'WHO DOESN'T HAVE A DOG HUNTS LIKE A CAT' – STRATEGIC PATH SETTING, LEADERSHIP AND THE ETHICS OF BRITISH BOMBING IN WORLD WAR II

First draft of paper (2016), co-written with Keith Grint, and later published in Leadership (SAGE)

Harris's continued preference for area bombing over precision targeting in the last year of the war remains controversial, partly because by this time many senior Allied air commanders thought it less effective and partly for the large number of civilian casualties and destruction this strategy caused in Continental Europe.
Wikipedia entry on Sir Arthur Harris

ABSTRACT

The British area bombing of Germany in World War II (1942-1945) is one of the most widely debated historiographical issues to have emerged from the conflict. This article is based on extant literature and has the express aim to make a contribution to the assessment of this campaign in terms of leadership ethics. The holism that characterizes this text is based on a virtual history methodology. This discussion of British area bombing has mostly been framed in absolute terms, whether the campaign was ethical from start to finish (or not), without paying particular notice to contingencies and changes in context. As Richard Overy makes only too clear in his *Why the Allies Won* (1996), important historical watersheds such as the Battle of Britain, Pearl Harbor or the Battle of Stalingrad are turning points in retrospect only. To contemporaries, however, these events often indicated no more than a moment of respite, followed by a tortuous path, and further trials, the outcomes of which were as yet uncertain. They obscure the considerable efforts that were still necessary to win this war against an elusive, clever and formidable enemy. By reintroducing chronology we come to a conclusion that differs from the absolutist standpoint, namely that the ethicist should pay heed to two distinct periods: a first, from 1942-1944; and a second, in 1944-1945, that saw a resumption of area bombing after the D-Day landings. It will be argued here that the first period corresponds to a context of 'choiceless choice' and that only the second period qualifies as a clear ethical transgression. One feature of the article is its profiling of the British strategic dilemma at the time when the area campaign began in 1942. Precision bombing techniques being extremely poor and fire-bombing bringing considerable devastation to Germany, the British were throwing in the only fully operational weapons system with which they could dent German continental might. As long as the Germans had the capacity to put resources in the way of the bomber fleets, this was a ruthless, but pragmatic course of action. Bombing during this phase qualifies as an example of Machiavellian

virtù, the strategic prowess or flexible disposition necessary to exploit *fortuna* and win a war. Not having pursued area bombing during the first period would have amounted to an inadvertent scaling down of the war effort against Nazi Germany, with all that this entailed. By the time of the second period the contextual underpinnings have shifted: there are now other (and more effective) alternatives to area bombing; expediency is beginning to play a major role in the decision to continue area bombing (but expediency alone does not provide sufficient grounds for arguing a 'dirty hands' case); and the decision is correlated to military blunders and political interference that occurred during the hard slog from Normandy to Berlin.

INTRODUCTION

In the seven decades since the end of the Second World War, the Allied bombing of Germany has continued to stoke the fires of controversy. A host of historians, philosophers and political thinkers has argued that the strategy was unworthy of the fight of the democracies, as it breached important just war standards, such as noncombatant immunity and proportionality (indicatively, Walzer, 1977, 255-262; Garrett, 1996; Walzer, 2004, 33-55; Grayling, 2007; Primoratz, 2010, 113-133). Over the years the criticism has become stronger rather than weaker, as witnessed by the publicity fallout of two books, W.E. Sebald's *On the Natural History of Destruction* (2003) and Jörg Friedrich's *The Fire* (2006*)*. The debate was topped by British military historian John Keegan, who argued that the civilian suffering caused by bombing was such that it brought the Allies dangerously close to descending to the enemy's moral level (Keegan, 1993, 433). This echoed earlier criticisms expressed by the renowned military historian Basil Lidell Hart who found it ironical that the 'defenders of civilization' would adopt such a 'most barbaric and unskilled way' for winning a war (quoted in Middlebrook, 1980, 343-4; see also Garrett, 1996, 207). Meanwhile, other authors, such as Robin Neillands (2001) and Frederick Taylor (2005), have continued to defend strategic bombing as a 'necessary evil' of war. Generally, however, the debate is characterized by an epistemic deadlock of mutually opposing and equally valid notions of utility, necessity or moral principle. Another common feature is the focus on the decisions and actions of a few white men, such as Arthur Harris, the C-in-C of Bomber Command from early 1942, and Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

Such frameworks of analysis do not provide sufficient scope for ethical analysis. This article brings a fresh perspective to the debate by casting the net a bit wider. The starting point is the common falsehood expressed in the above quote, namely that merely the last year of the bombing war is controversial. The entire British policy after the adoption of the area directive in February 1942 remains controversial (and to some extent American policy as well), i.e., subject to opposing, but

valid viewpoints. The critical core of article then addresses the general vagueness that has prevailed around the notion that area bombing in 1942-1944 was less morally reprehensible, and that this first period should be distinguished from the last months of the war. It makes the unique and novel qualifying argument that the first period is a rather compelling case of 'dirty hands' - albeit on a monumental scale (which quotes like the one above obscure rather than shed light on). The article seeks to qualify the dirty hands argument, through the greater contextualization of ethical qualifiers underpinning this assessment. This requires factoring in more closely situational constraints which often allowed little leeway and forced leaders to work from and with them.

By contrast, we will argue that area bombing during the last year of the war (or, to be more precise, the last 8 months) is uncontroversial. It can no longer avail itself of a 'dirty hands' legitimation and therefore has to be rationalized as what, intuitively, many already have come to perceive it: a significant blemish on the noble goal of ridding the world of Axis aggression. This holds despite the fanatical fight-back of the Axis powers in the last year of the war, and will, and should, continue to intrigue historians, ethicists, political theoreticians and practitioners alike.

The article has important implications as regards organizational learning and ethics in an extreme context. The interplay between both has been dealt with by Garrett (1996, 183-209), but this attempt is nevertheless characterized by a certain number of gaps in terms of historical contextualization and considers some important elements in isolation. A more convincing overture was made by Gray (2009), but which is rather short on ethical implications.

I. THE ROAD TO FIRE BOMBING

In the 1930s, the experience of the Zeppelin raids of World War I was still heavily engrained on the British mind. While the material and human damage of these raids was negligible, the psychological impact was all the greater, for they had showcased that in modern wars Britain's insularity no longer guaranteed invulnerability from attack. Public fears were helped along by the assessments of the early theoreticians of airpower who held that massed bomber fleets could level entire cities, generate mass panic and cajole countries into suing for peace. Policy makers were rattled by these alarmist assessments, holding that a deterrent was necessary in order to prevent this type of scenario from becoming reality. Acting as a complement to the policy of appeasement, the purpose of the bomber was to prevent war rather than make it more likely (Ferguson, 2006, 558-559). If push nevertheless came to shove, then the bomber would serve the purpose of sparing ground troops the

ordeal of the trenches and minimizing losses. Destroying the enemy's war waging potential or morale from the air was seen as a way to deal a decisive blow. The idea that it was possible to displace warfare from the frontline to the enemy's territory was one of the flawed lessons learnt from the massive bloodletting of the Great War. It is this *Zeitgeist* that led Britain to develop a sizeable strategic (rather than tactical) bomber force (Overy, 1989). This was based on a division of labour between the French and the British, whereby the former would take on the job of checking German land power, and the latter would chip in with sea power and bombers.

When hostilities commenced in 1939, Britain possessed a weapon whose primary role, to act as a deterrent, was already redundant, and which at the same time could not be deployed as a tactical force. As it would turn out, its strategic role was also limited. Denting enemy capabilities through targeted raids on military objectives and armaments factories turned out to be a utopian goal, as the Butt report of August 1941 would make only too clear: forced into bombing at night almost from the beginning of the conflict, RAF navigation and targeting were inaccurate to the point that less than one-third of deployed aircraft managed to get within 5 miles of their targets (cited in Longmate, 1983, 121); the actual number of bombs dropped onto their targets represented an even smaller proportion. As a matter of fact, about half of all British bombs dropped on South-West Germany between May 1940 and May 1941 fell onto open country (Richards, 1953, 239).

Finally, those few bombers who did get to targets worth bombing were greeted with concentrated fire and suffered unsustainably high attrition rates. Bomber Command in 1941 represented a colossal waste of resources that a country struggling for its very survival could ill afford. Once this was realized, only two options existed: the dissolution of Bomber Command and the reassignment of its resources to the army and navy; or a complete overhaul and change in tack. Resisting this encroachment, several key decision makers, among them Charles Portal, Chief of the Air Staff, and Lord Cherwell, the government scientific advisor, argued that Bomber Command could significantly weaken the enemy, if only moral scruples could be set aside (Probert, 2006, 126, 132; Holmes, 2001, at 9'03''). The key was to invert the advantage that allowed the defender to concentrate his strength around high priority pinpoint targets where an attack could be expected, and to replace this by a general offensive where targeting was unpredictable. This would create destruction on a scale where the defenders' resources were stretched to breaking point. One notable discovery was the fact that fire was more destructive than explosives; especially if the attackers managed to create a firestorm, such as had occurred in London on the night of 29-30 December 1940. The new bombing cocktail would therefore include a high proportion of incendiary devices rather than explosive bombs. Secondly, the bombers would target tightly built-up and highly burnable medieval city centers rather

than the urban sprawl in outlying areas where industrial plant was typically located. In line with the thinking of the 1930s, massed bomber forces would now 'de-house' millions of German industrial workers, thereby precipitating a collapse of morale that would deliver the decisive hammer blow. After a string of British defeats and little prospect of a turn in the tide, Churchill grasped this straw and authorized Harris to try his hand at grinding down the German war machine his own way. If Harris was right and Germany was knocked out of the war by an air campaign, then the need for landing Allied troops in Europe was removed. Otherwise, planning for a land campaign could continue in parallel. The moral obstacle of noncombatant immunity was overruled through the area bombing directive of 14 February 1942, which authorized the deliberate targeting of urban centres. The new bombing strategy was first put into practice in March and April 1942 in two massed night-time raids on the Hanseatic cities of Lübeck and Rostock. During the next two years the attackers elaborated on their technique, through improvements in navigation and target finding and by perfecting their method for causing maximum destruction. The standard bombing technique that evolved saw an initial deployment of blockbusters and other high explosive devices that unroofed houses, shattered windows and water pipes in a wide radius and blew craters into streets. This facilitated the quick spread of fire and prevented civilian protection units and fire brigades from accessing incident sites. In a second step incendiaries were dropped, causing myriads of small fires that would consolidate into larger blazes. Notable British campaigns between 1942 and 1944 involved the first 1,000 bomber raid on Cologne, in May 1942, the battle of the Ruhr in spring 1943, the Hamburg and Kassel firestorms, and the beginning of the sustained battering of Berlin, all in the second half of 1943.

Starting from the same year the US Air Force also picked up precision bombing where the British had left it in 1941 and resumed daylight attacks on industrial targets. These raids at first suffered similar attrition rates as the British had experienced in 1940-41, but the ratio improved in early 1944, when close long-range fighter support became available and the German defense started to show signs of strain. It was this positive experience with US precision bombing that led to the British and American bomber fleets being assigned to duties in preparation and support of Overlord, from April 1944. Overlord provided the Allies with important learning opportunities and lessons, and due to the political need to spare **French civilians**, bombing developed into a more sophisticated tool allowing for improved targeting (Harris, 1947, 266; Garrett, 1996, 152-153; Boog, 2008, 780-81, 799). By summer 1944 the Allies had attained air superiority and both the American and the British air forces were capable of striking precision targets when the weather was reasonable, with decreasing attrition rates. In the months that followed they were also deployed against German transport infrastructure, and oil, synthetic rubber and other strategic industries.

II. ARMAGEDDON, SEPTEMBER 1944 – APRIL 1945

Although several major urban centres in Germany, such as Munich or Frankfurt, were incinerated in the first half of 1944, the overall intensity of attacks on German cities dropped during this time. In early 1944 Harris had only reluctantly conceded to redeploying his force to attacks on the German aircraft industry and to support of operation Overlord. Harris and his lieutenants (one of whom, Air Vice Marshal Saundby, objected to Operation Neptune as a "boating expedition", cited in Overy, 2013, 612) considered this a distraction from their real mission – to score a decisive victory from the air that would make a deployment of ground troops unnecessary. During this time Harris lobbied tirelessly for a return of his force to area bombing at the earliest possible time. This materialized in September 1944[1], once the Allied land campaign had achieved its immediate objective, the liberation of France, but then become unhinged on the approach to the Reich's borders. This stalling of the Allied ground offensive presented Harris with the last opportunity to prove that he could end the war from the air after all (Boog, 2008, 782). By this time the bomber force had grown into a well-calibrated weapon that could deal increasingly destructive blows, with smaller numbers of aircraft, and ever greater velocity, accuracy and efficiency. This applied in particular to RAF No. 5 Bomber Group, the elite among British fire-bombers. This unit could typically erase an urban conglomeration in one single nocturnal stroke. The major cities having already been ground to rubble, Bomber Command now systematically 'worked off' a list of middle-sized German cities such as Bonn, Karlsruhe, Brunswick, Konigsberg, Heilbronn or Darmstadt, often invoking that they were located in the future operational zone of the Allied armies or contained valuable transport infrastructure. By the end of the year, Harris ran out of clearly identifiable urban targets 'worthy' of an attack. Yet the Nazi war machine fought on. The heat was therefore turned back on to Berlin, which was to be knocked out by a 'thunderclap'. However, despite taking another heaving pounding from the combined British and American bomber forces on 3 February 1945, the capital refused to buckle. At the same time, Bomber Command was put under political pressure to assist the Russian offensive on the Eastern front, which led to the destruction of Dresden on 13 February 1945 (Groehler, 1990, 400-404, Boog, 2008, 791ff, Overy, 2013, 392ff.). This marked the breaking point of a growing public disenchantment with the last eight months of the war, a period that would see more Allied bombs dropped on Germany than all the previous years together: 75 percent of the total combined tonnage (Overy, 2013, 378). Contrary to popular belief, the climax in British bombing was only reached *after*

[1] By October and November 1944, 60 percent of all Allied bombs were being dropped onto German civilian targets again.

the destruction of Dresden, in March 1945, when the highest monthly tonnage of the entire war, over 67,000 tons, was dropped on Germany (Redding, 2015, 318). Harris was only brought back in line at the end of the month, after several other East German cities, as well as many smaller cities and university towns of no strategic value, such as Pforzheim[2], Hildesheim, Giessen or Würzburg, had received the 'Dresden treatment'. Churchill's now famous minute of 28 March 1945 spelt the end to area bombing. Churchill, no doubt, was aware of the judgment of history and sensed that, in a situation where the end was nigh, continued area bombing could become a genuine blemish on the British war record. It could also be exploited for future propaganda by the Soviets, whose erstwhile enthusiasm for the British thrashing of Germany seemed to have changed after Dresden. As Churchill realized only too well, 'an utterly ruined land' (quoted in Webster and Frankland, 1961, 112) could fall into the lap of Communism like a ripe fruit.

III. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The declared goal of bombing was to precipitate the collapse of Nazi Germany, without the need for a costly land campaign. However, informed observers – such as the strategic bombing surveys after the war - considered bombing a relative failure (Overy, 2013, 398-402; Dyson, ch. 38). A good case in point is the bombing of Dresden, which was not targeted at transport, military and industrial hardware, and left much of this intact (Boog, 2008, 793). Paradoxes such as these add a second stroke to the moral criticism, namely that British strategic bombing had limited material benefits.

The case for morale bombing is even weaker. While considerable scientific effort went into providing Bomber Command with a more effective striking capacity and testing the burnability of German cities, little effort went into subjecting the black box of morale bombing to sound enquiry. In the end the idea that a breakdown in German morale would precipitate a general collapse may have been drawn from a flawed reading of the causes of the Revolution in November 1918. Historical reality, however, was different: it was not revolution that precipitated the military collapse of Imperial Germany, but the exact opposite.

The most important role played by bombing was a political one: to sustain the grand alliance. Bombing offered Stalin tangible proof of Britain's trustworthiness as an ally. Until the Allied reentry to Western Europe it was the only thing that could buy time from Stalin, who was urging the Western

[2] This raid on 23 February 1945 erased 83 percent of the built-up area and killed one-third of the population (17,600), see Boog, 2008, 783.

allies to open a second front at the earliest possible time. When Churchill visited Moscow in 1942, his proposal to wreck Germany was the only thing that found grace in the eyes of Stalin (Overy, 2013, 625). This aspect profiles rather neatly the option of using or not using the rather blunt and cruel tool that was bombing. The situation itself bore some resemblance to the Napoleonic Wars, when Britain made the most of her relative strengths, by financing the coalition wars against France, and only occasionally getting actively involved in European land campaigns (such as in the Peninsular war and at Waterloo).

Bombing also had indirect effects. It was war-winning in the sense that it forced the Germans into a massive redeployment of resources to the home front. These resources were bound up (and often destroyed) in defending the Reich, thereby taking pressure off other theatres of war and generally reducing German fighting capability. Bombing was largely responsible for dry-bleeding the Luftwaffe in 1943-44, 60% of which was repatriated from the East. The actual increase of German armaments production during this time, sometimes cited as proof of the ineffectiveness of the bombing campaign, actually rather confirms the effectiveness of bombing. In fact, bombing placed a 'strict ceiling' on the impressive growth rates of the German war economy; without this the increase would have been even higher (Overy, 1996, 103). On the downside, 'drawing fire' never was the declared intention of the campaign, but an unintended consequence. It was a case of 'moral luck' (Nelkin, 2013), and cannot underpin a moral assessment.

IV. WIDENING THE FRAME OF ANALYSIS

A first conclusion would be that the bottom-line for bombing, on the basis of a utility-focused frame of analysis, is a rather mixed bag and does not provide sufficient scope for an ethical analysis. Equally unsatisfactory is the fact that the debate has tended to rotate around the decisions and actions of a few leaders. This downplays contextual constraints which often allow little leeway and force leaders to work from and with them. Second World War leaders in the democracies were Tolstoyan leaders, i.e. subject to the greater forces of history and endowed with limited autonomy. Accordingly their ethical leadership was often reduced to mitigating negative side effects.

An improved model can base itself on the historiographical work of Fernand Braudel, the best-known of the French *Annales* school historians. In 1949, Braudel published one of the most influential historiographical texts of the 20th century, his three-volume history of the *Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. The baseline of his book is that, at all times, the actions

of individuals, however powerful they may be, are constrained by structural and environmental factors. His first volume therefore starts out with the inalterable long-term environmental conditioning of the Mediterranean space (geography, climate, maritime currents); volume two then turns to man-made socio-economic and political factors characteristic of a mid-term perspective, such as empires, markets, economic cycles and migrations; and the short-term human agency of personalities, battles, treaties and events only figures in the final tome.

1. Geopolitical disposition, structural constraints and strategic capabilities

Bombing was the direct emanation of a wider British strategy of attrition (Grint, 2008, 59). This had clear geopolitical underpinnings. As a maritime power with strong overseas interests, Britain traditionally focused on naval capability, maintaining only a small professional army capable of fighting colonial wars. This was a clear recognition of the strategic focus on Empire, which had no apparent need for a strong land army capable of interfering in European conflict. Resources that had to be split in other countries, which had a need to field large continental armies, could be dedicated to naval power alone, thereby giving Britain the edge she needed to assert her supremacy over the seas.

In case of embroilment in European conflict, Britain sought out continental allies, which she assisted with naval power and finance. Although Britain sometimes ended up in the undesirable position of fighting European land powers on her own (the Napoleonic wars are a good case in point), as a rule Britain never tried to overcome them of on her own, but relied on building coalitions. The same features came to the fore in the 20th century, first during the First World War, when it took the British army three years to develop into the effective force it would later become and, again, after the French debacle of 1940: deprived of the French army, the only force thought to have been able to check German land power, Britain suddenly found herself in a strategic cul-de-sac. As in the Napoleonic precedent, developing a response capable of challenging the full might of the Axis would take years, if not longer. The first three years of the war, when the British army went from defeat to defeat, seemed to bear out precisely this scenario.

The strategy adopted in response to the predicament was strikingly similar to the one adopted in the Coalition wars: drawing another major power, capable of tipping the scales, into the conflict. In the meantime, attrition remained the only option. This strategy revolved around avoiding direct confrontation and focused on wearing down the Germans in ‘sideshows’. This general outlook only changed in 1943, when it was replaced by a strategy of ‘boots on the ground’, entailing a French land

campaign that was to be followed by a march on Berlin (Grint, 2008, 23-43). Until this scenario materialized, bombing was the only Allied option for taking the war to Germany's doorstep. Today, bombing is viewed all the more unfavorably, as D-Day was a success. It helps to engage in virtual history and imagine a scenario to the contrary. Had D-Day failed, then bombing would have remained the default position for the Western Allies to fall back onto, in order to make a contribution to the war effort.

2. Strategic lock-in and organizational history of play

The second level of analysis relates to upstream decisions which pose inalterable wicked problems further down the line. Such a 'path dependency' was set in motion by the decision to dedicate public resources to Bomber Command. This strategic choice of the 1930s led to a lock-in, giving bombing policy a large (and continuous) stake in British resource allocation[3], if for no other reason than the fact that a heavy investment in bombing had already been made (Overy, 2013, 612; Garrett, 1996, 184). Once war arrived, decision-makers used the limited tools at their disposal, only to realize after one-and-a-half years into the conflict that, contrary to prewar assessments, this particular tool was a blunt instrument whose effect stood in no proportion to the investment already made. Although it must have been obvious that the resources dedicated to the bomber fleet would have been better employed elsewhere, a fundamental policy turn-around was unlikely in times of war, not least because ideas of re-affecting Bomber Command resources to other arms would not get past Portal. An additional motive would have been the need to save face and keep up appearances. It is hardly surprising then that the bomber was allowed to continue his trade, albeit using a different operating procedure: he would now be deployed in the only way he might prove relevant, i.e. by wreaking havoc in built-up inner cities.

3. Agency and diachronic time

Bombing policy was the outcrop of the dilemma of pursuing a necessary goal - bringing the war effort against Germany to a successful conclusion - while, at the same time, lacking the appropriate tools to do so. The tension between 'making do' with what one's got (rather than getting the job done with what one would have genuinely needed) forced planners and decision makers into making arbitrages between ethics and effectiveness.

[3] About 40% of wartime military budget went to the RAF, see Garrett, 1996, 170; Overy, 2013, 611; 25 percent of wartime RAF expenditure was allocated to Bomber Command, Boog, 2008, 868.

The dangers of lacking the cold-bloodedness required to overcome an unprincipled and cruel enemy are perfectly encapsulated in Julian Jackson's analysis of the fall of France in June 1940. Jackson has no time for the standard explanation for the downfall of France advanced by generations of historians, according to whom the Third Republic crumbled under the weight of its own degeneration. Instead he cited French scruples (in comparison with the Germans) as the genuine reason for *la debacle*. The lesson is that in circumstances that constitute a threat to survival a spot of ruthlessness is not an ugly stain, but essential (Jackson, 2003, 224-227).

British wartime policy makers had to find a navigable way that integrated multiple equally important objectives: first, to derive maximum efficiency from resources whose path-dependency lock-in cannot be readjusted in times of war; second, a moral obligation to demand unconditional surrender, thereby avoiding the error of 1918, when Germany was 'let off' lightly; and third, another moral obligation, to prevent at least some parts of Europe from falling into Stalin's sphere of influence. These heavy constraints invariably challenge the notion of an absolute moral prohibition on area bombing. A refusal to engage the enemy with the ruthless (and limited) tools the British had at their disposal would have had the inevitable consequence of leaving the job to putting anything in the way of Hitler rest on Soviet shoulders alone. This would have hardly sustained the wartime alliance, and may have even contributed to a Soviet-German diplomatic settlement. Alternatively, the British could have stood by and watched the Soviet being defeated. Both scenarios would have put Britain back to square one, approximately after the defeat of France in 1940. A refusal to engage the Germans on their home front would have also provided the British with no leverage over the future of Europe in the event of a Soviet victory. Finally, in view of the war of annihilation that the Nazis were fighting against the Soviet Union, but also with regard to the prospect of a communized Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals, 'sitting still' would have been an even greater wrong.

If we concede that a certain measure of ruthlessness in line with the dirty hands theorem was legitimate, then we must face a second question: can such a license be absolute? Or is it again subject to limitations? And if yes, which?

The probably most important provisos that emerge from the dirty hands literature (and which guide thought along these lines) pertain to proportionality and timing. We will first turn our attention to the issue of an admissible time-frame that may have legitimized a certain degree of ruthlessness. The first political theorist to have pondered whether there was an ethical window against which British area bombing should be contextualized was Michael Walzer (2004, 33-50). Reconciling his commitment to the inviolability of just war principles with the conviction that the defeat of Britain, and its consequences for civilization, would have been too awful to contemplate, Walzer concedes

Britain a window of supreme emergency in 1940-41. He argues that during this short period, when Britain was fighting for survival, it was legitimate to override the prohibition on the bombing of civilians. This was a first attempt to qualify the adage that 'desperate times call for desperate measures'. It led to Walzer to conclude that British strategic bombing was for the most part inadmissible, as British area bombing only started in earnest in March 1942 (i.e. outside his conceivable 'ethical window') and continued until March 1945, well beyond any supreme emergency. A critique of Walzer's argument will find that the idea of a 1941 cut-off fails to take into account and contextualize the seriousness of the British strategic dilemma. It also suffers from anachronism. The existential threat to Britain certainly did not subside with the ebbing of the Blitz in 1941. A hypothetical German victory over the Soviet Union in 1941 would have renewed the direct threat against Britain. Only the US entry into the war and the successful Soviet counteroffensive, both in December 1941, gave Britain genuine respite. Emergency ethics would therefore justify a somewhat longer 'ethical window', until early 1942. In an article on the bombing of Hiroshima the American political philosopher John Rawls toyed with the battle of Stalingrad as the cut-off point for what he called an 'exemption of extreme crisis' (Rawls, 2006, 637). This again reveals a linear post-facto reading of historical events and the less squeamish will have no issue in following Richard Overy in his argument that the outcome of the war remained uncertain well into 1943, therefore making bombing indispensable even after 1942 (Overy, 1996, 103). Churchill himself confided that the only thing that genuinely 'frightened' him during the war were the supply lines across the Atlantic, which were vulnerable to U-boat attack (Churchill, 1986, 259). Had Germany brought more submarines to bear, the situation may have well become desperate. Without control of the North Atlantic an Allied landing in France was also out of the question, leaving only two equally unpalatable scenarios for the future of Europe: Nazi or Soviet domination. A third scenario only crystallizes with Allied victory in the Battle of the Atlantic, in autumn 1943. Likewise, the liberation of Western Europe by the Allied armies in 1944 should also not be treated as a foregone conclusion. A failure of the Normandy landings was well within the realm of the possible; and by the time a second landing attempt could have been readied, in spring-summer 1945, Stalin's armies may have indeed reached Paris, as Tsar Alexander I had done in 1814[4], and there would have been nothing to liberate anymore. Political theorist Stephen Garrett therefore argues, somewhat imprecisely, a point of no return in spring 1944, after which area bombing loses all 'ethical justification' (Garrett, 1996, 184). Richard Overy supports a similar time-line, qualifying the return to area bombing as a 'natural escalation', based on fears of miracle weapons that might save the Nazis' necks after all (Overy, 2013, 379-382). This focus

[4] Stalin expressed himself in this way at the Potsdam Conference, see Rappaport, 1999, 109.

on motive dodges the genuine heart of the ethical discussion, namely why Harris was allowed to make a full return to city bombing.

V. ASSESSING THE RELAUNCH OF AREA BOMBING

“Then you should say what you mean," the March Hare went on, Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

Traditional analyses have often sought to identify the reasons for the unfettered come-back of area bombing by looking the way of the main *dramatis personae*, such as Harris, Churchill and other members of the Western Allied political and military elite. If character and disposition, most notably that of Harris, was a major contributing factor to the relaunch, it is fallacious to disregard contextual factors. It is to these that we shall turn first.

1. Strategic deadlock

One reason for the intensification (rather than return) of area bombing in late 1944-early 1945 is the simple fact that this was the first winter of the campaign where there was no lull in activity, a point proven by the unprecedentedly long list of cities targeted (Piekalkiewicz,1982, 912-919). This itself was the result of Allied planners having toyed with the idea of a German defeat by Christmas (Overy, 2013, 378), and these hopes not having materialized. Therefore, in a situation where the visibility needed for hitting targets with greater precision is decreasing, the pressure to convert the material advantage in victory is greater than ever. The air war increases in intensity (and inaccuracy). This goes against the grain of a popular misconception which holds that the sophistication of the bomber in 1944 was such that it would have made possible a permanent refocus on more precise bombing (indicatively Garrett, 1996, 177-178). This reveals a linear understanding of bombing capability. In actual fact, the idea that the Allies could have switched to precision bombing needs to be stood on its head: fall 1944 reinforces rather than invalidates Harris‘s stance; ‘area bombing’ in one form or another was inevitable.

Dealing with this argument requires a parenthesis: the Americans began their daylight campaign in earnest in summer 1943 with bombing on sight. This was more dangerous than the British night-time raids and resulted in high attrition rates. At the same it allowed for greater precision when weather conditions were reasonable. On the other hand, American bomber fleets often remained grounded or attacks were aborted because of low visibility. From autumn 1943, however, the Americans

increasingly began to rely on H2X radar. This enabled them to blind bomb through cloud cover, but also decreased accuracy. It is for this reason that over time American 'precision bombing' came to resemble British area bombing (Boog, 2008, 874; Overy, 2013, 346 ff, Groehler, 1990, 351, 388; Fooy, 156ff). Despite this resemblance, however, US and British bombing were not indistinguishable. A measure of precision remained in US bombing, even when it targeted larger areas. The reason for this was that the USAAF never agreed to shift the entire emphasis of an attack[5] from industrial installations to city centres (Boog, 2008, 786; Overy, 2013, 347). Many of the civilian areas touched by American bombing were what contemporary parlance would call 'collateral damage'. An illustrative example of the overall dynamic is offered by the paradoxical fate of the Bavarian city of Regensburg. Hosting the largest Messerschmitt plant and other installations on her outskirts, the city was one of the premier German armaments and aviation sites. For precisely this reason Regensburg (codename: Goldfish) became an American priority target as early as summer 1943, when the USAAF dispatched a daylight force to destroy the Messerschmitt plant. At the end of the war the total bomb drop on Regensburg amounted to over twice the drops on Dresden on 13-15 February 1945.[6] Significantly, however, the targets had been military and economic hardware, while the highly burnable medieval city center was spared and survived the war largely intact. The only raid to have caused damage to the old town, a raid on the oil harbor which also touched other sectors, was also the only RAF attack on the city in the 1942-1945 period (Schmoll, 2015). This raid occurred on 20 April 1945, a few days after Bomber Command has had its knuckles wrapped by Churchill for the second time within one month, after a 'precision' raid on Potsdam on 14 April that had degenerated into yet another area attack (Overy, 2013, 396-397; Boog, 2008, 784). This proves two things: RAF bombing could be more accurate when the emphasis was shifted away from the city centres; and, there were many roads that led to Rome. The relaunch of British area bombing didn't have to adopt the form it did.

As postwar surveys found, a better alternative in the latter phase would have been concentration on oil and transport targets. However, the Allies even allowed for a lull in the bombing of oil targets in late 1944 which baffled Albert Speer, the Reich armaments minister (Groehler, 1990, 357). It is certainly correct that the full effect of the oil and transport offensive could not be gauged at the time, and that the elementary role this had played revealed itself only in hindsight. Overy mentions the factors 'cushion', 'depth' and 'vulnerability' that made targeting the German war economy such a complicated business, and so prone to error (Overy, 2013, 403ff, 614-616). On the other hand, by

[5] With the notable exception of Thunderclap.
[6] 8,000 tons on Regensburg; 3907 tons on Dresden, see Groehler, 422-423; telephone conversation with Peter Schmoll, 17 November 2009.

late 1944 there already was a large consensus in the Allied air staff that Harris's claims were inflated and that the key to victory lay in attacks on bottlenecks such as oil and transport. In January 1945 Portal was already intent on a re-directing British bombing towards oil targets, but was then overruled by political pressure urging the resumption of Thunderclap (Groehler, 1990, 383-388).

It must be appreciated that the defeat of Germany in World War II was a wicked problem that could not know any linear solution or holistic strategy. The way forward was experimental and heuristic, characterized by often improvised trial-and-error. Under these constraints not all assessments would and could be accurate and not all 'learnable lessons' could be expected to be taken on board or learnt. This was always going to be a messy business. Harris himself was right to stress in the beginning of the area campaign that nothing like this had been attempted before, and that, in the absence of alternatives, it was a course worth pursuing (British Pathé, 1942, at 4'18''). That Harris was not outlandish in his initial optimism can be backed up by assessments from leading German armaments officials in the wake of the Hamburg firestorm. These reveal that they were doubtful about how civilian morale would hold up against a sustained campaign; they were equally incapable of anticipating how successful their own decentralization of war production to outlying areas would become.[7] Nevertheless, it is hard to understand how the high stakes in this case could have been missed. By failing to take stock at a critical time, when the bomber could have effectively broken the back of the German war economy, the war was prolonged by several weeks (Garrett, 1996, 179, Hansen, 2008, 246). The final crescendo of destruction during the last six months of the bombing campaign was not merely a matter of human and material waste, but also of a missed golden opportunity.[8] This is made all the more serious as the effect of oil and transport bombing was known through Ultra[9] (Garrett, 1996, 164-165). The Allies demonstrated in several other high-stake contests that they had the capacity to engage in incremental learning and improve on previous performance. This ability is discernible in other cases where Ultra intercepts proved vital. It is equally present in the planning and execution of Overlord (Grint, 2008).

This points to a more profound problem. Allowing Harris to return to his pet project was not the only major Allied mishap in the last eleven months of the war. It is in fact one major symptom of the

[7] On 29 July 1943 Albert Speer, minister for armaments and ammunitions, gave Germany a mere twelve weeks, 'if things continued like this'; on 2 August Field Marshal Erhard Milch, chief of air force procurement and supply, uttered that Germany could merely take another five or six attacks on a comparable scale before being forced to surrender, cited in Boog, 2001, 39-40.

[8] In this perspective Harris' return to city bombing on completion of his SHAEF assignment is a blunder on a scale comparable to the German error during the battle of Britain, when the Luftwaffe switched its emphasis from targeting airfields to bombing London, thereby taking pressure off Fighter Command, which was close to breaking point.

[9] The operation dealing with the cracking of German codes and the exploitation of Enigma intelligence.

difficulties encountered during the Allied assault. It is notorious that while the Allies had a game plan for D-Day, they lacked one for its aftermath. The string of temporary setbacks started in the Norman *bocage*. It continued at Arnhem, at Hürtgenwald, at the Bulge and elsewhere on the approach to the Reich's borders where combat conditions saw momentary returns to World War I style trench warfare. As one author argued, German tactical skill was as instrumental in holding up the Allies as was the latters' 'excessive caution and […] lack of strategic boldness' (Ludewig, 2012). As the Allies battled their way through to the Rhine they increasingly succumbed to a bout of tunnel vision. The Germans exploited every opportunity to encourage this disposition, through their deployment of state-of-the-art fighter jets, tanks, and V weapons. Harris was only too willing to exploit the cognitive gap that resulted from the consternation and exasperation over German bounce-back. If Allied planners let Harris off the leash again, then because he was impossible to rein in; and because they had run out of better ideas. For Harris this was a time to rejoice. The bogging down of the ground offensive seemed to vindicate his point that a land campaign against Germany could not work. From his postwar account we also know that he considered bombing before 1944 as no more than a 'warm-up' (Harris, 1947, 263), and that he now, finally, had full command over the resources considered necessary for delivering the all-out hammer blow (Bogg, 2008, 782, 787).[10]

All this seems to drive home a more general point. 'Good leadership' not merely relates to a simultaneous combination of ethics and effectiveness, but to something more profound: ethics *is* a function of effectiveness, or to put it into other words, a job 'well done' also increases the chance of a 'clean job'. The sections that follow will serve to solidify this point.

2. Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall

2.1. Proportionality, prudence and temperance

Post-war narratives would have been kinder to Harris if the area offensive could have been shown to have been an unavoidable evil necessity of war, the use of which was moderated (and modulated) according to circumstances and technical possibilities, and with a **stronger analytical basis** (rather than being based on amorphous ideas such as 'dehousing' and 'morale').

[10] By October 1944 two-thirds of British bombers had been redeployed to city bombing. In the last three months of 1944 area and transport targets drew 65 percent of RAF bomb drops, oil targets only 14 percent; from January to May 1945 these figures were 50 and 26 percent respectively, see Boog, 2008, 778, 782.

If you dirty your hands, you had better get your maths right; and you need to have something to show for that may justify having dirtied your hands. On this count the verdict of history is relatively unequivocal. It is appreciated that this was a war the Allies could not afford to lose (Rawls, 2006, 637). On the other hand, following the destruction of the major industrial centers, the demise of the Luftwaffe, the slow asphyxiation of oil supply and transport networks, the duress that previously justified a measure of ruthlessness is dissipating. None of this seems to have impressed Bomber Command who continued in the methodical killing of thousands of Germans civilians in perfectly orchestrated attacks of ever growing proportions and with ever lower attrition rates. To put it in other words: if the destruction of Hamburg or Kassel in 1943 can still be rationalized as an 'evil necessity' of total war, the incineration Dresden or Würzburg in 1945 was no longer an accessory to victory and lacks this justification.

While, cumulatively, area bombing certainly made a contribution to Allied victory, by late 1944 the cumulative effects are wearing very thin. Although Harris still argued in November 1944 that the incremental addition of another dozen dead cities to the 45 that had already been incinerated would lead to German collapse (Probert, 2006, 308; Groehler, 1990, 383), the benefits of further attrition against civilian targets could only be marginal. Area bombing was clearly not addressing the fundamentals: it had not demonstrated to have had a critical impact on the ability of the German armed forces to continue to wage war, as they had done again and again in 1944-45. This makes the tedious discussion whether this or that town or city targeted in the latter phase still contained a plant producing for the war effort (an example of this is Taylor's argument on Dresden), or a bridge, a train station, a telephone exchange or a post office irrelevant. The coarseness of targeting policy itself is an admission of defeat; it implies that one does not really know what and where to target: if everything is a potential target then there is no target.

In addition, the meager cumulative gains that could still be obtained have to be offset against the means employed. Especially in the final weeks this relation was practically inverted: the possible windfalls decreased in the same measure as the intensity of the attacks increased. This view is justified when one considers that these final attacks targeted weakly defended and strategically unimportant cities; that they were conducted with relatively small forces often not requiring more than quarter of an hour to incinerate a conglomeration; that they often involved only one strike; and that these single strikes were of such destructive force that they caused five-digit casualties in some of the cities and typical destruction ratios between 70 and 89 percent (Boog, 2008, 778-785). This disproportionate power of destruction is disconnected from the result, final victory, as it is not being directed at the two target categories that presented a correlation to the German ability to continue

to wage effective war, transport and oil. The noticeable dispersion of Allied bombing policy in the last months, for which Bomber Command carried a big responsibility, was criticized by Air Marshal Arthur Tedder, Eisenhower's deputy and a fervent advocate of oil and transport bombing, who called it 'patchwork' (Bogg, 2008, 779; Overy, 2013, 384).

The abyss between 'intended result' and 'means employed' reveals a mix of bulldozer tactics and an amateurish yo-yo approach that is as decoupled from solid fundamentals as it is from creative thinking. The situation called for a subtler approach to the intricate problem of expediting German collapse. Although Richard Overy considers the final phase as a 'natural escalation', even he admits that the US effort was more coherent and guided by a logic one fails to find in Bomber Command. Overy stresses that many of the men drafted into the US air force were professionals or businessmen who thought hard about reducing German economic war potential, and also commends their 'surer strategic grasp and [..] clearer set […] of objectives' (Overy, 2013, 404; 615).

The risks of letting the European conflict drag on well into 1945, which may have resulted in a situation where the Allied populations would no longer sustain the effort, were real enough (Groehler, 1990, 383). At the same time, exasperation, war weariness, combat fatigue or a desire to 'get it over with' are not sufficient reasons for massive and disproportionate violations of elementary rights (Rawls, 2006, 638-640). Ethical permissibility is not guided by the idea that the option that 'suggests itself' or best suits one is also the best overall option. Any assessment must take account of indirect and direct obligations, which apply not merely to one's own, but also to enemy civilians and even combatants (Garrett, 1996, 152; Rawls, 2006, 635-636; Walzer, 1977, 155-175). As one airman suggested, legitimate targeting was determined 'by the range of available alternatives', and 'the amount of destruction must be the minimum compatible with the achievement of the aim' (Frankland, 1965, 113-114, cited in Garrett 1996, 169). Dumping surplus ordnance on cities with no military or economic value, on the basis of mere burnability, or using a tool simply because it was there (Garrett, 1996, 204) hardly makes a convincing case for these responsibilities having been taken seriously in the latter phase. It also did not represent the best use of available resources. Finally, the manifest disconnect between the previous bombing (and killing) as a means to an end, and killing and destruction that, under the mantle of rationality, has become an end in itself, militates against the argument that there were no other feasible and realistic options.

Two images, the 'slippery slope' and the 'sorcerer's apprentice' invariably impress themselves: it was easy for this effort to have degenerated into an indiscriminate campaign, as no limits had ever been sent. Lifting the distinction between combatant and non-combatant and making German civilians fair

game dispatched the British into the grey zone. While this was both evil and necessary, the genuine problem was that the corrective of moral principle (and scruples) seems to have been assigned a permanent back seat. The license to kill that was granted to Harris created an ogre who demanded more and more to remain satisfied. Naturally one can end a war by eliminating the enemy's civilian population, on the way to eliminating the enemy's fighting capacity. However, this no longer qualifies as a war but as a massacre. The general disposition was reinforced by a rhetorical crumble zone that endorsed ambiguity and even practiced deception in order to keep the general public in the dark about what strategic bombing really entailed. It is instructive – and sobering - that when the ethical bankruptcy of area bombing was exposed in March 1945, the corrective was not provided by those military and political decision makers who had known all along, but by the general public. It is unfortunate that Harris did not have it his way in 1943, when he urged the British government to issue a clear statement on area bombing, for the public's consciousness may have been raised earlier to what was being done in their name.

2.2. Hybris and kairos

The same human qualities that allowed Harris to become the resolute and determined leader of a demoralized force in 1942 informed his later tunnel vision and pig-headedness (Chaloux, 2013). His lack of prudence and temperance found expression in his absence of sense of propitious timing (*kairos*): instead of pulling the plug and swallowing his pride after the Battle of Berlin, he responds with more of the same. The disposition is equally visible in his unconstructive approach in engaging with others dedicated to the same goal. If we want to understand Harris' downfall then we need look no further than his bragging that air power could deal the hammer blow and win the war. Already in 1943 he had suggested that he could pull off a German collapse by April 1944, if Bomber Command was given top priority (Garrett, 1996, 171). His later criticism that this scenario failed to realize in spring 1944 because he was not given sufficient resources (Harris, 1947, 263) is contradicted by the fact that when he did have access to ample resources six months later the outcome was fairly similar: Germany was not brought down by air power. Other factors contributing to Harris's unpopularity were his denigration of those urging the targeting of oil, transport and other economic targets as 'panacea' fetishists (what was his strategic thinking if not along the lines of panacea, namely that his command be given top priority among British arms, as it alone could deliver victory?); and his arrogance towards planners of the ground offensive that would finally win the war ("boating expedition").

The reasons for Harris playing a high-stake gamble and overplaying his hand have to be sought in what the social psychology literature variously subsumes under the terms confirmation bias, escalation of commitment and availability heuristic. These afflict organizations which have become an end onto themselves, for which the outcome of their action is a foregone conclusion. Epistemologically, it showcases another crucial link between ethics, on the one hand, and gaining and exploiting relevant knowledge, on the other. Naturally, in a fast-moving technological environment alternative techniques, such as precision bombing with Mosquito bombers, became available. These, however, were not opportune, as they challenged Bomber Command doctrine that precision bombing was pointless, that there was a breaking point in enemy morale, and that the reason why the dam hadn't been breached was that the necessary resources had not been committed (Boog, 2001, 29). In the end, Harris was not really the man for the job, as he was not sufficiently flexible and experimental in his methods (Gray, 2009, 306-307).

During the conflict Bomber Command developed not only a distinct organizational logic and identity, which militated in favour of area offensive doctrine (Dyson, ch. 37), but also political punching power (albeit without the crucial skill of brinkmanship). This brings us to a particularly unpalatable aspect of this whole story, namely that British decision-makers condoned Harris' stance in order to leverage independence vis-à-vis the Americans, who had gone from junior to senior partners in 1943-1944 (Garrett, 1996, 186-190). This implies that Harris was allowed to ignore calls to try his hand at daylight bombing, which, momentarily, allowed him to save face. In the end, however, this pulling of political strings was a Pyrrhus victory, as the RAF lost credibility and was forced to come around to daylight bombing anyway, in the closing weeks of the war (Peloquin, 2006).

2.3. Ethical unsustainability

This criticism is not about wisdom of hindsight, but about phronesis; the leader's ability to gauge his environment or read the writing on the wall. Such ability was in particularly short supply when one considers the ethical unsustainability of area bombing during its final phase. For Harris's expectations about the chances of reconditioning moral attitudes were similarly exaggerated and unrealistic as his ideas about the impact of area bombing.

Harris had always 'walked the talk'. His rhetoric never changed and at least had the advantage of being clear and unambiguous. When Operation Gomorrah got underway Harris stated that the objective was the "destruction" of Hamburg. And new arrivals at Bomber Command were briefed that there job was to 'kill Germans' (Bogg, 2008, 792). This was language that the US air force, although not always a complete stranger to RAF-style area bombing, consciously avoided. By

contrast, in 1943, Harris even asked the British government, unsuccessfully, to 'come out' on the bombing campaign and make an unequivocal declaration that its purpose was death and destruction in industrial cities (Garrett, 1996, 32-33). This was hypocritical, but it was also the only thing that could have been expected ('politics is the art of the possible'). Harris's absence of mindfulness found further expression in the pretense that the final phase of 1944-1945 was 'business as usual'; where blowing to smithereens a country's entire urban culture ('I do not personally regard the whole of the remaining cities of Germany as worth the bones of one British Grenadier', quoted in Saward, 1985, 601) , with little to show for in terms of impact on ground warfare, and refusing to see anything wrong with this, became a simple matter of routine. Getting used to something immoral, simply because you have been doing it for long enough is an idea that could be taken straight out of Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. This objective brutalization of thought and deed is what brings the last months of Bomber Command in dangerous proximity to 'Nazi morality' (as argued by John Keegan).

The new moral standard championed by Harris inhabited spheres that were a long way from just war or even dirty hands ethics. In Britain at least, it was utopian to suppose that this would ever be socially sustainable; it was suffered in the heat of battle, but consigned to the dustbin of history as soon as a return to peacetime standards beckoned.

2.4. Political unsustainability

Harris's 'straight-talking'[11] not only betrayed a lack of interest (and sensitivity) with regard to how intolerable many people would find his way of thinking once the winds of war had subsided, but also political inanity. This feature is also profiled in the context of the Dresden attacks, which proved his undoing.

Over the years the standard explanation for the Thunderclap area attacks on Berlin, Dresden and other cities in Eastern Germany in February-March 1945 has been that these were in support of the Soviet offensive (indicatively, Biddle, 2008). While this explanation is impossible to invalidate, there are just too many other elements to escape a parallel political reading.[12] For one thing, the Soviets

[11] Harris's bluntness was the reason why Portal decided to not take him along to Casablanca, in early 1943, for Anglo-American discussions on the combined air offensive, see Overy, 2013, 303.

[12] Thunderclap took place at the time of the Yalta conference, the only second wartime meeting to reunite the Big Three, from 4-11 February 1945. The Western Allies were only just recovering from the battle of the Bulge and struggling to make their way across Germany's western border, whereas the Soviet army was starting to pile up mileage on its way to Berlin since the beginning of its 12 January offensive. If there ever was a good time for Stalin to make excessive demands (and for the Allies to caution him), then this was it; a further hint to the

never specifically requested these area attacks - although they certainly did nothing to prevent them either (Overy, 2013, 393). That something truly unprecedented was afoot is discernible in the fact that Thunderclap saw the USAAF straying from their self-proclaimed principle of precision bombing and staging their first characterized area attack, on Berlin, on 3 February 1945. Although by this time the idea of the hammer blow was already discredited in military circles, Churchill (who pushed the idea of 'assisting the Soviet offensive') still seems to have toyed with the notion that air power might deliver the *coup de grace* after all. If this came to naught (and the Soviets expedited the Germans on their own), then the bomber would at least secure the Anglo-American claim to the second place on the podium (Groehler, 1990, 385-391; also Biddle, 2008, 427-431).

Had Harris been a smoother operator, he would have sensed this political undergrowth. Instead he squandered his last opportunity to put his campaign on a sounder footing. He would have to pay dearly for this. After the Americans do a U-turn on Thunderclap in the aftermath of Dresden (the series of attacks put a serious question mark over their public claims of being 'precision bombers'), Harris and his men are dropped like a hot potato.[13] The second lease of life given to area bombing, and 'Thunderclap', was just another Pyrrhus victory. What was to follow is in itself a prime example of 'winning one's war' (Harris finally got what he had always wanted, a free hand to turn Germany into a wasteland), but losing the battleground of historical memory.

German civilians were not the only ones to have suffered from the effects of Harris's intransigence. Perhaps even more shattering was the failure in his responsibility to his men, who were deprived of effective cover and shown the cold shoulder. As Connelly (2004) stresses, controversy over the bombing campaign in Britain predated the end of the war and the Bomber campaign was the only British campaign of World War II to have never been awarded a campaign medal. This was a particularly unfair outcome. Flying a bomber into the heart of Germany in World War II took enormous courage and Bomber Command suffered the highest casualty rate of any of the British arms in World War II. The airmen had to undergo decades of critical scrutiny as to what *they* had done during the war, and it was not until 2012 that the over 55,000 men who died serving in Bomber Command also received a national memorial (Boog, 2008, 811-812).

This could have been avoided if Harris had been able to call his a less doctrinaire attitude, a sounder scientific base, a better environmental awareness (including a better ear for reality on the ground),

political rather than military seedbed of the attacks is the rapidity with which Bomber Command went from poster child to virtual disgrace within a few weeks (February-March 1945).

[13] According to Connelly (2004) the negative reaction of the US press was decisive in turning around British opinion; for the media fallout of the Dresden raids, see Boog, 2008, 798, and Overy, 2013, 395.

more political acumen and a clearer grasp of *kairos*, and less of a tendency to become a sorcerer's apprentice (Chaloux, 2013).

2.5. Having it both ways

General Sherman's dictum that 'war is hell', and that therefore 'anything goes' in war ('all's fair in love and war') has been proven to be patently false (Walzer, 1977, 32-33, 230, 264-266; Garrett, 1996, 132-136). According to Mark Grimsley, '(t)hose who wage war routinely seek to justify themselves on moral grounds, something they would hardly bother to do if moral claims did not matter' (Grimsley, 1996, 5). This tendency is also detectable among Harris endorsers seeking an end to the controversy that will see them having their cake and eating it too: they want bombing's contribution to victory recognized, but they also want a clean ethical bill, associated with the wholesome idea that only the necessary was done. Uncomfortable facts, such as the price that was paid to attain the goal (i.e. the violation of important just war principles), the hypothetical presence of unpleasant motives like retaliation or revenge (an 'eye for an eye'; 'let them have it right on the chin'), and the cluelessness and lack of strategic direction engendered by the chaos of battle, are passed under a veil of silence.

However, citing the sacrifice and courage of the men of Bomber Command to claim the moral higher ground will just not do on its own. To attain that goal it is necessary to recognize the clear distinction between the area campaign until 1944, on the one hand, and its final months, on the other. This entails owning up to the fact that the period until 1944 was simultaneously wrong and necessary (dirty hands), but that the excesses of area bombing in the final period (for which there is practically no justification) were simply plain 'wrong'.

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