Proving Grounds of Urbicide: Civil and Urban Perspectives on the Bombing of Capital Cities

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Abstract
In the bombing of urban settlements, the main impacts have been on resident civilians, living space and non-military functions. This is shown in the bombing of London, Berlin and Tokyo in the Second World War, arguably the first and only serious tests of strategic air power and urbicide to determine war outcomes. The history and scope of raiding of these capital cities differed in many ways, but the civilian experience and urban implications were very similar. The bombings attacked the most vulnerable areas, where resident populations found themselves poorly protected at best. The intentions, as well as results, of the raiding are examples of urbicide, planned to kill indiscriminately and destroy all elements of urban existence. Yet, a disarticulation emerges between the political, industrial and war-controlling functions of the capitals, which the bombing was supposed to disable but could not, and the plight of their citizens. The bombing was encouraged as ‘spectacular violence’, even though militarily inconclusive and, in seeking to avoid combat while terrorising non-combatants, it experimented with an approach to armed violence that would prevail after 1945. Despite enormous changes since 1945, the plight of bombed civilians has changed little.

Comments
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Coined by writers on urban development in America, urbicide captures the sense that this widespread and deliberate destruction of buildings is a distinct form of violence. Using Martin Heidegger’s notion of space and Jean-Luc Nancy’s idea of community, Martin Coward outlines a theoretical understanding of the urban condition at stake in such violence. He contends that buildings are targeted because they make possible a plural public space that is contrary to the political aims of ethnic-nationalist regimes. His research focuses on the nexus of identity, violence and territory. Currently, he is investigating the manner in which this nexus is exhibited in the contemporary relationship between city and war. Routledge Advances in International Relations and Global Politics. Review of Urbicide by Martin Coward Urbicide: The Politics of Urban Destruction By Martin Coward Review by Sara Fregonese When confronted with information about the blockade of building materials into Gaza, or the attacks to houses in Osh’s sectarian conflict, it becomes clear how timely this book is. It is so, because it expands the implications of international politics beyond the elite level and populates it with the everyday: bodies, things, but above all: buildings. It remains to see whether the increase of intra-state and urban conflicts around the world coincides with the appearance of an extended and wilful destruction of cities. The nature of this novelty of urbicide is not simple to determine.