy at the Naval War College.

"Are We Beasts?"
Churchill and the Moral Question of World War II "Area Bombing"

Christopher C. Harmon

THE BRITISH PUBLIC OF A HALF-CENTURY AGO knew several things about its bulldog prime minister, Winston S. Churchill. One was that he could be moved to tears by the bomb damage the Nazi air forces did to English neighborhoods; the homeless planted Union Jacks in their smoking rubble piles and called out their support to him as he made his inspections. What the British also knew, from his many public statements, was that Churchill did not merely respond to but fully shared in the public's cries for retaliation against the German homeland. It was in large part at his direction—for he was simultaneously prime minister, minister of defense, and a leader of the Anglo-American coalition—that fully one-fifth of German homes were flattened or burned by strategic bombing. Seven and a half million people were rendered homeless, and these must be considered luckier than the one million other German civilians who were killed or wounded in bomber attacks.[1]

The moral burdens of these lethal attacks on the largely unarmed were accepted by Mr. Churchill as a grim necessity of a just war. To many, the weight would have been crushing. In Churchill's case the shoulders dipped only in private, and on remarkably few occasions. But there were at least three revealing times when the calls on his conscience were apparent to friends.

One came at the end of a June 1943 air campaign against the populous industrial centers of the Ruhr in which the Royal Air Force had bombed with particular intensity. At home, watching film footage of the raids in the company of another member of the war cabinet, the prime minister suddenly sat bolt upright and exclaimed: "Are we beasts? Are we taking this too far?"[2]

Two years later the cold logic of the strategic air campaign against the three-score largest German cities combined with the press of events on the Eastern Front to dictate the death sentence of Dresden. After that attack, and for the first time in the war, an Allied correspondent wrote of "deliberate terror bombing" intended to break German morale. The dispatch was aired on the floor of the House of Commons. Churchill reacted by drafting—but then withholding—a stinging memorandum to his chiefs of staff about the need to review "the question of bombing of German cities simply for the sake of increasing the terror, though under other pretexts...."[3]

A third moment came after the war, in a 1949 conversation at a Boston hotel before Churchill lectured at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He had learned of a monument in Alamogordo, New Mexico, raised to those who had died at Hiroshima, and he asked, did "the Americans have a bad conscience because the atom bomb was dropped?" Told that many did, he defended that action. When his son Randolph declared that "World War Two saturation bombing was an equal horror," the elder Churchill "then described in unforgettable words such bombings over Germany, with tears brimming in his extraordinary eyes. 'Tens of thousands of lives were extinguished in one night. Old men, old women, little children, yes, yes—children about to be born....'"[4]

The war leader's eventual willingness to permit area bombing was in contrast to his own early views. Despite the exaggerated view regnant in Europe of the power of aerial bombing, Churchill did not enter World War II expecting to use bombers to devastate German cities. He had to be driven to the deed by the Germans and by the imperatives of the war. The Winston Churchill who had been minister of munitions in World War I had inklings then that massive bombardment might not in fact destroy the will to war. He had written in 1917: "It is improbable that any terrorization of the civil population which could be achieved by air attack would compel...surrender.... We have seen the combative spirit of the people roused, and not quelled, by the German air raids. Nothing that we have learned of the capacity of the German population to endure suffering justifies us in assuming that they could be cowed into submission by

such methods, or...not be rendered more desperately resolved by them."[5]

Moreover, from the opening of war in 1939 and well into 1940, Churchill was often to insist upon the traditional (if battered) distinction between enemy forces and noncombatants. He often used the word "terrorism" when denouncing Luftwaffe bombing of cities. In the Smoking Room of the House of Commons in 1940 he argued with a member of Parliament who supported public demands for unrestricted bombardment of Germany in reprisal for the "blitz" against London. Harold Nicolson recorded Churchill's reply: "My dear sir, this is a military and not a civilian war. You and others may desire to kill women and children. We desire (and have succeeded in our desire) to destroy German military objectives."[6]

Yet within eighteen months both would be targeted as a matter of enunciated policy by the Royal Air Force Bomber Command. Why? What happened? The answers must be sought in three contiguous realms of influence upon British strategic decision makers: the moral, the political, and the military.

The Moral Case *For*

The two most potent moral arguments that can be made for bombing densely populated regions of the fascist countries in World War II turn upon the justice of the Allied cause and the rank injustice of the Axis aggression. Both are mentioned in Michael Walzer's thoughtful study of *Just and Unjust Wars*, and both were used by Winston Churchill during the war.[7]

The first principle is that "the greater the justice of one's cause, the more rights one has in battle." According to Walzer, no less a thinker than Hugo Grotius, a founder of international law, held this view. Such a "sliding scale" is a hazardous one to use; but if this principle depends heavily upon a government's subjective judgement, it is also one which makes eminently good sense. Churchill often made this point, though without elaboration and usually in direct application to particular events. He spoke of aggressors and victims, and certainly the war was of a nature that left—and leaves—little doubt about the justice of

the Allied cause. He spoke of his shame at England's failure to stop the conquests of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the Low Countries, and of the rights of neutrals still independent. He argued, as he did in a speech of 7 November 1941, that no country had tried harder than his to remain at peace; now driven to war, Britain had a cause as just as any could ever be. In Churchill's eyes, Britain had not merely to resist aggression but to lead a league of other nations in mutual self-defense.

It may therefore be claimed that British rights in battle greatly exceeded those of the aggressors, exceeding even those traditionally used to repel aggression. Churchill's earliest rhetoric asserted these rights gradually—by degree and by implication. In 1939 and early 1940, as First Lord of the Admiralty and a war cabinet member, he repeatedly ordered staff contingency studies to be kept ready for retaliation for German acts that were morally repugnant and broke the old laws of war. When fifteen Luftwaffe aircraft bombed the naval base at Scapa Flow in March 1940, theirs were the first bombs dropped on British soil. They killed a civilian and flattened cottages in addition to killing three naval officers. Britain, as the man in the London street was sometimes wont to say, had thus far dropped nothing but leaflets on Germany; now Churchill found "ample justification" for a British attack on a German military object even where it "might cause civilian casualties."[8]

In dealing with the complex question of a right to violate the neutrality of Norwegian waters Churchill could sound a good deal like Abraham Lincoln, whose justification for suspending the writ of habeas corpus was that vastly broader freedoms and the very possibility of democratic equality depended upon doing so.[9] Churchill's unabashed claim was that Britain deserved the right, for instance, to enter Norway's waters because his country was the champion of "every small country in Europe" against illegality incarnate, and could not wait for German forces to seize Norway first, as indeed Germany planned to do.[10] In the event, both powers launched expeditionary forces to Norway at about the same moment. British ships had just entered coastal waters when German troops began splashing ashore.

When he became prime minister on 10 May 1940, Churchill apparently believed that he could fight Hitler with unusually

harsh means yet not become Hitlerian. The principled decency of both his defensive position and his war aims was to him more important than arguments over means. He nonetheless paid scrupulous attention to means, calibrating British efforts to accord with German violations of traditional laws of war. Justice, he said in one speech, would allow Britain weapons as plentiful, as sharp, and as destructive "as those the Nazis used to impose their hateful domination.... Hitler and his Nazi gang have sown the wind; let them reap the whirlwind."[11] In their conquests the Nazi air force had deliberately carried out "hideous massacres" in Warsaw, Rotterdam, Belgrade, and London; now, in the rising Allied bomber offensive against Germany, Churchill saw that "there is a strange, stern justice in the long swing of events."[12] Three of these four cities had already been savaged from the air when the R.A.F. first directed an area attack at a German population center, Mannheim, in December 1940.

If the innate justice of the cause allowed him broad rights, there was a second moral argument for strategic bombing: that of "supreme emergency." When a threat meets the dual criteria of imminent danger—and danger of a particularly evil nature—then abnormal measures may be justified in response. This concept, like the other, lies open to willful extension into the absurd; many a self-interested evil act has been justified by appeal to necessity, and war is often accompanied by cries of "Allah wills it," "*Deus vult*," or "*Gott mitt Uns*." But another's abuse of a principle of statesmanship does not invalidate the principle. "The reasonable man" understands that the degree of evil opposed *does* change one's moral calculations: a homeowner merely orders away a party of obnoxious trespassers, but he may use a weapon to halt a forcible entry.

Some of Churchill's most ringing words reflect his judgement, and the demonstrable fact, that if the U-boats continued sinking British ships, especially as France collapsed, the end would indeed be near. Partially dependent upon foreign foodstuffs, England might expire even without a German air offensive or invasion of the island. "Without victory there is no survival," the new prime minister told the House on 13 May 1940. Defeat would doom more than Englishmen: there would be "no

survival for the British Empire, no survival for all that the British Empire has stood for, no survival for the urge and impulse of the ages, that mankind will move forward towards its goal...."[13]

The dangers and evils of an impending "long night of barbarism...unbroken by even a star of hope" could lead one to countenance the most extra-ordinary means of resistance. Indeed, the May 1940 assault upon France and the Low Countries, whose conquest exposed the coasts of England, raised the long-anticipated general alarm. The war cabinet met twice to discuss formally the issues—explicitly including the moral issues—of "carrying the air war into the enemy's country" as opposed to tactical bombing of German troops in France or Belgium. The minutes of the night of 12 May reflect general accord as to the justice of retaliating for all that Germany had already done. Churchill stated the conclusion: "We were no longer to be bound by our previously held scruples" on use of R.A.F. bombers against targets in Germany proper.[14]

Part of the drama in this decision derives from the fact that Germany had not yet unleashed a bomber offensive against Britain. In nine months of war, it had been *other* Europeans who were subjected to the new technique of mass bombing. The cabinet believed this omission was due to German fears of Britain's long-range bombers; now it was Britain that contemplated acts which could bring retaliation. The decision to begin bombing war industries (not populations) on German territory was taken in accordance with previous plans to retaliate in that way for either bombardment of Belgian towns or ground invasion of the Low Countries.[15] The cabinet minutes for these intense days are tantalizingly spare. But Churchill's remarks in these meetings, together with memoranda, directives, and speeches of the time, make it clear that he wished the moral and legal aspect of the decision for strategic bombing to be judged against the backdrop of, first, the imminent peril in which the German aggressor had placed Britain; second, the Germans' "many atrocities," including mass bombing of European cities, deployment of magnetic naval mines and air-dropping of parachute mines, machine-gunning of shipwrecked sailors and merchant seamen, and also the institutionalized outrages against civilians under the "New Order" on the

subdued European continent; and third, the German repudiation of traditional laws of armed conflict, as all the foregoing imply.[16]

While Churchill relied heavily upon the right of reprisal (which is indeed broad during war), and while he often pointed to German breeches of accepted laws-of-war tradition, he said or wrote little that elaborated on the international-law questions raised by British aerial bombing. This may reflect his political position and his practical cast of mind; it may also reflect the ambiguity in the law of war pertaining to such bombing, a matter which had been discussed without resolution in the 1920s and 1930s by senior British officers and officials. These men faced the inherent difficulty of testing any new and untried strategic weapon against old law-of-war traditions. For guidance through these thickets they had little light from the near-empty lamp of the international conference of 1922-1923 at The Hague, where delegates had drafted a ban on air bombardment of undefended population centers but had then failed to win ratification from their respective states. As war burst upon Europe in 1939, American president Franklin Roosevelt made a hasty attempt to fill the legal breach by seeking and winning pledges from France, Britain, and Germany for the mutual avoidance of unrestricted air warfare. But German assent came only in mid-September, when the Luftwaffe had already bombed several dozen Polish towns and was about to begin dive bomber attacks intended to smash Warsaw and force the surrender of the capital and its army garrison.[17]

Even the spectacle in Poland did not break down Britain's own position against unrestrained bombing and in favor of discrimination between military and civilian targets. Churchill and other political and military leaders entered World War II fully cognizant of the "nation at war" idea, which had grown ever stronger since the French Revolution and might have lent logic to a policy of city bombing. Most intended nonetheless to restrict their focus to military targets and war industries. Making what may have been his earliest remarks on bombing policy as a member of the war cabinet, Churchill, the new First Lord of the Admiralty, argued on 14 September 1939 for the "fullest possible use of the offensive power of the air force" in attacks

on "strictly military objectives...vital to [Germany's] prosecution of the war and which, at the same time, were isolated from the civil population."[18]

It was only thereafter, as Britain's prospects darkened and the train of German offenses against mankind lengthened, that the cabinet contemplated broadening the use of the bomber. With the May 1940 Wehrmacht assaults on three western countries, the cabinet undertook the aforementioned debate of the legality and morality of unleashing Bomber Command. But even then, in England's bleakest year in this century, restraints were loosened only by increments and almost always in response to some specific new German action.

British target folders prepared for the abundant war industries of the Ruhr were opened only when Belgium and France were attacked on 10 May. If the aforementioned minutes for 12 May laid down the principle of being no longer bound by "previously held scruples," those of 15 May include a note that what Bomber Command had been authorized to do in Germany was attack "suitable *military* objectives."[19] Only in July, with the disappearance of French power from the map of Europe and with the early stages of Luftwaffe operations over the Channel, did Churchill quietly conclude that there now seemed no route to victory except that offered by a bomber force capable of devastating attacks on the Nazi homeland.[20]

Churchill did not bomb Berlin until German bombs fell for the first time on central London (as opposed to her docks and aerodromes) on 24 August 1940. Then, however, he sent a small air force against the German capital immediately, the very next night.[21] Unable to defeat the R.A.F. and so clear the way for invading England, Germany undertook the September "blitz" against the population of London. The two-month campaign killed 14,000 civilians and seriously wounded another 20,000 during a period when only 300 British soldiers died. It was only after absorbing five weeks of this that Churchill permitted British bombers over Germany to drop their ordnance on any appropriate target if they failed to locate the objective they had been assigned to attack.[22] Churchill was developing an increasing willingness to fight with decreasing discrimination. Another October directive stipulated that large built-up areas in

Germany, rich in military targets, be attacked by bombers striking at night from safe altitudes and with "admittedly no special accuracy."[23] Even so, whatever might have been allowable under the loosened policy, throughout 1940 and 1941 it was German war factories, transport centers, coastal submarine pens and invasion barges, and other evident military targets that were always the principal, and usually the only, R.A.F. objectives.[24]

The Political Motives for Mass Bombing

If the R.A.F. bomber offensive against civil populations came slowly, it did indeed come. An absence of firm legal barriers might arguably permit it; it was of course the vigorous desire for retaliation and the need to take the military offensive which assured that it did in fact occur. Speaking out ever more forcefully, for retaliation, the prime minister had his eye on three vital political audiences.

The first was in Germany, with its fierce *Führer* and his legions of fervent followers. Retaliation, thought Churchill, would teach both that "war is not all loot and triumph," even if Germany *had* been overwhelmingly successful early in the war. In June 1941, as Russia also was attacked, the prime minister promised with perhaps his most brutal words of the war that as British airplane production allowed, ever heavier discharges would "make the German people taste and gulp each month a sharper dose of the miseries they have showered upon mankind."[25]

Why? First because he hoped for a German surrender—if not by the leaders than by an enraged and despairing German nation prodded into revolution by the British bombers bringing the war home to them.[26] This plausible hope proved tragically wrong. Second, Churchill quite correctly calculated that widespread bombing in Germany could do something which limited precise attacks on isolated military targets could not do: deliver a harsh message to every German, a message that Dr. Goebbels' censors could not impede. As the post-war American and British bombing surveys would show, German citizens were astonished and

disillusioned by the ability of Allied bomber formations to transit their airspace. The Nazis hastened to take political countermeasures to offset the psychological damage.[27]

The second political audience impressed by the R.A.F. bomber offensive was the British public. Churchill knew that morale at home required evidence that Her Majesty's government was hitting back. There is an amusing recollection about such wartime psychology that concerns the first use of anti-aircraft guns moved into London to resist the relentless streams of German bombers. After three depressing nights of attacks by bombers, there came on 10 September a great flashing of searchlights and firing of "triple A"; Churchill wrote later that if this "roaring cannonade did not do much harm to the enemy," certainly it "gave enormous satisfaction to the population."[28] The sound, at least, was something; it was more than Britain had had up till then; it was the sound of the British people fighting back.

The R.A.F. alone among the branches of the British military had means of taking the war to the aggressor. If pressure to use it could weigh upon the prime minister in the Smoking Room of the House, it was ten times stronger in the smoking ruins of London streets.[29] A statesman must not be ruled by the public's demands, especially for revenge; yet in a democracy public feeling will have its effects. By mid-1940 Churchill himself favored certain forms of retaliation, for reasons that were similar to but not dependent upon the feelings of the British citizenry. By mid-1941 he would make a speech before the London County Council that was at once amazing in its defiance and suggestive of very modern notions (of which he did not always approve) of "the nation at war": "We ask no favors of the enemy. We seek from him no compunction. On the contrary, if to-night the people of London were asked to cast their vote whether a convention should be entered into to stop the bombing of all cities, the overwhelming majority would cry 'No, we will mete out to the Germans the measure, and more than the measure, that they have meted out to us.'"

For the prime minister it was too late for a second Rooseveltian accord (like that of 1939) with the pioneers of mass bombing from the air. Instead he challenged Berlin: "You do your worst—and we will do our best." Churchill continued, "In the

last few weeks alone we have thrown upon Germany about half the tonnage of bombs thrown by the Germans upon our cities during the whole course of the war. But this is only the beginning.... We live in a terrible epoch of the human story, but we believe there is a broad and sure justice running through its theme."[30]

There was a third political audience which Churchill expected to reach with a bomber offensive: foreign states. The British sought to make it apparent not only that they intended to fight on but that they could hurt the aggressor. Only by raising a banner of effectual military counterattack could the island prevent weaker neutrals from raising the white flag to stop Hitler from destroying them. For Churchill, the opening chapters of the war were filled with plans for, concerns about, and appeals to these neutrals. Americans may tend to think of the war as comprising great American campaigns, but the British are steeped in their own history of coalition wars wherein, by political and moral leadership, they have induced others to help defeat a would-be European hegemon. In this light, few individual battles would be ultimately as important as which allies London won or lost.

The prime minister's most grievous worries included the prospect that Mussolini's Italy would "hurry in to share the loot of civilization." A greater worry was that America would not hurry in to save it; he cultivated her president with personal letters and her people with radio broadcasts. Churchill showed long patience with the Scandinavians, but bitterness thereafter at their ultimate refusal to resist Hitler: "In spite of all their brutality, the Germans are making more headway with the neutrals than we were with all our scruples."[31]

Bombing the enemy homeland was admittedly an unattractive way to appeal to neutral nations. Cabinet discussions showed concern, for example, that British bombing would alienate American public opinion. But continued restraint in the face of Luftwaffe assaults on the European populations could too easily be perceived as weakness, while bombing Germany was at least a powerful way to seize the Allies' imaginations. Churchill's patience with the neutrals was not always equal to his frustrations with them. He once snapped that if the choice between

good and evil were not clear enough for the neutrals, Britain should confront them "with a choice of two evils"—that is, "make them more frightened of us than they were of Germany."[32] More typically, he maintained that Britain required an air offensive which would show all that the British "were not afraid to strike at Germany herself" (as were so many other states). By such "positive or offensive action," Britain hoped to prevent their sliding towards "a patched up peace" with Hitler.[33]

A prominent dimension of this pursuit of allies, and a leitmotif in five years of British discussion of uses for Bomber Command, was the cultivation of Soviet Russia. Once "Operation Barbarossa" thrust Nazi armies into broad swaths of the U.S.S.R. in June 1941, the prime minister had two new reasons for escalating the air war against the German homeland. First, it would have robust operational effects, giving Germany a steady and injurious distraction behind the Eastern fronts. Churchill wrote promptly to Stalin promising R.A.F. bomber attacks on Germany to draw back the Luftwaffe fighters helping the Wehrmacht's advance.[34] Secondly, the air offensive against Germany was a political inducement to the Kremlin. After June 1941, the greatest British fear—after the prospect that America would never enter the war—was that Russia would leave it. Indeed, this had happened only a generation before; in 1917 the Bolsheviks' first significant international act had been conclusion of the Brest-Litovsk treaty by which Russia quit World War I and thereby freed a million German troops for deployment in the West. Now the British government was using war from the air, the only effective weapon it possessed aside from supply convoys, to buy insurance against a second Russian withdrawal from an anti-German coalition. It was a matter of such importance that London was to pay large premiums, pay them willingly, and do so with a timeliness that respected the Red Army's ever-changing ground situation.

Churchill brought an installment when he went to Moscow in August 1942. Discussions of prospects for opening a front in France to relieve pressure in the East had left the interlocutors glum; British and American planners wisely refused to undertake the invasion until they could do so in overwhelming strength. Anglo-American aid shipments to the U.S.S.R. would

continue, but once again, these hardly constituted an offensive weapon. What Churchill had to offer was the R.A.F. Bomber Command, with all its forceful imprecision. In the months leading up to this summit he had pressed his Air Staff to take the offensive to German cities. Berlin, first bombed to retaliate for the first attack on London, was hit more heavily, as were other eastern German centers of industry and population. Now, in conference with Stalin, Churchill presented the newest and most fearsome face of Britain's bombing strategy. He did not talk of seeking out factories while accepting German civilian casualties as collateral damage. "We looked upon [German] morale as a military target," he told the dictator. "We sought no mercy and we would show no mercy." "That was the only way," Stalin replied. Churchill then spoke of shattering twenty more German cities. It is reported that Stalin warmed to his words and finally smiled.[35]

The Operational Realities and the Military Rationale

A final cluster of reasons for Churchill's wartime movement away from the traditional distinction between soldier and civilian, and towards an air strategy devastating to Axis-nation civilians, turns upon a pair of operational realities of this war. First, the bomber offensive was all the prime minister had with which to hit Germany back. Second, this weapon proved to be a brutish club, not the lethal rapier which a statesman would prefer to wield.

So long at peace, so determined to remain so, and then so slow to face the war clouds gathering over Europe, Britain in 1939 found herself without any offensive arm powerful enough to strike her assailant, save the long-range bomber. The army expeditionary force launched into France was swiftly expelled from Dunkirk. The powerful Royal Navy had many roles, but it could not sail into the heart of Germany, and it would be years before it might strangle the body with a blockade. So when France and the Low Countries had collapsed and all England expected an invasion, the prime minister wrote, in the

memorandum quoted above, when "I look round to see how we can win the war I see that there is only one sure path.... We have no continental army which can defeat the German military power. The blockade is broken and Hitler has Asia and probably Africa to draw from. Should he be repulsed here or not try invasion, he will recoil eastward, and we have nothing to stop him. But there is one thing that will bring him back and bring him down, and that is an absolutely devastating, exterminating attack by our very heavy bombers from this country upon the Nazi homeland."[36]

The subsequent chief of Bomber Command, Arthur Harris, would say of this Churchill memo, "It was the origin of the idea of bombing the enemy out of the war.... I should have been proud of it. But it originated with Winston."[37] There is some justice, as well as much defensiveness, in this note. But Churchill, at most, believed only briefly what Harris believed up through 1945, that bombing of cities could win the war. The prime minister's greatest enthusiasm for strategic bombing was as an intermediate stage between the early collapse of so many allies and the growth of renewed prospects for re-invading the Continent from the British base. Even before Harris was given authority over Bomber Command in 1942 (exactly fifty years ago this February), Churchill was warning his staff in writing against overestimating its war-winning capability, calling the bomber "not decisive" but only "a formidable method of injuring the enemy."[38] Most of his references to the bomber offensive in the years 1942-1945 use similar language and describe the purpose as the general weakening of Germany, with increasing reference to the anticipated reentry of Allied armies on the Continent.

But in 1940 "Overlord" was years in the future, while the danger of defeat was tangible; further, Bomber Command's early emphasis on purely military and war-industry targets was failing. Daylight precision raids against German assets taught painfully and quickly the dual lesson that daylight was as advantageous to German fighter pilots as to R.A.F. bombardiers and that the British bombers were relatively under-gunned and under-armored. On a typical mission the R.A.F. Bomber Command would lose ten percent of its attacking force. This was an

intolerable rate of attrition, first because of the expense of producing the machines under the crush of other industrial demands,[39] and second because when a plane went down it took with it a crew of six, each of whom had been trained at an expense equal to putting ten students through three years at Oxford or Cambridge.[40]

It was simply for the purpose of preserving their tautly stretched forces that, very early on, the R.A.F. switched to night attacks. All knew that the change multiplied targeting difficulties and would compound German noncombatant deaths. In daylight, targeting was an inexact science; it now became a good deal like informed guesswork. Even mechanical advances and navigational aides did not at first significantly improve performance. A mid-1941 study of night bombing raids by Professor F.A. Lindemann, Churchill's scientific advisor, reached shocking conclusions: only one-fourth of attacking bombers got within five miles of their German targets. Anti-aircraft fire, when present, further reduced this feeble success ratio. Given that many other planes started but were never able to attack at all, the net result was that one in five planes which took off "got within five miles of the target; i.e. within the 75 square miles surrounding the target."[41]

Thus the Air Staff's careful plotting of war-industry targets and its lengthy debates over priorities—oil, submarine pens, communications, and other competitors for attention—were doing little good. For example, Bomber Command's attention to oil targets in Germany was all but dismissed by one post-war study, which held that if in early 1941 "Bomber Command had...been left free to carry out the oil plan it would probably have done a good deal more damage to its prestige than to its targets."[42]

Precision bombing, the strategy which leaders had hoped would be the most moral (being discriminate) and the most militarily effective, was flatly unworkable. The Royal Air Force was compelled to choose another, apparently less moral and markedly less effective: "area bombing." The rather shaky assumption that the spirit of a nation could be broken by such attacks more easily than could the morale of its army had always had a back seat in British war planning; desperation now brought it forward and made its counsel heard.

There *were* serious arguments offered for placing hope in this approach. Some British felt that their country's morale had been at least bent by German air attacks, which were light in comparison to what Britain now hoped to do. Moreover, a nation like Italy was thought to lack German stamina; bombing might well drive Rome to seek peace. Finally there was the view, sophisticated if not correct, that attacking the workers' houses located near industries would have the greatest moral and material effect. This argument happened to make a virtue out of an embarrassment, the bombing of civilians; nonetheless, it was not spurious. Post-war interviews of Nazi officials show that many thought the German population was in fact very close to total demoralization. Nor was the perception without precedent: Hugh Trenchard, a British Chief of the Air Staff during World War I (and again during the 1920s) had in 1918 seen worker morale as "the most sensitive" target in the German population, and advocated attacks on both industry and the working class.[43] Various English observers of the effects of bombing of Britain in 1940 believed Germany was equally or more vulnerable than Britain.

The Trenchard thesis was revived by scientific advisor F.A. Lindemann. It was the observation of "The Prof" that British workers suffered most from German bombing when their houses were damaged. This produced not only an effect on morale but, more importantly, absenteeism at the war industries. By elaborate calculations Lindemann concluded that if three score of Germany's largest towns, those with 100,000 or more citizens, were flattened, the economic and moral impact would be too great for the Nazi state to bear. So was born what seems today the war's most unseemly euphemism for killing civilians, "worker dehousing." It was indeed a strategy, a strategy for using R.A.F. bombers, at safe altitudes and with the protection of night, against attainable targets. Lindemann wrote that as the unprecedented tonnage of ordnance overwhelmed "built-up areas" of factories and adjacent homes, "there seems little doubt that this would break the spirit of the people."[44] There was always a sense, dangerously like the notion that an end justifies any means, that the more devastating the bombing the earlier might be the end of the war, a development that

would have its own moral rewards. Finally, it was evident that even should the area strategy fail, it could not but do serious damage to the Nazi war infrastructure, as indeed it did.

There was controversy over the proposed strategy but little recorded discussion of its moral dimensions. This may reflect the vagueness of the moral logic of this plan of war, or the reality that both sides had already employed area bombing and thus made the question almost moot, or the national fatigue from war and the overpowering feeling that it must be won and ended. Perhaps all these had their role. The logic *was* questionable; even if it were granted that the German industrial worker was somehow as guilty of Nazi aggression as the soldier, could the same be said of his wife and children, whose numbers so far exceeded his?

On 14 February 1942, undermining "the morale of the enemy civil population and in particular, of the industrial workers" formally became, and would for two years remain, the primary R.A.F. objective.[45] The change suited Lindemann, whose staff already had the credit for proving that R.A.F. precision bombing usually failed. The change especially pleased the new chief of Bomber Command, Marshall Harris, who regarded the usual R.A.F. priorities, military installations and war industries, as limited in potential and distracting from the larger purpose. To Harris there was nothing immoral about a war on industry and population; the war was an engagement between nations, not merely armies. Both Lindemann and Harris were close associates of Winston Churchill, and this bureaucratic reality helped seal the choice of a new direction.

Yet the new strategy was also repeatedly undermined as Churchill, senior military advisors, and foreign allies sought to attend to military targets Harris derided as diversions: submarine pens during the battle of the Atlantic, oil targets and aircraft factories at all times, immediate needs of Soviet ground forces for air support, etc. It was the high command's preparation for the reentry into Europe, and those responsible for it, that finally dragged Bomber Command's attentions away from German urban areas. Land transportation targets in France and Germany became the primary objectives, and these and other more traditional military objectives received the greater emphasis for

the rest of the war. Targeting of built-up areas did not cease, however.

The destruction of that marvel of half-timber medieval architecture, Dresden, took place only as late as February 1945 because of a combination of all the above factors. Dresden was without the explosives factories of a Hamburg, or the submarine engine factories of a Cologne; it had virtually no militarily important industries.[46] It is little wonder that Dresden has become the symbol of the futility of trying to crush the German nation's morale with aerial bombing. Those like Arthur Harris who had most believed before and during the war that the bomber's psychological impact would far outweigh its enormous material impact were wrong, at least with respect to the Germans. But it cannot be denied that one reason, the weakest reason, for fire-bombing Dresden was that it had a place on the list of fifty-eight cities through which "Bomber" Harris was grinding his way. Even in 1945, he was convinced that he was shortening the war.

There were other and more conventional military reasons for destroying the city. Dresden had become the center of German rail and road communications behind the southern half of the Eastern front. Such logistical nodes had long been sought out for emphasis by Allied bombers, and post-war examination by the two bombing survey units would find attacks on land transport targets to be among the most effective of the war. Then there was the most immediate reason for pounding Dresden, one by now a commonplace in the language of Royal Air Force directives: support for Soviet armies.[47] Stalin had pressed for attacks on German cities behind the whole front, and Churchill had promised him the previous autumn that he would "destroy whole cities" which were "advance bases for the [German] Army."[48] In January 1945, the British prime minister asked his Air Staff what "large cities in East Germany" should now be considered "especially attractive targets" for aiding the advance of the Soviet Red Army. Their fateful short list included the name Dresden. Lastly, there was a related tactical purpose, one John Colville calls a principal factor in the decision: an (erroneous) intelligence report from the Soviets that one or possibly two German armored divisions had arrived at Dresden

from Italy on the way to reinforce the Eastern front.[49] Troop and armor transfers from West to East were indeed underway, and their interception was a laudable Allied priority. But it would take a remarkable argument to show that one should pursue this object by burning a town of 600,000 inhabitants, few factories, unnumbered refugees, and Allied prisoners of war.

If blame is due for destruction of this town so late in the war, Churchill could not escape it and probably would not have sought to. Yet the operation left him deeply affected, as his draft memorandum against "terror" bombing shows. Chief of the Air Staff Portal objected to the memorandum, though he himself had wrestled with the strong-minded Harris over priorities, because, he said, it had long been agreed policy to destroy, for *military* reasons, industry and transportation capabilities in the German cities—not to "terrorize." Churchill relented, permitting a redrafting of his memo to emphasize the foolishness of ruining a land for which the Allies would soon be accepting responsibility. Even this milder document served notice on his military staff that the day for mass attacks in the hope of crushing enemy morale had passed, giving way to a new day in which problems of the impending peace were dominant.[50] Enunciated policy did change, though later than one might now wish.

Conclusions

The end-of-war review of the strategic air campaign by the British Bombing Survey Unit makes no mention of Dresden, later the "bloody shirt" waved by critics who thought the strategy a national shame. Nor (and this is not surprising, given the study's empirical purposes) is there any reference to questions of the legitimacy of the strategy used from 1942 which so contravened the customs of war. A sense of national embarrassment about this dark side of a virtuous war may be the explanation for the B.B.S.U.'s silence. Such a sentiment may account for the disdain in which "Bomber" Harris was sometimes later held. Perhaps it even explains the near-silence about area bombing in the six-volume war history by Winston Churchill.[51]

There are other possible explanations. One is the position of scholars like Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, whose immense study of the air war almost dismisses the moral question as a mere abstraction.[52] This, however, is a view repudiated by others. When Mr. Frankland lectured in 1962 before the Royal United Service Institution and turned aside the moral and legal dimensions of the air strategy, a rear admiral challenged this facile dismissal. The editor preparing the discussion for print in the Institution's journal also objected, daring to write of the "bestiality" and "gross inhumanity" of the R.A.F.'s area bombing.[53] This caused a critical stir but also won support, including that of B.H. Liddell Hart, who wrote to deplore the dismissal of moral questions by "so-called 'practical' men" who forget that grand strategy must win not just the war but the peace, and that grand strategy must therefore coincide with morality. In short, seventeen years after the end of World War II, the issue smoldered in these breasts as one demanding intellectual and moral reconsideration.

Churchill's position was not one of silence, and certainly not one of dismissal. One *does* expect more from this prolific maker of arguments and proficient keeper of archives. Since he troubled himself to write a long justification for the American decision to use the atomic bomb against Japan, why is there no equal elaboration of his rationale for area bombing of Germany?[54] The answer to the anomaly can not be "indifference"; the historian Michael Sherry blunders when he writes of the prime minister's growing indifference to the realities of the air campaign.[55] Not only was Churchill one of modern history's most effective micro-managers of military commanders, he was too thoughtful, and too moral, to ignore Bomber Command's deeds. There is a story about Churchill the man: a friend lent him a translation of Aristotle's *Ethics*, recommending it as the greatest of all the world's books. After reading it, or at least from it, Churchill is reported to have said that he thought it very good, "but it is extraordinary how much of it I had thought out for myself."[56]

After a rich lifetime of leadership and reflection upon leadership, the prime minister well knew that statesmanship is not as principled as theology, not as self-interested as the governance

of Bismarck, not as cynical as the commentary of Machiavelli. Statesmanship is instead a judicious combination of ideals and realities; neither may be set aside; both are brought as closely together as possible in the circumstances. For statesmen as great as Churchill, means as well as ends must undergo moral scrutiny.

During much of the war, strategic bombing was a tragic necessity. It probably meets the high standards of statesmanship, and it certainly met the "reasonable man's" standard of what was decently allowable given the blunt weapons and desperate violence of a war Britain saw pressed upon it. During the war Churchill's view of what was allowable to him, as the arbiter of a nation's fate, changed. It did so rationally, along the "sliding scale" which measured the strength and evil of the aggressor and the degree of Britain's peril. In the early war years England undeniably found itself in a "supreme emergency" and took countermeasures slowly increasing in their own extremity. These came grossly to exceed the bounds of customary laws of war, beginning with the "worker dehousing" plan of 1942. Even that plan, however, did not contravene any established international accord and was not instituted before the aggressor repeatedly used area bombing against European population centers, acts which by rights merit harsh reprisals. Until 1942 British countermeasures had usually been only equal to, or even short of, the actions of the enemy, just as Churchill's retaliatory deeds often fell short of the rights he publicly asserted.[57]

The "worker dehousing" campaign was only one part of the bombing strategy but it demanded fully half of Bomber Command's effort and resources. Begun when precise uses of the bomber were proving costly failures, the campaign against the home of the German worker became itself a gigantic failure. That fact might have been recognized by late 1944; instead, the towns campaign continued, if in abated form, virtually to the end of the war. The strongest argument against the means Britain used is not that it was wrong to begin strategic bombing in 1940 or perhaps even area bombing in 1942. (There was indeed, as Churchill several times said publicly, a strange, stern justice in this form of repayment, and Britain had at the time no other realistic options; allowing England to perish would have

been incomparably the larger sin.) The strongest argument against Britain concerns, rather, the *continuation* of area bombing late in the war after Nazi power had been overmatched. Reason and morals alike require of strategists not merely initial choices but occasional reassessment.

At what point did the Allies understand that German defeat had become not merely inevitable but imminent? Was it at the close of 1944, as the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes expended the last German offensive capabilities? Had not the Allied diplomatic corps been obsessed even before with how, rather than whether, Germany was to be occupied? At what point did it seem evident that no amount of smashing German towns and cities from the air seemed to be forcing the surrender of a fanatical leadership? With eighty percent of the urban areas on Harris's list already devastated, how well could it be argued that victory lay in the other twenty, in places like Dresden? Was there not a point, somewhere short of February 1945, when the answers to these questions were sufficiently clear?

Churchill's post-Dresden memo suggests that there was. It may be argued that redirection of the bomber effort, towards targets of immediate military significance such as armies and their supply, taking advantage of significant changes in the environment between 1942 and 1945, would have been practical. The air arm had heretofore been indiscriminate because of the air fleet's technical limitations; now, however, new navigational aids and total air superiority made daylight precision raids effective.[58] Where the air arm had been the only way to hit Germany, Allied armies now stood within reach of German soil on several fronts. Once, the air arm had been the only true offensive method deemed powerful enough to keep the U.S.S.R. in the war; now, the long-awaited Western front was in being and moving confidently forward. The real problem of the moment, to which Churchill was nervously pointing, was not keeping Russia in the war but keeping her from swallowing all of Central Europe. These factors gave Britain growing confidence. The time of "supreme emergency" had long since passed, replaced by expectations of imminent victory.

Perhaps such an argument for a change in bombing strategy was advanced at the dawn of the year 1945, or before. It would

have been a worthy one. If debated, it would have met with these criticisms: first, there had never been any certainty about how much bomb damage Germany could absorb before buckling. To let up at that stage would be to give the enemy new hope. Second, Germany could take heart in the strength of Japan, as yet inviolate in her islands and promising continued and ferocious Axis resistance. Everything must be done to finish the European war because only then could the war in Asia be given its due. Third, holding back on the strategic air war would have allowed Germany to focus her attentions on the ground war, which was still chewing up Allied lives. The Battle of Berlin, not yet begun, was to cost 300,000 Russian casualties. Fourth, the air offensive had tied down (in air defense, public works repair, fire details, etc.) 850,000 able-bodied German males and well over a million others.[59] To make a change in strategy that would loose three-quarters of a million German men into the land armies could put an "impending victory" at risk, and would assuredly defer it for bloody weeks or months. Lastly, a reassessment would have to balance the value of German civilian lives against those of the British. Quite apart from their general suffering in this sixth year of war, the British now were the target of "V" weapons hurtling across the Channel. These seemed to augur not an armistice but a whole new generation of indiscriminate weapons. The rockets, like the death camps moving into high gear on the Continent, were an indication that even as the enemy weakened he was becoming more vicious.

If Dresden and its like are to be remembered so vividly, so too might be indications that it was reasoning men who controlled the air war. They may have been stubborn or wrong; they were neither blind nor wanton. Further, the military men generally remained under political control; Arthur Harris's subordinates knew an iron regimen under him, but Harris himself served only at the pleasure of the prime minister and chiefs of staff, who had responsibility for the strategies used.

Churchill kept a sense of perspective which belies both the odd notion that he ignored the R.A.F.'s bombing damage and the notion that the bomber's use was not just punitive but hateful. Two illustrations have been offered: his position against area bombing at the beginning of the war, and his repudiation

of it when the war's end was close at hand. The prime minister's treatment of occupied "nonbelligerent" populations during 1944 is also illuminating. Bombardment of Italy had been controlled while that country was at war and became yet more restrained when she left it but remained occupied by the German army.[60] Similar political judgement was evident in Churchill's opposition to the massive collateral damage to French civilians expected from an Allied campaign against rail systems in Normandy just prior to "Overlord." On this point he finally yielded to Roosevelt and Eisenhower, who had insisted on the overriding military requirement. Seventy thousand tons of ordnance were in fact dropped on the rails, and there were ten thousand French casualties even in these "precision" raids. On the other hand, the operation was also one of the most militarily important uses of air power in the entire war.

Consideration of the strategic choices made between 1939 and 1945 thus suggests a clear answer to Churchill's question "Are we beasts?" but only rather tentative answers to his subsequent query "Have we gone too far?" They were not beasts, but leaders of an alliance desperate to preserve the world from a bestial hegemon. In fighting beastly enemies they resorted to an abhorrent means, area bombing—something not a few moral philosophers would call *malum in se*, "evil in itself." This choice troubled them, and became only more troubling in the post-war calm. The choice of means would have troubled them less, and many fewer nonbelligerents would have been killed, had they ceased to use it as soon as their superior power permitted.

Notes

1. *The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, Summary Report (European War)*, September 1945, p. 1.

2. Winston S. Churchill, quoted in Martin Gilbert, *The Second World War: A Complete History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1989), p. 441.

3. Both the draft memo and the version which was actually sent may be found in Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany, 1939-1945* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1961), v. 3, pp. 112-113, 117. The second draft—by Air Staff Chief Charles Portal rather than Churchill—shifted the argument away from grounds fraught with moral implications and stressed the practical problem of heavily damaging urban areas for which the Allies would be responsible with the coming victory.

4. Conversation witnessed by Kay Halle, *The Irrepressible Churchill* (Oxford: Facts on File Publications, 1966; reprint ed., 1985), p. 8.

5. Churchill, quoted in Peter Calvocoressi and Guy Wint, *Total War* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972; reprint ed., 1984), p. 491.

6. Churchill in October 1940, quoted in Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), v. 6, *Finest Hour, 1939-1941*, pp. 851-852.

7. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), pp. 242-263. It should be noted that Walzer is not fully persuaded by Churchill's usage of the two principles.

8. Britain retaliated promptly and in a way worthy of note: it decided to bomb the German seaplane base on the isle of Borkum. This plan was canceled when it was discovered that a half dozen civilians lived in the neighborhood of the target (5000 others lived on the island as well). Another seaplane base, on the island of Sylt, was struck instead. Sir Arthur Harris, *Bomber Offensive* (London: Collins, 1947), pp. 37-38; Webster and Frankland, v. 1, p. 140.

9. See the memo of 16 December 1939 quoted by Gilbert in *Finest Hour*, p. 106. Note also Churchill's use of the phrase "supreme emergency." Pages 171 and 190 are of similar interest.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

11. Speech of 30 December 1941, from Charles Eade, ed., *The Unrelenting Struggle: War Speeches by the Right Hon. Winston S. Churchill* (London: Cassell, 1942), see pp. 343-345.

12. Churchill speeches of 30 December 1941 and 21 February 1944. See *The Unrelenting Struggle*, p. 345, and Martin Gilbert,

Winston S. Churchill (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), v. 7, *Road to Victory, 1941-1945*, p. 690.

13. Randolph S. Churchill, ed., *Into Battle: Speeches by the Right Hon. Winston S. Churchill*, 2nd ed. (London: Cassell and Company, 1941), pp. 337, 212. Another Churchillian depiction of the world's stake in Britain's fight may be found in his 22 June 1941 broadcast following the Nazi invasion of Soviet Russia (pp. 176-180).

14. War Cabinet Minutes of 12 May 1940, 10:30 p.m., Confidential Annex ('Most Secret'), microfilm collection of La Mont Library, Harvard University, Boston.

15. On 10 May 1940 the cabinet firmly settled this question of reprisal: attacks on "German oil refineries and marshalling yards" would be the appropriate countermeasure if either of the aforementioned contingencies occurred; either would in the leaders' view be evidence that the Germans had "taken off the gloves." Part of this decision reflected earlier conclusions by the Supreme War Council. Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, p. 310.

16. War Cabinet Minutes of 13 May 1940, 6:30 p.m., include the phrase "many atrocities" in Churchill's summary of arguments for initiating strategic bombing of Germany.

17. Webster and Frankland, v. 1, pp. 134-135; John Keegan, *The Second World War* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 46.

18. Quoted in Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, p. 28.

19. War Cabinet Minutes, 123rd session, 15 May 1940, Confidential Annex. (Emphasis in the original).

20. Minute of 8 July 1940 to Lord Beaverbrook, who held the newly created position of Minister of Aircraft Production; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, pp. 655-656.

21. The German attack has been called "an accident," for instance by Sheldon M. Cohen in *Arms and Judgement: Law, Morality, and the Conduct of War in the Twentieth Century* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), pp. 98-100. But, as he himself adds, on that night the Luftwaffe also bombed other residential areas outside London. Webster and Frankland underscore the fact that the 24 August strike included the British cities of Birmingham, Bristol, South Wales, and Liverpool (v. 1, p. 152). It is therefore wrong to see "the accident," if that is what it was, as a tragedy which began "counter-value" targeting; the Nazis were resolved upon a strategy of attacking population centers.

In his study of *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon*, Michael Sherry implies that the British attack on Berlin on 25 August was unduly escalatory. But to make the argument he omits mention of the German attacks of the previous night on so many British cities. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, p. 93.)

22. Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, p. 776.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 655-656, 850-851.

24. As of 8 July 1941, or exactly one year after Prime Minister Churchill had penned his minute to Lord Beaverbrook about how exterminating attack on the German homeland was probably the only route to victory, the R.A.F. had dropped about 31,000 "short tons" of bombs on German objectives, of which some 7,000 were aimed at population centers. This was about half as much tonnage as Germany had dropped on British population centers. It was in the last four years of war that British bombing was so many times greater than German bombing of Britain. See Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, p. 1136, but especially *The Strategic Air War Against Germany, 1939-1945: Report of the British Bombing Survey Unit*, p. 56. (Making use of research materials available up to mid-1947, and drafted by Solly Zuckerman, this undated report was initially classified "Confidential" and had very limited circulation. The Naval War College library in Newport, R.I., received a copy in 1949 which was declassified in 1973.) See Solly Zuckerman, *From Apes to Warlords* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), p.337, and the B.B.S.U. report itself, pp. xi-xiii.

25. Broadcast of 22 June 1941, *The Unrelenting Struggle*, p. 179.

26. See Churchill's speech of 14 July 1941, and Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, p. 167.

27. The chapter on "Mass Bombing" in Calvocoressi and Wint discusses Nazi countermeasures to political and psychological defeatism caused by Allied bombing, as do the British and American post-war bombing survey reports. But see especially "German Civilian Morale" in the U.S.S.B. *Survey*, pp. 95-99.

28. Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), v. 2, *Their Finest Hour*, p. 343.

29. In March 1940, as First Lord of the Admiralty, Churchill advised the war cabinet that there was a public feeling that "while the Germans used bombs we only dropped leaflets." In the autumn, British domestic intelligence was reporting "increased hatred of Germany" and more demands for reprisal. On 15 October the war cabinet discussed its own fears that people were thinking Britain was not "hitting back hard enough at Germany in our bombing." Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, pp. 192, 844.

30. Churchill speech of 14 July 1941, *The Unrelenting Struggle*, p. 191.

31. Churchill, private letter of 14 March 1940, quoted in Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, p. 190, see also pp. 129-140, 194, 201, 229.

32. Churchill in war cabinet discussions of 10 January 1940, quoted in Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, pp. 128-129. (See also note 9, above.)

33. Churchill, remarks to the cabinet of 9 April 1940, quoted in Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, p. 221. His special concern at this date was the posture of Italy.

34. Promising Stalin on 7 July 1941 that he would use air power to "take some of the strain off you," Churchill instructed his Chief of Air Staff on the same day to use R.A.F. resources for the "devastation of the German cities" to draw Nazi aircraft back off the Eastern front. German armies were only 180 miles from Leningrad, and a German general was noting in his diary, "Führer is firmly determined to level Moscow and Leningrad to the ground, and to dispose fully of their population, which otherwise we shall have to feed during the winter." Quoted in Gilbert, *The Second World War*, pp. 208-209.

35. Minutes of the summit, quoted by Gilbert, *The Road to Victory*, p. 179.

36. See note 20.

37. Conversation between Arthur Harris and Martin Gilbert, 21 October 1982, quoted in Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, p. 656, note 1.

38. Minute of 13 March 1942 from the prime minister to Secretary of State for Air Sir Archibald Sinclair and Chief of Air Staff Sir Charles Portal, quoted in Gilbert, *The Road to Victory*, p. 75.

39. Production was then running twenty-one to thirty-four heavy bombers a week, or roughly as much as the losses. War Cabinet Minutes for 1940, 114th session, 7 May, Confidential Annex.

40. Harris, p. 98.

41. Lindemann's staff's work was assembled by D.M. Butt. Close working relations between Lindemann and the prime minister meant that the study had an immediate impact. Webster and Frankland, v. 4, p. 205.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 215.

43. Keegan, p. 418.

44. Lindemann's minute to the prime minister of 30 March 1942, reproduced in Webster and Frankland, v. 1, pp. 331-332.

45. From Deputy Chief of the Air Staff (Bottomley) to the Acting Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Bomber Command, (Baldwin), quoted in Webster and Frankland, v. 4, p. 144.

The "Casablanca directive" of 21 January 1943, which followed the summit in Morocco and gave joint expression to the Anglo-American air strategy, begins with these words: "Your primary object will be the progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic system, and the undermining of the morale of the German people to a point where their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened." This placed the targeting of civilian morale in a different context and at a lower priority, and reflected the American determination to hold where possible to daylight raids against military targets and war industries. But even though the Casablanca Directive explicitly replaced the 14 February 1942 mission order and went on to list categories of traditional military targets

which were the new priorities, "Bomber" Harris continued deliberately to destroy German urban areas. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

46. While "Bomber" Harris in his memoirs declares Dresden to have been "a large centre of war industry," there is little evidence for this. The target indicator board at Bomber Command headquarters at High Wycombe for early February 1945 listed Dresden under "Area Targets" alone, and not under any other category such as "Naval Targets," "Transportation," "Jet Factories," or "Special Targets." See Max Hastings, *Bomber Command* (New York: The Dial Press, 1979), p. 369. British and American strategic bombing survey teams' summary volumes do not even mention Dresden's supposed war-time productiveness. Michael Sherry calls the war industries there "marginal" and notes that they were not even targeted in the raids. John Terraine says that as a military center it appears to have had "no outstanding significance." *A Time for Courage: The Royal Air Force in the European War, 1939-1945* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), p. 677.

47. For citations other than those already given for an R.A.F. priority for tactical support for the Soviet armies, see for example Gilbert, *The Road to Victory*, p. 1160, or Webster and Frankland, v. 4, p. 13. The Casablanca directive, the most important Allied air directive of the war, orders continued bombardment of Berlin for "specially valuable results unfavorable to the morale of the enemy or favorable to that of Russia." *Ibid.*, p. 154.

48. An October 1944 missive to Stalin from Churchill, quoted in Gilbert, *The Road to Victory*, p. 1024.

49. Colville's note (which does not raise the question of authenticity) on British receipt of the Soviet intelligence report was inserted later in readying his wartime diary for publication as *The Fringes of Power* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985), pp. 562-563, at the entry for 23 February 1945. Calvocoressi and Wint, at p. 534, argue that the report was erroneous and was in fact disputed at the time, but commanders did not have enough evidence to call off the air raid. They write that a transfer of German armor from West to East was indeed the backdrop for the Allied mistake, noting that a panzer division was being moved from the failed Ardennes offensive to Hungary. Other sources, such as the American bombing survey, note the city's importance at that time as a base for the nearby German fighting front.

50. Two weeks later, in mid-April 1945, Portal and Churchill had another exchange when Potsdam was bombed. Having so recently ordered consideration for the state of German cities about to fall into Allied hands, Churchill demanded "What was the point of going and blowing down Potsdam?" Portal had two explanations: hitting German communication centers, and the fact that the German air force

operational headquarters had just been moved from Berlin to Potsdam. Gilbert, *Road to Victory*, p. 1258.

51. My point concerns the moral dimensions of bombing. Churchill's final volume of his history does note that the bomber offensive forced great diversions of resources to air defense, as in tying down seventy percent of the Luftwaffe's fighters in home defense roles. He observes further that strategic bombing played a role in the economic collapse of Germany. Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1953), v. 6, *Triumph & Tragedy*, pp. 540, 542.

52. See Webster and Frankland, v. 2, p. 22, or the report of Frankland's appearance before the Royal United Services Institution in 1962 in *The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* of that year (pp. 94-110).

Frankland wrote to the RUSI editor to protest that he and Webster had not "avoided" the moral questions in their official history, citing the few pages 14-16 in v. 1. Frankland devoted more treatment to the question when, three years later, he published his own book *The Bombing Offensive Against Germany* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), pp. 108-120.

53. *The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, 1962, pp. 1-2, 61-64, 94-110, 153-157.

Noble Frankland's argument, in discussion after the lecture, was that the greatest moral issue is whether or not to go to war. Once war is decided upon, he said, the cheapest and easiest means to victory should be chosen, though these must not include destruction for destruction's sake.

54. Of Truman's decision to use the atom bomb against Japan, Churchill wrote: "I never doubted what it would be, nor have I ever doubted since that he was right." The reasons he gives in favor of using the bomb are: (1) it could end the war; (2) it could end the specter of an invasion with great slaughter on both sides and even mass suicides by Japanese as had happened when the U.S. took Saipan; (3) it was an alternative to the anticipated American air force assault on (more) Japanese cities; (4) the power of the bomb might give the Japanese people the excuse to surrender without dishonor; (5) its use would end the need for Russian help in the Pacific theater. Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, v. 6, pp. 639-641.

55. Sherry, pp. 315-316. Sherry can be rather prejudicial: discussing the decision to bomb Dresden, he ascribes the decision to Churchill, which as we have seen is exactly half true. Then he describes Churchill's motive as terrorism, by twisting the words of the draft memo which Churchill wrote *after* the attack to protest the bombing! (p. 260).

56. A second-hand account reported by Lord Birkenhead in an essay in Martin Gilbert, ed., *Churchill*, part of the Prentice-Hall series "Great Lives Observed." (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967).

57. In the latter years of the war, of course, British bombing killed so many Germans that one can question the "proportionality" which, at least under international law, is supposed to govern reprisals. But I am forced to keep discussion of legal questions all too brief. It is enough for the present to note that Nazis as prominent as Goebbels and Speer recognized that Churchill was right about the "strange, stern justice" in Bomber Command's offensive. After the July 1943 attacks which burned Hamburg, the propaganda minister wrote in a published article that "Our cities have now to stand in 1943 what Britain had to stand in 1940. . . ." The minister of armaments production wrote after the war that "Hamburg had suffered the fate Göring and Hitler had conceived for London in 1940." Dudley Saward, *Victory Denied: The Rise of Air Power and the Defeat of Germany, 1920-1945* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1987), pp. 312-313.

58. Right up through the end of war, bomber crews made some large errors in navigation and targeting. Nonetheless, improvements were great. As early as March 1944, Bomber Command precision raids ordered by Harris's superiors surprised him with their precision and technical virtuosity. What his men could do against French rail marshalling yards in anticipation of the June invasion was quite amazing to him. Obviously, technical and operating conditions were far more amenable to a precision raid campaign than they had been in 1942. For example, as the western armies' advance continued, the utility of the ground they held for guiding R.A.F. bombers to German targets became ever greater. But Harris insisted right up to war's end that city-busting was the path to success. There were thirty-six major operations against German urban areas in the first four months of 1945. Hastings, pp. 276, 337.

59. The figure of 850,000 males of military age is the one used by Dr. Harold W. Rood of the Center for Defense and Strategic Studies, Southwest Missouri State University (telephone conversation of May 1991). The broader statistic of two million men and women tied down by the Allied air offensive is used by John Keegan, chap. 22. The U.S.S.B. *Survey* uses a figure of five million persons "pinned down" by the Allied air offensive in late 1944 in the following ways: defensive construction, bombing casualties, repair work, lost productive time, manning of air defenses, etc. This tally would represent some twenty percent of non-agricultural civilian labor in Germany.

60. Willing to bomb Rome "remorselessly" when it was part of the Axis, Churchill altered the policy when Mussolini was overthrown even though Italy remained under German occupation. When in 1944 the R.A.F. proposed to bomb vehicle convoys taking food into the

capital, the prime minister forbade it, minuting: "It looks as if some stupid and spiteful person of the 4th grade has got hold of this matter." He demanded to know "how starving the city" would achieve any "important military object." Gilbert, *Road to Victory*, p. 761.