

# Operational Military Violence

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A Cartography of Bureaucratic Minds and Practices

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### **Abstract**

Western use of military violence is becoming increasingly centralised, partly through the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (or more commonly referred to as “drones” in the literature). Drone technology allows control and command of military operations to be put under one roof, and as military organisations traditionally have a close dependence on technological developments, procedures and regulations for centralised command and control have developed in close concert with advances in drone technology. Apart from technological innovations, there are other aspects that contribute to the growing centralisation of military violence. The increasing military sensitivity about public and media criticism regarding casualties and ‘collateral damage’ underlines the need for Western military organisations to take central control of military missions and the use of violence.

What are the characteristics and consequences of this centralisation and how does it affect military practitioners’ relation to violence? The literature on military violence has slowly become aware that something has happened in Western military organisations’ relations to the use of force and has made some attempts to answer these questions. The tentative (short) answer is that military violence is becoming increasingly bureaucratised in the wake of this centralisation, and its human consequences are lost in bureaucratic routines and procedures. But so far the research on the bureaucratisation of violence has been delimited to investigations of either the theoretical procedures themselves (e.g. analysis of military doctrines), or field studies of drone operators or airmen’s work of ‘dropping bombs’. A major gap in the literature exists as the main organisational function for retaining control and command over violence – the operational level and the staff work performed there – is largely left aside in the research. Of particular interest here is how the work at operational levels of military organisations contributes to a bureaucratic institutionalisation of violence.

This thesis aims to fill some of this gap through ethnographic investigations of operational military work and the training of ‘targeteers’ – staff officers working with the operational governance of military violence. In addition, the thesis also sets the current bureaucratisation of violence in a modern historical perspective, where the nation of Sweden stands as an example of how political incentives for military reformations form the foundation of a bureaucratisation of violence. The results of these investigations illustrate *how* bureaucratisation of violence leaves death and violence aside, and offers detailed insights into how the procedures, routines and the language of bureaucracy form the main points of reference for military practitioners’ view of their work. In addition, the analysis shows how military masculinity is reshaped from traditional warrior ideals to encompass norms of ‘the rational bureaucrat’. What is exceptional in these results is that they open up an otherwise closed off part of military practice and facilitates for public debates about military violence. Particularly regarding the central findings that some military practitioners do not regard violence as an outcome of their work, and that the bureaucratic operational work operates to reduce and even remove the (enemy) Other as a (human) point of reference in contemporary military work.

**Keywords:** military violence, bureaucratisation, operational level, targeting, military masculinity