

THE BRITISH BOMBER OFFENSIVE  
DURING WORLD WAR TWO.  
Survival vs. Morality

A  
great job

Phillip Weiss  
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...a prince who wishes to maintain the state  
is often forced to do evil....

...the end justifies the means. Let a prince  
therefore aim at conquering and maintaining the  
state, and the means will always be judged  
honorable....

Machiavelli, The Prince

In war, then, let your great object be  
victory....

Sun Tzu, The Art of War

During the Second World War the British government under the leadership of Winston Churchill favored the policy of aerial bombardment of German cities as one of the means of winning the war and eradicating the Nazi government which was viewed with abhorrence and held in contempt. It was known that by bombing German cities civilians would be killed and injured in significant numbers. Did the British government view this policy as posing an ethical dilemma? Was the morality of bombing civilians ever discussed?

The purpose of this paper will not be to pass judgement on the morality or wisdom of the bomber offensive or to impugn British motives behind their conduct of the war, which the British government under Neville Chamberlain had done all that it could to avoid, but rather to explore whether the British government found any impropriety with a policy, albeit fully justified under the circumstances, which would inevitably cause civilian casualties.

Frightening your enemy is the fundamental and presumably the oldest weapon of war. Starving him - hitting him where it hurts most - cannot be much less old. Mass bombing is the most modern way of trying to destroy both his morale and his economy at one and the same time. Where earlier warriors rushed upon their foes with painted bodies and hideous screams, or poisoned wells or beleaguered towns, their more sophisticated though hardly more civilized successors rained high explosives on factories and homes and set fire to whole cities. Only the techniques and the scale were new.'

Sir Arthur Harris, the Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Air Force Bomber Command during most of World War Two, claimed that there was no international law in the matter of the use of aircraft.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, there was a tacit adoption at the end of the seventeenth century of an unwritten code of restrictions and restraints which were later codified at the conventions of Geneva and the Hague, becoming known as the Rules of Civilized Warfare. The fundamental principle of this code was that hostilities should be restricted to the armed and uniformed forces of the combatants, from which followed the corollary that civilians must be left entirely outside the scope of military operations.<sup>3</sup> The Hague Conventions and Declarations of 1899 and 1907, signed by many nations including Germany and Great Britain, forbade twenty separate acts, including the use of arms which cause unnecessary suffering and the use of projectiles causing useless suffering.<sup>4</sup> Both Conventions also states that the rights of belligerents to adopt means of injuring the enemy is not unlimited and both forbade belligerents to declare that no quarter will be given.<sup>5</sup>

Thus there was a body of law governing the conduct of war which was recognized by many nations, including Great Britain, and this body of law established a certain standard of behavior against which the conduct of nations during war could be measured. However this is not to imply that the British bomber offensive during World War Two violated international law, but rather to point out that an ethical problem could have conceivably been identified in view of the potential conflict between the recognized rules of warfare

and the overriding need to achieve victory through measures dictated exclusively by political and military expediency.

When the war in Europe broke out on September 1, 1939, Great Britain found itself involved in a conflict for which it was militarily ill-prepared to fight. After the outbreak of the war a period then ensued which was called the phoney war. The so-called phoney war was a period in which nothing very warlike happened (except locally, sporadically and briefly), and more than that, in which it was possible for people who were so disposed to go on hoping that nothing very warlike would happen. In April, 1940, Germany invaded Norway; Britain's attempt to force the German out of Norway failed.<sup>6</sup>

The phoney war ended on May 10, 1940, the day Hitler invaded France and the Low Countries.<sup>7</sup> The King of Belgium, Leopold III, requested assistance to thwart the Nazi aggressors. Despite their own problems, both Britain and France responded to Leopold's request and sent forces to aid the Belgium army. On May 28, 1940, King Leopold III unilaterally ordered his army to surrender after eighteen days of fighting.<sup>8</sup> The Germans quickly moved to encircle the allied forces and a complete debacle was narrowly avoided when the British succeeded in evacuating 338,226 men from Dunkirk (one-third of those evacuated were not British).<sup>9</sup> On June 22, 1940, France fell.<sup>10</sup>

After the fall of France, Great Britain was the only country left still fighting the Nazis. Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union had yet entered the war. Hitler had invaded and conquered Poland, Norway, Denmark (which had been invaded along with Norway), the Netherlands, Belgium,

Luxembourg and France. The military situation for the British was bleak. The British army had been forced off the continent. Great Britain was standing alone.

It seemed that the only means left to Britain to get at Germany was by the bomber offensive. On May 11, 1940, the Royal Air Force launched its first attack on industrial areas in Germany.<sup>11</sup> Germany had already invaded France and the Low Countries. On May 14, 1940, the Germans attacked Rotterdam by air. The heart of the city was heavily bombed; great destruction was caused and 980 were killed. Nothing like this had been seen in the war so far.<sup>12</sup> Although the British began the bomber offensive while France was still in the war, and therefore were not yet fighting alone, the Germans were already in a very advantageous position militarily by virtue of their blitzkrieg attack, and with the French collapsing, and the British ground forces being no match for the Germans, the British utilized the only means they had left to continue effectively fighting the war - the air force. But it was the Germans who first used their air force to indiscriminately bomb a large population center.

The British decision to attack large industrial areas was made by the Ministries, by the Chiefs of Staff Committee and by the War Cabinet.<sup>13</sup> The War Cabinet laid down the general lines of the bombing policy after receiving the advice of the Chiefs of Staff. Within the limits of that policy and under the authority of the Secretary of State, the Air Staff, after consulting with other Departments concerned, issued a directive to Bomber Command indicating

on broad lines the targets to be attacked. Subject to any special directions that may have been given, the final decision how and when a particular target would be attacked necessarily rested with the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Bomber Command.<sup>14</sup> The decision to have a bomber offensive was clearly political with the military being responsible for its implementation.

The Nazis were infuriated by Britain's efforts to carry the war to Germany. On May 12, 1940, after the allies had bombed the Krupp works and the Rhine areas, Germany threatened reprisal:

Berlin gives "reprisal warning."

Berlin, May 11(UP) "There is no question of total air war such as the enemy attributes to Germany. But the German Air Force will repay many times every attempt by the enemy to turn this into a total war." (D.N.B. agency)<sup>15</sup>

On May 24, 1940, Adolf Hitler authorized the German Air Force to attack the English home land in the fullest manner, as soon as sufficient forces were available. "This attack will be opened by an annihilating reprisal for English attacks on the Ruhr."<sup>16</sup> On August 1, 1940, Hitler directed that he reserved to himself "...the right to decide on terror attacks as measures of reprisal."<sup>17</sup> On September 4, 1940, Hitler threatened to "...raze cities in reprisal for British bombings."<sup>18</sup>

Listed below are headlines from the New York Times which illustrate the level of viciousness attained during Hitler's furious attempt to pound Britain into submission:

Sunday, September 1, 1940 - "Nazis Pound London in All-Day Raids, Bomb Northwest City for Six Hours; R.A.F. Planes Renew Attack on Berlin."  
"Hundreds of Nazi Planes Participated in the Attacks"

Tuesday, September 3, 1940 - "Nazis Raid Britain in Waves; 42 Shot Down, London Says; R.A.F. Pounds Germany, Italy"

Wednesday, September 4, 1940 - "R.A.F. Repels Raids - Fliers Turn Back Three Drives on London - Reich Perfecting Technique"

Thursday, September 5, 1940 - "Hitler Threatens to Raze Cities in Reprisal for British Bombings; R.A.F. Fires German Forest Plants"

Saturday, September 7, 1940 - "German Planes Raid London All Day; British Bomb Berlin Starting Fires; Carol in Flight; Riots in Rumania"

Sunday, September 8, 1940 - "1,500 Nazi Planes Bomb London; Industry and Services Damaged; R.A.F. Scores Many Hits in Reich"

"All London is Objective"

"4,400,400 Pounds of Bombs Reported Dropped with One Fire From City to Coast"

"Chancellor Hitler yesterday started to try to make good his threat to destroy this capital."

Monday, September 9, 1940 - "Mighty Nazi Air Fleets Again Bomb London; Docks and Plants Hit, Fires Rage, 400 Dead; Goering Directing 'New Phase of the War'"

Tuesday, September 10, 1940 - "Center of London Battered by Heavy Bombs; R.A.F. Wreaks Havoc in 3-Hour Raid on Hamburg; Big Guns Wage Duel Across English Channel"

On March 28, 1941, it was announced that a total of 28,859 civilians had been killed and 40,166 seriously wounded in air raids on Great Britain to date.<sup>19</sup> On June 30, 1943, Prime Minister Winston Churchill reported that more than 40,000 people were killed and more than 120,000 wounded.<sup>20</sup>

However, Hitler failed to accomplish his objective and the Battle of Britain was lost by Germany. After 1942 the German Air Force, apart from local successes, ceased to count in one theatre after another.<sup>21</sup> But Germany did produce at the end of the war special weapons called V weapons, V standing for Vergeltung or retribution.



There were three V weapons. The V 1 was a jet-propelled pilotless aircraft twenty-five feet long with a ceiling of 2,000-3,000 feet, a range of 200-250 miles, a speed of 470 m.p.h. and a one-ton warhead. It cost only 125 British pounds and consumed in flight only 150 gallons of low-grade fuel. *Illustrated?* Beginning in June, 1944, 2,448 of these weapons hit Antwerp, 2,419 London (out of 10,492 aimed at it) and 3,132 hit other parts of England. The V 2 was a rocket. It was fifty feet long and six feet in circumference and carried a one-ton warhead. It rose into the air for fifty to seventy-five miles and could reach a speed of 3,600 m.p.h. Its range was 220 miles. Its motor, controlled from the ground, was cut at the crucial moment, thus setting it on course. It was impossible to intercept and arrived without warning since it travelled faster than sound. The V 2 was therefore a more terrifying weapon than the V 1, but each V 2 cost about 6,000 British pounds, exclusive of research and development costs. Again Antwerp was the chief sufferer, receiving 1,265 hits. London received 517 and other parts of England 537.

The V 3 was a long-range gun. One weapon of this kind - originally there were to be two - was installed at Mimoyecques, near Calais. It had twenty-five barrels, each of them 416 feet long, entirely embedded in limestone and concrete, and the whole weapon was serviced and controlled by an extremely elaborate underground network. Its construction absorbed 1,000 tons of steel. It was to fire one shell on London every twelve seconds, but although the site was well prepared the

components did not start arriving until early in June, 1944. Allied bombing first severed its electricity supply and then scored a direct hit with a heavy bomb. In any case trials in the Baltic had not been completed when the site at Mimoyecques was overrun by the allied armies.

Hitler's plan of attack on England was to fire a salvo of V 1s at dawn and dusk every day with intermediate single launchings every twenty to thirty minutes, but when the attack began on June 12 from fifty-five sites it was a rushed fiasco. On the first day ten V 1s were launched, of which four arrived. Appreciable damage was caused to rail traffic, factories, hospitals and housing, mostly south of the Thames. There was then a pause of three days but in the ensuing two weeks 2,000 were launched. At first spotter aircraft gave warnings but the number of V 1s destroyed was small. Anti-aircraft guns in the London area had to cease fire after the first two days because they were bringing the V 1s down in the city. Batteries were re-deployed along the south coast and, with the help of radar and proximity fuses, gradually succeeded in hitting half and then three quarters of their incoming targets. Some V 1s were destroyed by jet aircraft. The attack on London was suspended in September (Antwerp and Brussels came under fire a few weeks later) but it was followed by the V 2 attack.

The worst aspect of the attack was the number of men, women and children who were blinded by flying glass before they knew that anything had struck. In spite of doctors working round the clock on delicate eye operations many lost their

sight for life. There was also severe material damage, but the firing sites were already threatened and had to be removed as the British armies approached them.

In the first two weeks the V 1s killed 1,600 people, seriously injured another 4,500 and damaged 200,000 houses; the casualty rate in England in June, 1944 was as heavy as it had been in September, 1940, although the weight of attack measured in tons of explosives was much lighter. Over the whole period of the V 1 and V 2 attacks 29,400 houses were completely destroyed in London and over a quarter of a million damaged.<sup>22</sup>

Thus the Germans developed and utilized formidable jet and rocket propelled weapons that rained terror upon the British people. Bombardment of cities was not exclusively a British strategy. While the British were bombing the German homeland, the Germans were bombing the British homeland too. It was total war.

*you could use a better transition*

The British air offensive against Germany entered a new phase which began in March, 1942, with the adoption of the Lindemann Plan by the British War Cabinet.<sup>23</sup> On March 30, 1942, Professor Frederick Lindemann, who was the Principal Scientific Adviser of Winston Churchill, submitted a Minute to the War Cabinet in which he urged that bombing henceforth should be directed against German working-class houses in preference to military objectives, which were much too difficult to hit. He claimed that given a total concentration of effort on the production of aircraft suitable for this work, 50% of all the houses in the cities

and towns in Germany with over 50,000 inhabitants would be destroyed.<sup>24</sup> The British air chiefs had argued that their orders to reduce German industrial production would be more readily achieved if the homes of the workers in the factories were destroyed, and since December, 1940, starting with the raid on Mannheim on December 16, 1940, had on their own initiative been carrying out their orders "...by an easier method than by dropping bombs through the roofs of factories." "Thus the adoption of the Lindemann Plan merely gave express government sanction to tactics which had long been adopted with semi-official approval."<sup>25</sup>

Lindemann's position was strongly contested by other eminent scientists, notably Professors Henry Tizard and P.M.S. Blackett, who alleged (correctly, as it turned out) that expectations were greatly exaggerated and argued for more selective operations such as the war against the U-boats. The policy in action cost the lives of over 55,000 aircrew in Bomber Command - and twice as many in the American air forces in Europe.<sup>26</sup>

Nonetheless the Air Ministry fell in behind the Lindemann paper. The minority view was not only defeated but squashed. Tizard was actually called a defeatist. Strategic bombing, according to the Lindemann policy, was put into action with every effort the country could make.

The bombing survey after the war revealed that Lindemann's estimate had been ten times too high. After the war Tizard said "No one thinks now that it would have been possible to defeat Germany by bombing alone. The actual effort in

manpower and resources that was expended on bombing Germany was greater than the value in manpower of the damage caused."<sup>27</sup>

On November 18, 1942, almost eight months after the adoption of the Lindemann Plan, the British Secretary of State for Air, Archibald Sinclair, submitted an official report to the House of Commons listing all the cities that had been attacked in Germany with the number of times each had been attacked. Listed below are the German cities that were reported to have been attacked at least fifty times:<sup>28</sup>

<u>City</u>	<u>No. of times attacked</u>
Berlin	53
Bremen	101
Cologne	110
Duisberg	55
Dusseldorf	50
Emden	80
Hamburg	93
Hamm	85
Kiel	70
Mannheim	56
Wilhelms haven	69

The Royal Air Force continued to bomb German cities until May, 1945.\* The estimates of the numbers killed and wounded in the air attacks vary. General Hans Rumpf, after careful examination and analysis of all the available evidence, came to the conclusion that in Germany between 1940 and 1945 some 600,000 were killed and 800,000 were wounded in air attacks.<sup>29</sup> Americans put the number of deaths caused by bombing at 305,000.<sup>30</sup>

The effectiveness and morality of the bomber offensive was debated in the House of Commons. Those who favored the bomber offensive asserted that the strategy was a necessary and appropriate military measure that would help defeat the

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enemy. It was known that civilians in Germany were being killed in great numbers, but it was believed that this was an unavoidable by-product of an air offensive against military objectives. Winston Churchill and other members of his government repeatedly denied and discounted allegations that the bomber offensive was a means of reprisal meant to terrorize the German civilian population. The strongest and most vociferous advocate of the bomber offensive was Winston Churchill himself. Churchill made several statements explaining and defending the purpose of the bomber offensive. On October 8, 1940, about two months after Adolf Hitler had publicly threatened to "raze" British cities and while London was being subjected to the Nazi blitz, Churchill made a speech explaining the military goal of the bomber offensive. In his speech Churchill completely dismissed the possibility that bombing could be seen as a means of reprisal, <sup>being</sup> as irrelevant.

The question of reprisals is being discussed in some quarters as if it were a moral issue. What are reprisals? What we are doing now is to batter continuously, with forces which steadily increase in power, each one of those points in Germany which we believe will do the Germans most injury and will most speedily lessen their power to strike at us. Is that a reprisal? It seems to me very like one. At any rate, it is all we have time for now. We should be foolish to shift off those military targets which the skill of our navigators enables us to find with a very great measure of success, to any other targets at the present stage. Although the bombing force that we are able as yet to employ is, as I have told the House on several occasions, much less numerous than that which the enemy disposes, I believe it to be true that we have done a great deal more harm to the war-making capacity of Germany than they have done to us. Do not let us get into a sterile controversy as to what are and what are not reprisals. Our object must be to inflict the maximum harm on the enemy's war-making capacity. That is the only object that we shall pursue.<sup>31</sup>

Winston Churchill clearly was willing to employ whatever means necessary to win the war and bring an end to the death and destruction that the British were suffering themselves.

Churchill reiterated the military goal of the bomber offensive in subsequent statements:

April 23, 1942 - "The war can only be ended through the defeat in Europe of the German armies, or through internal convulsions in Germany produced by the unfavorable course of the war, economic privations and the Allied bomber offensive."<sup>32</sup>

May 10, 1942 - "The British, and presently the American, bombing offensive against Germany will be one of the principal features of this year's world war. Now it is time to use our increasingly superior air strength to strike and continually at the home front in Germany, from which so much evil has leaked out upon the world, and which is the foundation of the whole enormous German invasion of Russia.... Now it is time to bring home to the German people the wickedness of their rulers, by destroying under their very eyes the factories and seaports on which their war effort depends."<sup>33</sup>

June 8, 1943 - "Nothing will turn us from our endeavor and intention to accomplish the complete destruction of our foes by bombs from the air in addition to all other methods."<sup>34</sup>

Churchill's statement of May 10, 1942, is of particular significance because in it Churchill articulates the view that it is militarily appropriate and desirable to use aerial bombardment as a means of undermining the confidence of the German people in their rulers. This view was expressed by other members of the House of Commons as well. On March 4, 1942, criticisms were expressed concerning the apparent inability of bombers to accurately hit targets. However, despite these criticisms



expressions of support for the bombing policy were still forthcoming, citing the effect that the bombing was supposedly having on the morale of the German people. These views were expressed by three Members of Parliament whose names and comments are noted below:

Arthur Duckworth (Conservative Member for Salop, Shrewsbury) - "I believe that in very heavily defended areas accurate bombing of selected targets has become practically an impossibility, and I hope that pilots in the future will not be ordered to risk their lives in making these attempts; the Germans have certainly never done so. That in itself is certainly no condemnation of the bombing policy. There is always to be considered the moral effect...."<sup>35</sup>

George Garro-Jones (Labour Member for Aberdeen, North) - "Now we know that these heavy bombers cannot operate except from extreme altitudes or by night. In the former case they cannot hit their targets. As far as direct hits on specified industrial targets by high-flying aircraft by night are concerned, we might as well send the long distance bombers to the moon.... And now a few words about the moral effect. The moral effect is of immense importance."<sup>36</sup>

Geoffrey Mander (Liberal Member for Wolverhampton, East) - "But we ought to be quite clear what bombing can do and cannot do. At night, and from great heights, it cannot, except by a great stroke of luck, hit small and precise targets, but it can do immense destruction over wide areas and play an essential part in winning the war. Furthermore it can destroy the morale of the people in Germany, it can prevent them sleeping."<sup>37</sup>

The doubts raised concerning the technical capability of bombers to accurately hit targets did not stop Churchill and other members of his government and of the House of Commons from defending the effectiveness and necessity of the bomber offensive. On February 25, 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps, leader of the House of Commons, and a Labour Member of Parliament, stated:

Another question which has been raised by a great number of Members is the question of the policy as to the continued use of heavy bombers and the bombing of Germany. A number of honorable members have questioned whether, in the existing circumstances, the continued devotion of a considerable part of our effort to the building up of this bomber force is the best use that we can make of our resources. It is obviously a matter which is almost impossible to debate in public, but, if I may, I would remind the House that this policy was initiated at a time when we were fighting alone against the combined forces of Germany and Italy and it then seemed that it was the most effective way in which we, acting alone, could take the initiative against the enemy.<sup>38</sup>

Captain Peter Macdonald, a Conservative Member for the Isle of Wight, felt that the ability to precisely bomb targets was not a necessary prerequisite for having a bomber offensive. Captain Macdonald also favored the bombing policy as a means of undermining the morale of the German people. On March 4, 1942, Captain Macdonald stated:

Instead of sending over 300 or 400 planes over Berlin one night...and then leaving it alone for months...it would have been far better to have sent over half-a-dozen planes every night to Berlin. You do not have to have precision targets.... Our bombing operations, even when they were on a small scale, had a very detrimental effect upon the morale of the Germans.<sup>39</sup>

On July 2, 1942, Winston Churchill succinctly stated his views on the effectiveness of the bomber offensive:

I know there is a tendency to deride and disparage the bomber effort against Germany, but I think that is a very great mistake. There is no doubt that the bomber offensive against Germany is the most powerful means we have of carrying on an offensive war against Germany.<sup>40</sup>

Churchill's strong advocacy for the bomber offensive was provided a scientific foundation by Lindemann's projections.

Other Members of Parliament expressed support for the

the bomber offensive in terms that were even more strident than Churchill's. On November 13, 1941, Captain John Profumo, a Conservative Member for Northampton, Kettering, stated:

There are some who say we must not debase ourselves by bombing anything but military objectives. To those I would answer that in my opinion any square inch of land which is occupied by anything, animal or mineral, which is contributing in any way to the German war effort is a legitimate military objective.<sup>41</sup>

Captain Profumo offered a broad definition of what constituted a "legitimate military objective." On March 11, 1942, Lt. Col. Sir Thomas Moore, a Conservative Member for Districts of Ayr Burghs, sought assurance that the bombing of Germany would continue:

Lt. Col. Moore - "I paid a visit to Germany after the war and came across a very intelligent German officer...and one of the things that he repeatedly rubbed in, was that the Germans feared bombing more than anything else.... I was relieved in my mind by the statement of the Secretary of State, when he made it clear, in categorical terms, that the policy of the Air Force was to continue bombing Germany relentlessly."<sup>42</sup>

The response from Captain Harold Balfour, the Joint Undersecretary of State for Air, was:

My hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Ayr Burghs [Sir Thomas Moore] may be assured that we shall go on bombing the Germans.<sup>43</sup>

Even if the actual bombing of cities was tactically of little value, it is clear that that the members of the House of Commons quoted above favored the bomber offensive anyway as a way of taking the war to the enemy and undermining the morale of the enemy's civilian population which was considered a legitimate military objective.

Churchill's conduct of the war had widespread support in

the House of Commons. On July 2, 1942, Churchill put the following question for a vote:

That this house, while paying tribute to the heroism and endurance of the Armed Forces of the Crown in circumstances of extreme difficulty, has no confidence in the central direction of the war.

The House divided: Ayes, 25, Noes, 475.<sup>44</sup>

The support for Churchill was almost unanimous, with 95% of the House expressing confidence in Churchill's direction of the war.

On June 16, 1942, a brief, yet very revealing, debate occurred in which Clement Attlee, the Deputy Prime Minister, and Evelyn Walkden, a Labour Member of the House of Commons for Yorks, West Riding Doncaster, took issue with Richard Stokes, a Labour Member of the House of Commons for Ipswich, who asserted that there was a substantial minority which considered the bomber offensive immoral. The debate went as follows:

Richard Stokes - "Is my right honorable friend aware that there is a substantial minority which considers indiscriminate raiding of this kind highly immoral."

Evelyn Walkden - "Is my right honorable friend aware that the rest of the people of the country admire the Royal Air Force."

Clement Attlee - "My right honorable friend probably more accurately represents the views of these people than the honorable Member for Ipswich."<sup>45</sup>

It would not indeed be correct to say that what was officially termed "the strategic bomber offensive" was carried out to the last day of the war without opposition, protest or misgivings. Questions were asked in Parliament as to the

character of the air offensive. In accordance with the British tradition the Ministers of the Crown, upon whom fell the duty of answering these questions, kept a stiff upper lip and gave clear and emphatic replies.<sup>46</sup>

Nonetheless only a few Members of Parliament expressed opposition to the bomber offensive on moral grounds. Yet these individuals - Richard Stokes, Oliver Simmonds (a National Unionist for Birmingham, Duddeston), Frederick Montague (a Labour Member for Islington, West) and Ivor Thomas (a Labour member for Keighly) - stated views which in some instances prompted members of Churchill's Cabinet to respond. The statements from both those opposing the bomber offensive and those defending it were compelling and substantive in terms of the issues raised.

On May 19, 1942, Richard Stokes questioned the effectiveness of the bombing policy as a means of undermining the morale of the German people:

I question very much the policy...to telling people in this country that they are going to win the war by bombing Germany. I do not believe that for a single moment. I have been through practically every raid in London and to most of the places which have been badly blitzed, and I do not believe for a single moment that you are ever going to destroy the morale of the people by bombing from the air.... One of our more noted strategic critics described strategical bombing the other day as contagious lunacy, and I think there is a good deal in what he said. I question very much whether the losses we incur in the process are worth the material damage which is done.<sup>47</sup>

On November 12, 1942, Ivor Thomas, cited the possibility of Rome being bombed to express his concerns over the morality of bombing non-military targets and how the world would judge

the British people:

The Prime Minister is constantly being asked to bomb Rome. May I briefly give some reasons for my view that that would be a disastrous step?... It would not, in fact, be possible to bomb Rome without violating the neutrality of the Vatican City. Then there are no military objectives in Rome unless we include the railway station as one.... I think it would be extremely unwise to take a step calculated to give such offense to 350,000,000 Catholics. But it is more than a matter of offending Catholic sentiment. There are many of us who, on the morrow of the bombing of Rome, would not feel as proud of the British flag as we do today. It is a question of civilised values. It is no answer to say that the Germans have bombed Canterbury. Even if the Italians had done it, we do not believe in the principle of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.... Such a step, in sum, would bring us no military advantages but would be calculated to bring us into disrepute throughout the world, and it would inflame public opinion against us.<sup>48</sup>

Thomas clearly felt that reprisals were morally inexcusable and in addition were of no military value.

Oliver Simmonds lamented the bombing of enemy countries in a statement he made on November 12, 1942:

...let me not be accused of revelling in carnage. This bombing of enemy countries, just like the bombing of our own land, is a horrible necessity in modern warfare, which nobody wants less than I....<sup>49</sup>

Richard Stokes branded the bombing of Cologne as morally wrong, claiming that no effort was made to limit the targets to military objectives. On November 24, 1942, Stokes quoted a speech he made in June, 1942:

"The bombing of Cologne in my view was morally wrong, as no real effort was made to limit the targets to military objectives...."

Stokes went on to acknowledge the unpopularity of his position, and expressed repugnance over the carnage resulting from bombing:

I know that I hold an unpopular view on this subject [bombing], but women and little children are women and little children to me, wherever they live, and it fills me with absolute nausea to think of the filthy task that many of our young men are being invited to carry out.<sup>50</sup>

The appearance that the bomber offensive was aimed at causing wanton destruction worried Frederick Montague who called for a reaffirmation that the bombing policy was aimed at military objectives and that the bombing was not merely to inflict wanton destruction. On March 11, 1943, Montague said:

.... I do not like the idea of wanton destruction.... I believe that we are maintaining our policy of concentrating upon military objectives, but I think it is important that we should state to the world that there is no departure of policy, that we are not bombing the people of Germany - women and children to use another sentimental phrase - merely for its wanton sake.<sup>51</sup>

In response to Montague's appeal, Captain Harold Balfour, the Joint Undersecretary of State for Air, refused to acknowledge that the British were responsible for the suffering of the German civilian population, but reiterated the military purpose of the bombing policy. On March 11, 1943, Balfour stated:

If in our pursuit of our objective the German civilian population has to suffer, it is not our fault. It is not for us to turn back because of that. The remedy lies in the hands of the German people themselves.... Of course, war is cruel and destructive, and the destruction of property and cities is inevitable, but again, I give the assurance that there is no change in our policy, that our purpose is to destroy Germany's industry, transport and war industry and war potential, and that we are not wantonly bombing women and children for the sake of doing so.<sup>52</sup>

About three weeks after the attack on Dresden, which occurred on February 13, 1945, resulting the deaths of 100,000 to 250,000 persons, another debate took place in the House of Commons concerning the aim of the bombing policy.<sup>53</sup> On March 6, 1945, Richard Stokes quoted a dispatch from the Associated Press reporting that the

"Allied Air Chiefs have made the long-awaited decision to adopt deliberate terror bombings of German populated centres as a ruthless expedient to hasten Hitler's doom...."

Stokes went on to ask if terror bombing was now part of British policy.<sup>54</sup>

The report quoted by Stokes was vehemently denied by Commander Rupert Brabner, the Joint Undersecretary of State for Air. In response to Stokes's comments, Brabner said:

....May I conclude on a note of denial. The hon. Member for Ipswich [Stokes] read to the House a statement from an Associated Press war correspondent at S.H.A.E.F., in which he said that the Allied commanders had adopted a policy of terror bombing. This is absolutely not so.... We are not wasting our bombers or time on purely terror tactics. Our job is to destroy the enemy. That is what we are doing, I hope in an ever increasing and more efficient way. It does not do the hon. Member justice to come to this House and try to suggest that there are a lot of Air Marshals or pilots, or anyone else, sitting in a room, trying to think how many German women and children they can kill.... We are concentrating on war Targets, and we intend to remain concentrated on them until Germany gives up.

The Secretary of State for Air, Archibald Sinclair, also said that the report was not true.<sup>55</sup>

In conclusion, the evidence shows that during World War Two the British government repudiated the use of the Royal



Air Force as an instrument of terror, despite the extremely provocative aerial and rocket onslaught upon the British homeland ordered by Adolf Hitler who had stated publicly and for the record his intent to terrorize the British and annihilate their cities by aerial bombardment. In addition, the record of the debates in the House of Commons show that the British government was not insensitive to the ethical implications or moral considerations relating to the bomber offensive, which indeed was debated, but under the circumstances, the British government's war strategy, which had almost unanimous support in the House, was ultimately determined by the overriding need to achieve victory.

## Appendix I

### HIGHLIGHTS OF THE R.A.F. BOMBER OFFENSIVE AGAINST GERMANY DURING WORLD WAR TWO\*

#### 1940

November 14 - R.A.F. raided Berlin

#### 1941

March 14 - R.A.F. made their heaviest raid on Berlin

March 31 - New bombs of "devastating power" dropped by R.A.F. in raids on Emden, Bremen and Rotterdam

June 12 - Several hundred R.A.F. bombers made "heaviest-ever" raid on the Ruhr

July 10 - Heavy R.A.F. raids on Le Havre, Cherbourg, Cologne and Naples

July 25 - R.A.F. bombed Berlin

August 2 - R.A.F. opened its new bombing offensive on Germany with heavy raids on Berlin, Hamburg and Kiel

August 7 - R.A.F. bombed Krupp works at Essen

August 12 - R.A.F. carried out its most devastating air raids of the war on Germany

September 17 - Berlin had its heaviest raid of the war on the anniversary of the first air blitz on London

September 20 - R.A.F. carried out its greatest daylight attack of the war on Germany and occupied territory

November 7 - R.A.F. planes carried out the heaviest raid of the war on Berlin

#### 1942

April 17 - R.A.F. made a daring daylight raid on Augsburg in southern Germany

May 30 - R.A.F. attacked Cologne with more than 1,000 bombers in the biggest air raid in history

June 1 - R.A.F. made a 1,000 bomber raid on Essen and the Ruhr

June 25 - Another 1,000 bomber raid by the R.A.F. on Germany, with Bremen as the main objective

June 26 - R.A.F. made one of the heaviest raids of the war on Hamburg, dropping 175,000 incendiary bombs in thirty-five minutes as well as 4,000-lb. high explosive bombs

September 17 - Officially revealed that the R.A.F. was now dropping four-ton bombs on Germany

\*From Churchill, Winston, The War Speeches of the Rt Hon Winston S. Churchill (Cassell and Company, Ltd., London), Volumes 1, 2, and 3, 1952

1943

- January 16-17 - R.A.F. made heavy raids on Berlin on two successive nights
- January 30 - R.A.F. Mosquito bombers made two daylight attacks on Berlin
- March 1 - Berlin had its heaviest raid of the war when a large force of R.A.F. bombers dropped many 8,000-lb. and 4,000-lb. bombs
- March 27 - R.A.F. dropped 900 tons of bombs on Berlin - the heaviest raid made so far on the German capital
- March 29 - R.A.F. made a heavy raid on Berlin for the second time in 48 hours
- April 3 - Officially announced that more than 8,000 tons of bombs were dropped on Germany during March
- April 4 - R.A.F. gave Kiel its heaviest raid of the war
- May 4 - R.A.F. dropped 1,500 tons of bombs on Dortmund
- May 12 - R.A.F. carried out the war's heaviest raid, dropping nearly 2,000 tons of bombs on Germany, mainly on Duisburg
- May 16 - R.A.F. struck the most devastating blow of the war at Germany by smashing the walls of the Mohne and Eder dams, causing huge floods to sweep through the Ruhr valley
- May 19 - R.A.F. Mosquitos made a night attack on Berlin without a loss
- May 20 - R.A.F. Mosquitos again bomb Berlin without a loss
- May 23 - R.A.F. dropped more than 2,000 tons of bombs in an hour on Dortmund
- June 2 - In one week 7,500 tons of bombs were dropped on Germany
- July 24 - R.A.F. dropped more than 2,000 tons of bombs on Hamburg
- July 27 - R.A.F. dropped 2,300 tons of bombs on Hamburg in 45 minutes
- July 29 - R.A.F. dropped another 2,300 tons of bombs on Hamburg
- August 2- R.A.F. made another heavy attack on Hamburg and it was estimated that in ten days and nights the city had received as great a tonnage of bombs as London in the whole of the 1940-41 attack
- August 17 - R.A.F. dropped 1,500 tons of bombs on the research center of Peenemunde
- August 19 - R.A.F. continued regular night raids on Berlin
- August 23 - R.A.F. dropped 1,700 tons of bombs on Berlin in 50 minutes
- September 4 - R.A.F. dropped 1,000 tons of bombs on Berlin in 20 minutes

- November 3 - At night the R.A.F. attacked Cologne and Dusseldorf
- November 18 - Berlin and Ludwigshaven were targets of simultaneous night raids in which Bomber Command set up a new record
- November 26 - R.A.F. bombers attacked Berlin for the fifth night in succession
- November 27 - One third of Berlin was reported wrecked as a result of the tremendous raids
- December 20 - Day attacks on Bremen, Innsbruck and Augsburg. Heavy night attacks on Frankfurt
- December 29 - More than 2,000 bombs were dropped on Berlin in a night raid

#### 1944

- January 1 - R.A.F. dropped 1,000 tons of bombs on Berlin in the ninth major assault in six weeks
- January 20 - R.A.F. dropped 2,300 tons of bombs on Berlin, the city's heaviest raid of the war
- February 15 - R.A.F. made its biggest attack so far on Berlin, dropping well over 2,500 tons of bombs in twenty minutes
- February 20 - R.A.F. dropped more than 2,300 tons of bombs on Leipzig
- February 21 - R.A.F. dropped nearly 2,000 tons of bombs on Stuttgart
- February 24 - R.A.F. and U.S. bombers continued day and night attacks on Germany
- March 15 - Heaviest air blow on record was struck at Germany when R.A.F. dropped 3,000 tons of bombs with Stuttgart as the main target
- March 22 - R.A.F. dropped 3,000 tons on Frankfurt
- May 22 - Kiel was bombed
- June 2 - It was announced that during May U.S. air forces in Europe had dropped 63,000 tons of bombs and the R.A.F. 37,000 tons
- September 13 - Nearly 3,000 British and U.S. bombers attacked Germany
- October 7 - Record force of 3,000 British and American heavy bombers raided Germany

#### 1945

- February 26 - Berlin had its biggest daylight air attack of the war
- March 11 - 4,500 tons of bombs were dropped on Essen

FOOTNOTES

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