

Does the Armed Drone Make Killing Easier? The Ethics of Drone Warfare Explored from a Marxist Perspective

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Abstract: The paper explores the ethics of drone warfare through a Marxist lens, examining its implications within the broader context of capitalist relations. While the US government promotes drones as precise, risk-free tools for targeting terrorists, critics argue that their use perpetuates asymmetrical warfare and dehumanizes the targets, making killing easier. Drawing on Marxist theory, the paper challenges the conventional ethical discourse surrounding drones, arguing that their deployment is intricately linked to the capitalist mode of production and the imperialist ambitions of advanced US imperialism. It contends that drones are not inherently good or bad but rather products of the capitalist system at a certain stage of its historical development, serving the interests of monopoly-financial capital. Several more precise points are delineated in the paper.

Key Words: Drone Warfare, Marx, Terrorism, Militarism, Capitalism

Introduction

With the beginning of the “war on terror,” the US started overt and covert operations, targeting the Muslim-majority countries of Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan, Libya, Somalia (and others). The overall stated goal was the eradication of all terrorist threats. The US began its war on terror by sending small American troops across the Middle East. It also started regularly bombing countries accused of harboring terrorists. Some countries in the Middle East experienced extremely damaging and unending wars (some very damaging wars are in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, and Palestine). The weapon of choice in the counterterrorism missions of the US is the drone. Indeed, since its inception, the war on terrorism has been synonymous with drone warfare.

A “drone” or “unmanned aerial vehicle” (UAV’s) used in warfare is a remotely piloted aircraft used to conduct precise and remote operations, reconnaissance, surveillance, target acquisition, and sometimes even airstrikes. It provides real-time intelligence and can be equipped with various payloads such as cameras, sensors, and weapons. In the context of the war on terror, popular drones used to conduct reconnaissance and surveillance operations are the RQ-4 Global Hawk and the RQ-21 Blackjack. Drones equipped with bombs and missiles are the MQ-1 Predator, the MQ-9 Reaper, and the MQ-1C Gray Eagle. The drone should not be confused with the “smart-bomb,” which is a munition equipped with a guidance system. A smart bomb could be attached to a manned or unmanned aerial vehicle. Offensive armed drones

2 Cultural Logic

were first used in Afghanistan, in 2001. According to Gusterson, the offensive armed drone is the pivotal asset within “drone warfare”:

There are tank drones and submarine drones, for example. But current debates over US policy are focused overwhelmingly on aerial drones, and when people argue about drones, that is what they are presumed to mean, at least first and foremost. Indeed, what people usually mean when they argue about drone policy is even more specific, that is, long-range strategic armed drones or what are more technically referred to as unmanned combat aerial vehicles such as MQ-1 predators and MQ-9 reapers. (Gusterson, 2016, p. 92)

Indeed, the literature on drone warfare since 9/11 focuses particularly on the “armed drone” (such as the Predator or Reaper) as the main constituent of drone warfare, although unarmed drones are also used in drone warfare. The emphasis on armed drones stems from their central role in an ongoing ethical debate about drone warfare, particularly due to the perception that they can kill “autonomously,” without direct human involvement. Unlike traditional weapons, armed drones do not require their operators to be physically near or inside the vehicle.

The US began using armed drones with the start of the war on terror, first in Afghanistan in 2001, soon after 9/11. The MQ-1 Predator drone marked the initial deployment of armed drones in combat by the US military. Armed with Hellfire missiles, these drones were employed chiefly for targeted airstrikes against suspected terrorist elements, encompassing high-value individuals, insurgent leaders, and fortified militant positions (Connor, 2018). Since the war on terror, the official narrative of the US government is that the use of drones allows precise targeting in military operations all while eliminating pilot risks and minimizing civilian casualties (Haulman, 2003). Drones became more prominently used in the war on terror at the start of President Barack Obama’s presidency. According to Purkiss and Serle, “A total of 563 strikes, largely by drones, targeted Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen during Obama’s two terms, compared to 57 strikes under Bush” (Purkiss and Serle, 2017). Obama emphasized in many of his speeches that drone strikes were vital to counterterrorism efforts against individuals affiliated with terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS (Singer, 2013). This official narrative is situated in the broader ideological context of the “Vietnam syndrome” ongoing since the 1980s. After the Vietnam War, a part of the American public expressed their opposition to the military adventures of their government through protests, citing the immense human losses and their lack of trust in the government. Some American politicians also followed the trend, leading to turmoil within the American political superstructure (Herring, 1981). This historical situation, known as the “Vietnam syndrome,” weighs on American politics to this day. Many politicians and authors have voiced their support for the drone since it allows the US government to pursue its “unavoidable wars” all while mitigating the risk of American deaths (Schulzke, 2015).

In recent years, the “terrorist” side has been increasingly employing drones. For example, ISIL established a drone program in Iraq in 2017, enabling it to conduct observation missions and carry out bombing (Warrick, 2017). Additionally, in the Yemen war since 2015, the Houthi rebels have leveraged drones as a key factor in their consolidation of power in northern Yemen, using them effectively against the Saudi-led coalition (Kadri, 2021). Kaag and Kreps (2014) asserted in their 2014 book that a transformation in the dynamics of drone warfare was inevitable due to the widespread acquisition of drones by many countries (p. 147). That

said, the USA remains the global leader in the use of drones, with more than 337,055 bombs and missiles dropped since 2001 (Davies and Benjamin, 2022).

Drone warfare has been criticized frequently in the last two decades. One recurrent theory is that drone warfare is “unethical” in warfare due to its asymmetric nature. The proponents of this theory perceive that drone warfare allows voyeuristic surveillance and removes all death risks for the operators of the drones, which leads those operators to pursue remorseless killing. The issue with this popular theory is its individualistic undertones, which align closely with the dominant ideology of American imperialism. This paper aims to revisit the ethics of drone warfare since 9/11 from a Marxist perspective. Such a perspective does not base ethics on abstract notions of good or bad but on revolutionary proletarian theories that help understand and critique the root of capitalism: global class exploitation.

The main thesis put forward from this perspective, which is ethical (due to the logic of dialectical materialism) and historical (due to the application of historical materialism), is two-fold: the first idea relates to the ethics of drones (specifically armed drones), and the second relates to the historical role of drones. The thesis is that the drone is inherently neither good nor bad; it has a historical essence making it a tool in the class struggle between labor and capital within the advanced stage of American imperialism.

First, the drone is ethically neutral because it is a product of the totality of the relations of production at a certain stage of history. The neutrality of the drone stems from the neutrality of the capitalist mode of production that produces it. Although Marx was critical of capitalism, he saw it as a logical progression from feudalism, which liberated the workers within the economic base from the constraints of religion and rural life. Marx maintained a neutral view of capitalism and history in general due to his scientific method of historical materialism which posits the economic base as the ultimate maker of history, regardless of the historical era or the social conditions imposed by the ideal and repressive power of the superstructure. Based on Marxian ethics, the popular notion that drones make killing easier in warfare is irrelevant. This is because it is not the drone, nor the abstract – fully independent – individual, that kills in warfare, but social beings who are part of an interconnected mode of production. Drones are tools produced by the economic base of society, which encompasses nature, the concrete laborers, their forms of consciousness, the means of production, and the relations of production which are defined by the central “mediation” of history (meaning the relation that dominates all other relations, producing an ensemble of relations of production). Although the capitalist superstructure (comprising the dominant institutions, states, and ideologies of society) gives surreal power to entities such as money and commodities, drones have no meaning or practical purpose outside of the social and material reproduction of the economic base.

Second, considering that the drone is dependent on the historical capitalist relations of production, it becomes a class tool. The central mediation within the economic base under capitalism is alienated labor, meaning total social labor that is fragmented and works against its social interests for the private absorption of surplus value by capital. This mediation is a contradiction that leads to class struggle, which is the driving force of history under capitalism. The drone, as a product of this mediation in the economic base, must be viewed as a historical object that can be utilized either by capital or labor. However, historically, capital has had the upper hand over labor, especially since the fall of the Soviet Union. A more precise historical interpretation of this thesis is that the ongoing drone warfare belongs to a specific stage of capitalism: the stage of advanced US imperialism. This stage is also marked by the structural crisis of capitalist accumulation, which is politically managed through the ideology of

neoliberalism. The drone emerged as the perfect weapon for pursuing unlimited and profitable warfare in the strategically oil-rich Middle East during this era of structural, global, and permanent crisis in capitalism. The advanced stage of US imperialism necessitates destructive production to bridge the gap between production and consumption (and between supply and demand), with the ultimate goal of securing the profits of monopoly-financial capital. Although drones are disproportionately used by US imperialism, they remain class tools in essence, making them tools that can potentially be turned against US imperialism.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first section is an overview of the “critical” literature on drone warfare. The second section presents the overall Marxist framework used to explore the ethics of drone warfare. The third section looks at drone warfare based on Marxian ethics founded on dialectical materialism. Considering that the logic of dialectical materialism was born out of a critique of idealism, several points contradicting the popular critical literature are made, including:

1. The drone is neither good nor bad.
2. The drone was born out of the “totality of the relations” and is defined by both the infinite accumulation of capital and the class struggle between labor and capital.
3. The drone is an inanimate object that cannot facilitate murder on its own.
4. Humans do not have any inherent desire to kill.
5. The distance between the drone user and the targeted person is an illusion.
6. Drone warfare’s “risk-free” incentive leads to nihilism (or worse) in the face of mass murder.

The fourth section assesses drone warfare from a historical perspective based on historical materialism, the Marxist method of analysis. It addresses the historical side of the thesis of the paper which relates to the historically advanced stage of American imperialism. Drone warfare is a “productive” imperialist endeavor that fixes the gap between supply and demand in the historical era of the structural crisis of capital (since the 1970s).

I. The critical literature on drone warfare: “drone warfare facilitates killing”

The literature exploring the ethics of drone warfare from a critical approach is vast. However, one theory is recurring. For the proponents of this one theory, drones are unethical because of the asymmetry of risks they create. The asymmetric nature of drone warfare, which implies a long distance between the drone user and its target, makes it psychologically easier for drone operators to kill. There are different variations of this theory, but the underlying unethical nature of drones is always there.

Dave Grossman’s book *On Killing* (1996) is often cited as evidence that distance facilitates killing. In this book, Grossman delves into the inherent resistance individuals have when taking another person’s life, particularly in close-range combat. Grossman explores the role of military training in overcoming this natural aversion, emphasizing desensitization and conditioning. He introduces the idea that physical distance from the target makes killing psychologically easier, illustrated by a graph correlating the ease of killing with the distance between the killer and the victim. The book also addresses the evolving nature of warfare with technological advancements and their impact on the psychological distance between soldiers and their actions. Additionally, Grossman discusses the aftermath of killing, including the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder among combat-experienced soldiers.

Chamayou, in his book *Drone Theory* (2015), also emphasizes the distance between the drone user and the target. He explains that today's drone warfare can be likened to manhunting because there is a distance between the hunter and the prey, and the hunter has control over their prey's destiny. The goal is killing, not fighting. In drone warfare, as in manhunting, there is a lack of reciprocal vulnerability. However, in drone warfare, because of the long distance between the assailant and the "victim," and because of the moral superiority of the "assailant," it can be difficult to see the executioner/executed dichotomy as seen in manhunting. Chamayou critiques the "humanitarian" idea popular in US political circles, which claims that drones are precise in their targeting (the idea that they do not kill innocent civilians, only terrorists). Due to the lack of direct observation during drone attacks, there is no guarantee that all victims are terrorists. Chamayou argues that direct contact between attackers and victims is ethically preferable to drone warfare because it ensures a higher level of certainty regarding the consequences of the attackers' actions.

In his book *Drone: Remote Control Warfare* (2016), Gusterson begins with an explanation of the evolution of the military drone across history, before examining how drones have "remixed" warfare since 9/11. According to Gusterson, drones "remixed" war on many levels: the ethical level (here, he reprises the idea of Chamayou), the political level (politicians changed their minds about drones), the geographical level (war has become transnational), the psychological level (there is an intimacy between the drone operator and the victim). September 11, 2001, had a pivotal role in this "remixing" of wars, as it was only after 9/11 that American politicians, who had previously opposed the idea of killer drones, changed their stance and began to view them as necessary tools for targeted killings. Gusterson emphasizes the voyeuristic nature of drones. He sees that their users are likely to take pleasure in stalking people for days and then killing them.

Other proponents of this theory are Paul Kahn (2013) and Suzy Killmister (2008). According to Kahn, war hinges on the mutual exposure to risk (of death) between opposing combatants. In the absence of this mutual risk, the combatants without any risk (and with remote weapons systems) lose their moral justification to engage in lethal conflict. Killmister argues that remote weapons systems are inherently unjust due to their imposition of limited options on those at a disadvantage. From her perspective, states facing remote attacks are left with the stark choice of either capitulating or resorting to acts of terrorism.

This idea that drone warfare makes killing easy because of "distance" is recurrent even in NGO reports and in the media. Philip Alston and Hina Shamsi (2010), in a column for *The Guardian*, criticize the "PlayStation mentality" surrounding drone killings, highlighting how young military personnel, raised on video games, now engage in remote killing using joysticks. The International Committee of the Red Cross (2020), in a published report, contends that advanced technologies allowing killing from a distance or on a computer screen bypass neuro-psychological mechanisms that make killing difficult. In a report titled "Convenient Killing: Armed Drones and the 'PlayStation' Mentality" (2010), the Fellowship of Reconciliation, an interfaith Christian organization, asserts that drone operators perceive their targets as mere blips on a screen rather than as human beings. Overall, these critiques suggest that screen-based killing, with its aesthetic resemblance to video games, makes the act appear disturbingly easy, while the geographical distance between the drone operator and the target further lowers the threshold for launching an attack.

The principal concern with this critical theory lies in the adoption of an individualistic perspective that promotes ideas of freedom, personal responsibility and bourgeois property and ontologically revolves around an individual's consciousness: his psychology, emotions, and

personal feelings. Such a perspective ends up giving too much agency to the individual. It also gives surrealist power to the drone since it is considered a determining factor in an individual's real thoughts, practices, and behaviors in times of warfare. Theoretically speaking, in this popular theory, an independently fully conscious individual appears in a theoretical void, encountering and contemplating a strange new object: the drone. Then, only the individual and the drone are the precursors of a chain of events. The drone user feels a psychological stimulus through the use of the drone, making him develop voyeuristic and sadistic feelings in times of warfare. It becomes easy for him to kill. This overall individualist theoretical framework appears like a blank space where spontaneous and atomized subjects, objects, and feelings reign. There is no underlying notion of a capitalist mode of production that socializes beings and fosters social change. The drivers of change appear to be the spontaneous linkages (with psychological roots) between two or more independent entities (including individuals and objects) within an undetermined social system. This individualist perspective does not fundamentally diverge from the official imperialist narrative, which tends to postulate that drone warfare makes war more "just" by limiting the killing of American soldiers and innocent civilians. The imperialist and individualist narrative, which emphasizes personal responsibility and abstract concepts like "freedom," "human rights," and "democracy," is rooted in the idealist philosophies of the Enlightenment. These philosophies, which include an individualist perspective, are marked by the ideological separation of the subject from the object (the environment), implying that subjects are a-social beings.

According to Badiou, Emmanuel Kant perfectly embodies the idealism of the Enlightenment and the prevailing concept of "ethics" in contemporary capitalist society. Kantian thought is rooted in pure idealism, where notions of good and bad hinge on an individual's spontaneous (and a-social) consciousness. In contrast, for Marxism, true ethics are those "truths" that unite people under a concept of the "Same" against the capitalist pursuit of profit (Badiou, 2001). The existing literature lacks an examination of the ethics of drone warfare from a Marxian class perspective, which prioritizes, in the last instance, the material reproduction of life defined by historical and social relations of production, rather than unilateral ideas or concepts without any material grounding.

II. Theoretical framework: dialectical materialism and historical materialism

In Marx's logic of dialectical materialism, social "labor" (equivalent to the totality of the social relations of production) is the central "mediation" (also a "relation," "dialectic" or "contradiction") of history. Everything in society such as humans, their ideas, their institutions, their tools, and nature gains social and practical sense only through the mediation that is social labor. When the laborers work on nature using their tools, they transform it and in turn transform themselves, developing their ideas, tools, brains, and social practices. More generally, for Marx, "labor" is a highly relevant abstraction that represents both abstract and concrete labor (at the same time) and mediates the abstract (everything ideal) with the concrete totality (in Marx, *contra* Hegel, the totality is the concrete reality which includes nature, organic human bodies, social relations of production and social forms of consciousness). Mészáros calls it a very important "practical abstraction" (Mészáros, 2011, p. 91). This mediation can never be spontaneous since human beings depend on it to become functioning human beings (with social consciousnesses) in the first place. It precedes all human beings but belongs to a specific historical epoch since it has both a historical abstract side and a transhistorical more concrete side that relates to the basic needs of organic bodies (Mészáros, 1970, p. 31).

Dialectical materialism is the foundational logic of Marx's method of historical materialism. In the method of historical materialism, the central mediation defining the economic base (along with the productive forces, although those are subordinated to the mediation) is always inherited from the past and originates from the beginning of human society going back millions of years. Labor has always defined the nature of humans, ever since *homo habilis*. That said, with the advent of agriculture a few thousand years ago, the specificity of the central mediation produced a class society (Harman, 1994). Since then, human history unfolded in a grand series of stages, with each stage defined by a specific mediation that replaced the one that preceded it. Indeed, because of the violent nature of class society, history is inevitably tied to structural change. There have been mainly 3 modes of production based on class divisions: the slave mode of production, the feudal mode of production, and the capitalist mode of production. Each "mode of production" is foundationally defined by a specific mediation, embodied by the whole economic base and socially reproduced through the ideal and repressive power of the superstructure (Althusser, Balibar, Establet, Macherey & Rancière, 2016).

With the rise of the capitalist mode of production, the mediation of labor was supplanted by a specific historical form of labor: alienated labor. Under capitalism, the social relation that is capital – based on the private extraction of surplus value – overwhelms society through ideological, political, and repressive powers, leading to the separation of laborers from the means of production. This separation leads to the alienation of laborers, both from each other and from the products of their labor. Alienation then facilitates the exponential private extraction of surplus value, which refers to the labor time beyond what is considered "necessary" for the reproduction of life (i.e., wages). Overall, laborers are both ideologically and physically alienated from the means of production, leading to a constant struggle against the totalitarian social control of capital, whether or not they are conscious of it (Mészáros, 1970).

Capital's central and totalizing ideal form, or "form of consciousness," that allows it to thrive socially and control the whole economic base, is the law of "value" (Ilyenkov, 1977). According to this law, commodities are exchanged based on their exchange value (represented by money) rather than their use value, which is tied to the real basic needs of laborers. A commodity's exchange value is determined by the "socially necessary labor time" required for its production at a given moment. This socially necessary labor time is mainly decided by the holders of capital (the capitalists) through blind and coercive competition in the market. The alienated laborers are under the spell of the law of value and believe that exchange value is independent of them, with money appearing as an all-powerful god and wages appearing as "fair." They do not realize that the "socially necessary labor time" or value of a commodity contains both the "necessary labor time" (equivalent to their wages) and "surplus value" (unpaid labor time). Marx explains: "The wage-form thus extinguishes every trace of the division of the working-day into necessary labour and surplus labour, into paid and unpaid labour. All labour appears as paid labour" (Marx, 1867, Part VI, Chap 19).

The mediation that is alienated labor/capital (or simply capital) can be grasped through the base/superstructure dialectic, which emphasizes the class struggle between labor and capital. In Marxian thought, the fundamental importance given to the ontological category of "labor" explains why the economic base is determinant in the last instance. Marx calls the economic base the "foundation" of society because the laborers within it can shape their history, changing nature and human nature based on the specific historical relations of production (here, the capitalist relationships). The laborers are the root of all "value" and "surplus value": they can give social and practical meaning to all things they collectively work on. Indeed, "value"

is an abstraction that does not exist outside of a human society working towards its material reproduction. The superstructure embodies the ideals that socially condition the laborers to shape history according to the historical relations of production. As Marx wrote in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852), the laborers make history, but they do not make it as they please, since they are social beings dependent on the inherited relations of production. According to Althusser, although there is a dialectic between the economic base and the superstructure, the economic base, which contains the principal mediation, overdetermines the superstructure (in the last instance) (Althusser, 1962). For Marxism, which is politically founded on materialism, the goal of society should not be purely abstract (capitalism makes us believe we must pursue purely abstract concepts such as money, freedom, democracy, etc.), but both social and concrete (which implies first and foremost the physical reproduction of social labor). The ultimate goal of Marxism is to align revolutionary abstractions with the concrete interests of the economic base.

According to Althusser, the dialectic of the base/superstructure is “effective” (as compared to Hegelian dialectics) only because of the “determination in the last instance” by the economic base (itself determined by the relations of production). The “index of effectivity” of a dialectic is the dominance of the economic base in the last instance. He explains: “It is possible to say that the floors of the superstructure are not determinant in the last instance, but that they are determined by the effectivity of the base; that if they are determinant in their own (as yet undefined) ways, this is true only insofar as they are determined by the base” (Althusser, 1970). The dialectic between the base and the superstructure implies that all ideologies will ultimately have a material “effectivity” and affect the real concrete world. The totality of the relations of production defining the base, although essentially abstract, has concrete consequences that transform both human nature and nature (as explained: the laborers, through their relations of production, transform themselves and nature). Hegelianism, just like liberalism and humanism, is ineffective, because of the lack of overdetermination and the disregard of social human nature and nature. In Marxism, due to the determination by the base in the last instance, the “structure” of society is always a “structure in dominance” where the relations of production within the economic base are determinant in the last instance (Althusser 1970).

The idea of overdetermination by the relations of production within the base stems from human nature; human beings are social creatures capable of transcending their basic instincts through the social organization of labor. They navigate their lives through social forms of consciousness associated with inherited relations of production. Due to the primacy of the relations of production in human history, there is always a “returning action” of the superstructure on the base. This means that while the base relies on the superstructure, it remains determinant in the last instance. That said, Althusser, in his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” explains that although there is an overdetermination, there is always a “relative autonomy” between the base and the superstructure. There is no “mechanical” relationship between the superstructure and the base, where every idea is a direct reflection of the material imperatives of the economic base. Ideas originate from the economic base (since laborers are the ones bringing the ideas promoted by the superstructure into practice), but they can become detached from the existing economic base if appropriated by laborers for revolutionary goals. Nonetheless, all social ideas, in the final analysis, serve a political and material purpose tied to class interests – whether those of the capitalists or the laborers – within the economic base (Althusser, 1970).

In line with the idea of “relative autonomy,” Althusser cautioned that the domination by the base in the last instance “never comes” in reality (Althusser 1962). Indeed, social labor

is always led by abstract labor; never concrete labor. The Marxist theoretician must keep in mind that human beings organize their society primarily based on ideals; whether these ideals align with inequality or with equality, basic needs, and respect for nature, is a matter of politics and class struggle. Marxist science is the only science that seeks to transform society and create harmony between the dominant ideals and the concreteness of society. It does so by asserting concrete labor as the foundation of life (through the logic of dialectical materialism) and by exposing the unfairness of bourgeois ideals (through the use of the method of historical materialism). The underlying idea of Marxism is that a healthy society – one that prioritizes basic human rights and the protection of nature – admits, through its dominant abstractions, the importance of concreteness above all other ideals.

Overall, when Marx abstracts a commodity under capitalism, he does not identify it solely by its immediate physiological form or ideological appearance but by its social meaning and purpose determined by total social labor within the economic base. The “drone,” a commodity sold and used regularly in our era of advanced US imperialism, gains logical Marxian sense only when it is tied to the ensemble of capitalist relations of production. It is not merely a thing, but a reflection of the class struggle arising from this ensemble. Based on this Marxian framework rooted in a critique of idealism (and all its offshoots), 6 points regarding the ethics of drone warfare can be made.

III. The drone has no value or purpose outside of the relations of production.

1. The drone is neither good nor bad.

The idea that the drone is neither good nor bad stems from the idea that the capitalist class struggle is neither good nor bad. The class struggle between capital and labor is a historical fact (arising from the specific historical relations of production) and the motor of history itself ever since the rise of capitalism. In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx exclaims:

No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. Therefore, mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the tasks itself arises only when the material conditions of its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation. (Marx, 1859)

Marx recognizes capitalism’s role in advancing human society by dramatically enhancing productive capacities and dismantling the old feudal order, even though he remains deeply critical of it.

Furthermore, Marx’s view of the economic base as the overdetermination means that he sees every mode of production as the culmination of the efforts of the economic base, although the latter could be exploited due to an unjust superstructure like that of capitalism. Indeed, Marx has a scientific outlook of history since the mediation within the economic base has a transhistorical side: total social labor (or in more concrete terms, the masses) always makes history. The fundamental role of the economic base in the material reproduction of human life indicates that capitalism, although alienating and exploitative, has a liberating

aspect since it provides the tools and ideas necessary for the liberation of the economic base. Mészáros explains:

The development of the – in principle universally applicable – functional division of labor constitutes the potentially liberating horizontal dimension of capital’s labor process. However, this dimension is inseparable from the vertical or hierarchical division of labor within the framework of capital’s command structure. The function of the vertical dimension is to safeguard the vital interests of the system by securing the continued expansion of surplus labor on the basis of the maximum practicable exploitation of the totality of labor. Accordingly, the horizontal structuring force is allowed to advance at any given time only to the extent to which it is firmly controllable in capital’s reproductive horizon by the vertical dimension. (Mészáros, 2001, p. 12)

Although the social labor process is constantly balanced and restricted by hierarchical control mechanisms to safeguard the system’s interests and maximize exploitation (referring to the vertical dimension of history, meaning the structural and controlling side of history), it always possesses a potentially empowering aspect that could lead to its full liberation (referring to the horizontal dimension of history, meaning the contingent side of history).

Within the context of capitalism, the weapons produced by the capitalist labor process are weapons of class struggle; they could be used for the benefit of either capital or labor. They are then completely dependent (ideally and practically) on the class that uses them. This is why class ideology is central to the class struggle and the meaning (and practicality) of weapons and arms. Althusser explains:

Revolutionaries know that, *in the last instance*, everything depends not on techniques, weapons, etc., but on militants, on their class consciousness, their devotion and their courage. However, the whole Marxist tradition has refused to say that it is ‘*man*’ who makes history. Why? Because practically, i.e. *in the facts*, this expression is exploited by bourgeois ideology which uses it to fight, i.e. to kill another, true, expression, one vital for the proletariat: it is the masses who make history. (Althusser, 1968)

In the last instance, the material struggle ultimately matters, but what leads to the material struggle? The struggle of ideas. Moreover, as explained previously, the “last instance,” never truly comes. A material rupture of the social structure (a collapse of the central mediation and its repressive institutions) is inherently possible due to the relative autonomy between the base and superstructure; however, for society to prosper after a material rupture, the latter must immediately be followed by an ideological rupture that structures society according to a new proletarian mediation (Althusser, 1970).

2. *The drone was born out of the “totality of the relations” and is defined by both the infinite accumulation of capital and the class struggle between labor and capital.*

The popular critical theory that postulates drones trigger killer instincts places too much emphasis on the drone as an unexpected and unique novelty in warfare (especially since 9/11). In this view, the innovation of the drone appears as an uncontrollable force that “came out of nowhere,” disregarding the ethical concerns of most people, who might perceive killing as bad or “unethical,” similar to the adherents of the popular critical individualist theory. However, this view amounts to technological determinism because it grants autonomous power to science

and technology, abstracting them from the mode of production and its central mediation. In reality, it is not pure science or technology that drives technological development under capitalism, but the totality of the laborers in the economic base, even if this totality is not conscious of it. In a society, every productive member has a role – directly or indirectly – in deciding what is useful socially. Since 9/11, the most privileged laboring classes within imperialist countries have allowed, whether consciously or unconsciously, the proliferation of armed drones. These drones are mass-produced, sold to governments or other entities, and deployed in the Middle East to destroy infrastructure and take lives. While laborers are always the driving force behind historical change, they are not the primary beneficiaries of drone warfare (although they could be highly paid in the West for participating in warfare). Instead, the main financial beneficiaries are the small parasitic imperialist elite, who control monopoly-financial capital (as further elaborated in section IV).

Overall, the armed drone, as a popular weapon, is neither unexpected nor random. Society, as a class society, has deemed drone warfare a “necessity” at a certain stage of its development, despite its inherent irrationality.

Although, ontologically, total social labor is meant to produce things for human needs, under capitalism, those needs (use values) are subjugated to the ideal power of exchange value. To put this into perspective, technological development under capitalism is not determined by unexpected, random, and impressive “innovations” (as Joseph Schumpeter theorized) but by the blind and coercive competition between capitals for the infinite accumulation of capital, which is dependent on exponential labor exploitation. The pursuit of infinite accumulation is always accompanied by a nuanced class struggle, as laborers can never be completely passive in the face of their own oppression and exploitation (while also considering that counter-revolutionary movements may misleadingly appear revolutionary). Thus, technology evolves in response to both the flow of capitalist accumulation (the necessity or structure of history) and the demands of social classes (the contingency of history).

Mészáros explains the inalienable (and necessary) link between technology and profit under capitalism:

These developments [technological developments of capitalism] had to take place in an alienated form, under the rule of a reified objectivity – capital – determining the course to follow and the limits to transgress, the potentially emancipatory reproductive interchange of humankind with nature had to turn into its opposite. For the scope of practicable science and technology had to be strictly subordinated to the absolute requirements of capital-expansion and accumulation. This is why they always had to be used with extreme selectivity, in accord with the only principle of selectivity available to capital even in the historically known forms of postcapitalist systems. Thus, even the already existing forms of scientific knowledge which could to some extent counter the degradation of the natural environment must be left unrealized, because they would interfere with the imperative of mindless capital expansion; not to mention the refusal to pursue the necessary scientific and technological projects which could, if funded on the required monumental scale, redress the worsening state of affairs in this respect. (Mészáros, 1995, p. 175)

Historically, imperialist nations have been the leading producers and consumers of high-tech military innovations. The most powerful imperialist nations and their states have

played a primary role in driving military innovations and warfare in general. As we will see in section IV, the US state, which has taken on the role of the “state of capital” since World War II, has been promoting the use and development of drones since 9/11 to pursue its strategic goals in the Middle East and maintain a growing rate of profit. The drone was produced by the inner workings of the imperialist system, with these workings (involving monopolies, major banks and financial institutions, politics, and competitive pressures) driven by profit. It was then marketed to the American public as a “necessity” for use against so-called terrorists in the Middle East. Its essence, however, lies in its role as a class tool that can be used by either side of the class struggle.

3. The drone is an inanimate object that cannot facilitate murder on its own.

The popular critical individualist theory presented in section I gives undue credit to the drone itself when it comes to killing. The drone makes killing “easier” by distancing the killer from the victim. However, objects do not kill people; only people kill people, regardless of how efficient an object may be in causing death. The drone cannot kill without a human pressing a button somewhere, somehow. In the process of imperialist warfare, the drone (or any other weapon) can be considered “constant capital” or “dead labor” because it is an inanimate object used and consumed (some of its value with each use) by capital to produce profitable warfare in strategic countries (warfare is profitable through the sale of arms and the domination of strategic countries – further explained in section IV). Marx explains how constant capital or dead value can only be “activated” to produce new value through the touch of variable capital or living labor:

[The worker] is unable to add new labour, to create new value, without at the same time preserving old values, and this, because the labour he adds must be of a specific useful kind; and he cannot do work of a useful kind, without employing products as the means of production of a new product, and thereby transferring their value to the new product. The property therefore which labour-power in action, living labour, possesses of preserving value, at the same time that it adds it, is a gift of Nature which costs the labourer nothing, but which is very advantageous to the capitalist inasmuch as it preserves the existing value of his capital. (Marx, 1867, Vol 1, Chap 8)

Without the alienation of total social labor in the economic base, the capitalist cannot purchase labor power (alienated wage labor) to “activate” their constant capital and imbue value and surplus value into the commodities. Marx explains the peculiarity of labor power:

In order to be able to extract value from the consumption of a commodity, our friend, Moneybags, must be so lucky as to find, within the sphere of circulation, in the market, a commodity, whose use-value possesses the peculiar property of being a source of value, whose actual consumption, therefore, is itself an embodiment of labour, and, consequently, a creation of value. The possessor of money does find on the market such a special commodity in capacity for labour or labour-power.” (Marx, 1867, Vol 1, Chap 6)

Only total social labor, defined by the totality of relations of production, can act on nature to produce things that have “value” (and surplus value). In the drone warfare process, which is predominantly pursued by the US state, the American soldiers and the targeted individuals can all be considered the employed “living labor,” as they all physically interact

with the drones (in one way or another) for the profit of capital. The only difference is that the American soldiers, belonging to the privileged American labor class, have a high level of choice when it comes to killing, whereas the targeted victims, coming from Third-World countries, have no choice at all when it comes to their own targeting.

Even though drones and technologically advanced objects may appear to operate independently in certain moments, they cannot affect the course of history on their own. Only social human beings can create and develop useful objects. We have not yet reached a level of technological advancement where robots can take over humanity, and it is highly unlikely that this will happen anytime soon.

4. Humans do not have any inherent desire to kill.

The popular critical theory of drone warfare centers on the “killer” as the primary morally culpable actor, characterized by a willingness or even enjoyment of killing. It presupposes that killing is something animalistic and should be generally condemned (within the current context of class society). However, individuals in a society do not act based on their instincts or individual morals (which do not exist since all ideas are social) but rather on the totality of the relations of production that socializes them and shapes them into functioning social beings. Even if we hypothesize that a small minority of individuals, perhaps 0.1%, kill because of their innate urges (supposing they possess a psychopathic-murderer trait due to their brain chemistry or genetics), it remains the responsibility of society and its social institutions to assess and control these individuals, determining whether they have the means or ability to pursue violent behaviors. When it comes to the historical context of capitalism, murder in warfare is a structural need for the accumulation of capital (aside from being an outcome of class divisions). Warfare is pushed by propaganda and dominant ideologies spread by the superstructure, whose practical aim is to reproduce the capitalist relations of production and serve the class interests of the imperialist elite (the holders of monopoly-financial capitalism). In Althusser’s language, the individuals of the most imperialist nations are “interpellated” by the ideologies of the superstructure from birth, shaping them as subjects of capitalism and leading them to accept the justification of imperialist warfare abroad as a rightful and honorable cause. An individual’s morality, or the morals of a group of individuals against killing, cannot overcome the capitalist mediation, as it is historically embedded within the social whole and determines the social and material reproduction of many generations.

The influential sociologist Thorstein Veblen, in his book *The Theory of the Leisure Class* published in 1899, explained the dynamics of consumer culture in the late 19th century and noted how people were being sold warfare as a need. He argued that the hereditary leisure class, particularly prevalent in the upper echelons of society, possessed a strong martial spirit, viewing war and martial prowess as honorable and a source of pride. He said:

War is honorable, and warlike prowess is eminently honorific in the eyes of the generality of men; and this admiration of warlike prowess is itself the best voucher of a predatory temperament in the admirer of war. The enthusiasm for war, and the predatory temper of which it is the index, prevail in the largest measure among the upper classes, especially among the hereditary leisure class. Moreover, the ostensible serious occupation of the upper class is that of government, which, in point of origin and developmental content, is also a predatory occupation. (Veblen, 1899, p. 247)

In times of peace, Veblen observed that the industrial classes, forming the backbone of the community, typically exhibited apathy towards warlike interests. However, the economic condition of some might have led them to join the military (Veblen, 1899, p. 247).

War has historically been necessary to satisfy capitalist interests, particularly since the rise of imperialism in the early 20th century (as further explored in section IV). In imperialist nations, war propaganda – disseminated through the media, speeches, literature, and covert operations – plays a crucial role in conditioning both soldiers and the wider population. This propaganda serves to present war plans as efficient, legitimate, and “just,” ensuring that the imperialist agenda is accepted and supported by society at large.

Markus Schulzke’s article “Morality of Remote Warfare” exemplifies imperialist war propaganda, as it not only challenges the widespread criticism that drone warfare is immoral due to its asymmetry, but also reinforces the imperialist claim that drone warfare is “just.” He explains: “The principles of *jus ad Bellum*, which help to determine when wars can be justifiably waged, and the principles of *jus in Bello*, which establish ideal rules of fighting, can provide insight into when and how drones may be used” (Schulzke, 2017, p. 8). Schulzke starts his argument with the idea that drones will continue to be used in warfare, regardless of the criticism they face. He views drones as a new military technology that will be employed in “unavoidable warfare.” The main issue with Schulzke’s perspective is not his realism when it comes to drone usage, as it is true that wars are unavoidable within the context of capitalism and that drones will continue to be used; the issue is with his idea of what constitutes a “just war.” Schulzke employs a Kantian notion of what constitutes a “just war” that completely disregards class interests – in favor of abstract concepts such as democracy and freedom – throughout his article. He argues that drones, which selectively target terrorists, are beneficial because they protect civilians in the long run. However, this claim has been quantitatively proven untrue, as the war on terrorism since 9/11 has led to more “terrorism” (from an imperialist perspective) and resulted in countless innocent victims in the Middle East (Parrish and Chomsky, 2006). The idea of a “just war” is one of the ideas within the imperialist superstructure, used to spread imperialist morality within the imperialist nations themselves in order to justify and pursue unjust wars abroad that ultimately serve the interests of monopoly-financial capital. Other imperialist ideological weapons can take the form of xenophobic, racist, and Islamophobic narratives, which are more explicitly violent and aggressive in their attempts to dehumanize and justify the subjugation of nations abroad.

Talking about the beginning of the Iraq war in 2003, Egan explains how US soldiers were conditioned by the imperialist superstructure to view Iraqis as lesser human beings. He points out that it was common for US soldiers to call Iraqis “Haji” or “Sand N****” during the beginning of the Iraq war. The derogatory term “Sand N****” has its historical roots traced back to the Persian Gulf War of 1991. Egan points out reports that include instances where even Muslim or Arab members of the US armed forces encountered these offensive terms from their colleagues. These derogatory terms extended beyond Iraq, encompassing anyone from the Middle East or South Asia, including prisoners in Afghanistan and low-wage migrant workers hired by US contractors in Iraq (Egan, 2007).

Although the imperialist nations’ soldiers are conditioned to kill the oriental “others” abroad, the true profiteers, as explained, are the holders of monopoly-financial capital. However, this does not absolve the soldiers of their responsibility, as they do possess the mental capacity to recognize their class interests, provided they can overcome their “false consciousness,” meaning the lack of awareness of their role in history. On the flip side, even

though individuals have the capacity for independent thought, it does not mean that their individual consciousness can override the totality of the relations of production (embodied by all the masses). The awakening of a few from false consciousness will not lead to change. Indeed, history is not made by a few subjects – but by the practices of all the workers of the mode of production. Mészáros explains the importance of the concrete whole:

To be sure, every social agency must articulate at the level of its social consciousness the objective determinations by which it is moved: a condition by no means invalidated by the category of ‘false consciousness’. Equally, it is easy to grant that social consciousness (or ‘false consciousness’) cannot be reduced to direct material determinations, let alone to ‘automatic’ and ‘fatalistic’ outside forces. From this, however, it does not follow that one may proceed the other way round, reducing objective material/social factors, laws and forces to acts of consciousness, even though they undoubtedly appear in consciousness, be that in a correct or in an upside-down fashion. For turning the upside-down images the ‘right way up again’ will not eliminate their objective ground of determination, no matter how successful the work of consciousness upon consciousness temporarily might be in its effort to produce an ‘ideological clarification’. Indeed, leaving such grounds of determination intact is likely to end up reproducing sooner or later the same upside-down images which the enlightening consciousness so laboriously tried to weed out from its target-conscious. (Mészáros, 1995, pp. 315-316)

From this perspective, responsibility can be attributed to both individual soldiers and the imperialist states, though the primary culpability lies with the imperialist states that pursue the profits of monopoly-financial capital. While an American soldier may exhibit traits of a racist killer, the question remains: who ultimately benefits the most from such actions?

5. The distance between the drone user and the targeted person is an illusion.

Proponents of the “drones facilitate killing” theory such as Chamayou (2015) and Gusterson (2016) argue that the physical distance between the drone operator and the target fundamentally alters the dynamics of killing. Unlike a rifle user, who must be in close proximity to the target – potentially making eye contact before pulling the trigger – a drone operator can observe the target from afar, often for days, before carrying out a strike from miles away. This detachment, they contend, makes killing more impersonal and easier to execute. However, this theory once again misses the point of critiquing the reality of drone warfare. It is fixated on its psychological dimensions rather than its social and material underpinnings. From a Marxian perspective, the focus should shift to the structural causes and outcomes of drone warfare, which are shaped by class interests and imperialist objectives. The means of killing – whether by drone or rifle – does not fundamentally change the outcome: the target is dead, and the dominant class consolidates its power. Historically, the rifle was a critical tool of colonial violence, enabling Western powers to exterminate Indigenous populations in the Americas. In the present era, the drone serves as its technological counterpart, advancing imperialist agendas in strategic regions like the Middle East. This continuity underscores the centrality of material conditions and class dynamics in analyzing the function of warfare technologies.

Before addressing the question of the distance between the drone user and the target more in-depth, the Marxist philosophical outlook must be specified. The driving force of

history is not a mere collection of psychological stimuli or disjointed ideas “fallen from the sky” (as pointed out by Mao Zedong). Instead, it is rooted in the capitalist relations of production, which find expression through the dominant ideologies of the idealist superstructure – ideologies such as individualism, liberalism, and conservatism. Arguing from a position of pure idealism – a philosophy rooted in Kantianism according to which the material world can never be understood beyond our perceptions of it – fails to grapple with these underlying relations of production. These relations, which give rise to class struggle, form the foundation of historical development, shaping both abstract ideas and concrete reality.

As explained in the preceding section II, the relationship that is capital is based on the material – and subsequently ideological – separation of the laborers from their means of production. This separation generates alienation: between individuals and among individuals and the objects around them. As a result, objects appear to possess agency comparable to that of subjects, creating the illusion that they can “act” and influence the world autonomously. Debord illustrates the “spectacle” of commodities:

The images detached from every aspect of life merge into a common stream in which the unity of that life can no longer be recovered. Fragmented views of reality regroup themselves into a new unity as a separate pseudo-world that can only be looked at. The specialization of images of the world has culminated in a world of atomized images where even the deceivers are deceived. The spectacle is a concrete inversion of life, an autonomous movement of the nonliving. (Debord, 2014, p. 2)

The true makers of the world – the collective social laborers – become overwhelmed by the “non-living.” Commodities and their main representation, money, are perceived as superior to human relations. This inversion of reality obscures the fact that these entities derive their social purpose and significance solely from the collective social labor of the very people they dominate. Moreover, the laborers remain unaware that the social system compels them to embed commodities with value far exceeding the worth of their wages, perpetuating their exploitation while enriching the ruling class.

In the current era of imperialism, the drone emerges as a fetishized commodity, akin to money in its ideological function. It creates the illusion of being an entity that transcends class relations, seemingly capable of widening the physical and psychological distance between the oppressor – the imperialists – and the oppressed – the targeted Third World nations. Yet, this abstraction conceals the reality that the theft of surplus value underpins the production and deployment of drones, irrespective of the spatial distance between oppressor and oppressed. Just as money’s abstract power enables exploitation across vast geographies, so too does the abstract power of the drone facilitate imperialist subjugation, which lies at the heart of private imperialist profit. A billionaire imperialist, even isolated on a remote island, continues to benefit materially from the warfare and destruction sustained by these fetishized – but truly social – technologies in regions like the Middle East.

From a Marxist perspective, the physical distance between the killer and the target is irrelevant because, in the imperialist context, the primary goal of warfare for imperialism is to secure the social control of strategic nations to preserve global hegemony against the rising competition (it also has a secondary role of being profitable by itself, as seen in section IV). In other words, imperialist warfare always serves an intimate purpose: to strip others of their social capacities and resources. The role of Marxist criticism is to expose and highlight this goal, making it more visible against the dominant logic of commodity fetishism, which

confuses and detaches everything from one another. This Marxist approach facilitates the consideration of political strategies in a unique, global, and interconnected battleground. Failing to address the root causes of warfare – class relations – leads to dangerous consequences, such as the glorification of abstract morals (“just war,” “humanitarian warfare,” “democracy”), the fetishism of technologies (framing the drone as morally superior to the rifle) or the promotion of divisive identities that are weaponized by imperialism. In this process, real social human beings, whose lives depend on the global and interconnected social system, are erased from the narrative. What remains are idealized abstractions, detached from material reality, regardless of the destructiveness of the wars they justify or sustain.

6. Drone warfare’s “risk-free” incentive leads to nihilism (or worse) in the face of mass murder.

The theory that asserts drones facilitate killing fails to address the concrete reality: drones do, in fact, achieve their intended goal of reducing American casualties in pursued warfare. One of the key assumptions within the imperialist superstructure, which remains largely unchallenged, is that drone warfare is “risk-free” for Americans. From a Marxist critical perspective, failing to critique the material outcomes of drone warfare is tantamount to accepting these outcomes as normal and acceptable. However, it is nearly impossible to properly critique drone warfare from an individualist standpoint, given that the logic of capitalism itself is rooted in idealist philosophy – which includes the ideology of individualism. Capitalism, in its essence, inverts human values, fostering a belief that individuals are isolated and solely responsible for their own living conditions. Consequently, the fact that fewer Americans die in warfare due to the use of drones is often accepted as a morally positive development, even by critics. But is this truly a “good thing”? Should the reduction of American casualties be considered morally right if it only deepens imperialist oppression and continues to exacerbates the exploitation of the lives of others?

The minimization of American deaths in warfare, while significant, does not inherently advance the broader struggle against imperialism or uphold the human rights of all people equally. On the contrary, this trend has devastating consequences for the targeted countries, as it makes the mass killing of “others” (citizens from the global South) more accepted by the “aristocratic” labor classes in the imperialist nations – a Leninist concept referring to the privileged working classes in imperialist countries (Lenin, 1916). With the ongoing normalization of drone warfare – bolstered by minimal casualties at home and framed by the narrative of the war on terror – people in the targeted global South nations increasingly appear as distant “others,” perceived as either malevolent (linked to terrorism) or insignificant (unfortunate “collateral damage”). According to Alain Badiou, the current ideology of capitalism rooted in idealism has served to emphasize the distinction between “us” and “them” to such an extent that it has led to a generalized nihilism in the face of expanding misery and violence abroad (Cox, Whalen, and Badiou, 2001).

Even worse than nihilism, the dominant ideology of imperialism in the context of drone warfare leads to the glorification of the killer soldiers by the imperialist nations. The fetishism of different imperialist ideals such as “risk-free” warfare, “just war,” “freedom” and the fight against “evil” creates an upside-down world where the killers are celebrated, while the victims are reduced to mere numbers, sacrificed for the supposed greater good. Marx, in the “Power of Money,” explained how money (the principal form of exchange value) turns everything upside down, making the ugly man appear beautiful or the stupid man appear intelligent (Marx, 1844). Through the superstructure, this fetishist philosophical inversion is propagated widely,

allowing imperialist nations to distort basic human rights and justify atrocities in the name of liberal concepts. Only a perverse image of reality remains. Mészáros describes this perspective that privileges lofty ideals over real human beings:

The thought that the mass destruction of human beings – just because it is directed against groups and not particular individuals, as if the destroyed groups of people could be simply constructed as abstract ‘numbers of a whole’, instead of being human persons under all feasible circumstances – should be considered a ‘higher form of courage’ and an ‘abstract form of bravery’ directly emanating from the superior reason of inventive World Spirit, is worse than absurd. For capital’s power of overturning everything – by removing their human anchorage through the universalization of fetishist commodity production – is mirrored here in philosophy by turning human values upside down, in the name of ‘thought and the universal.’ (Mészáros, 1995, p. 115)

The perverse imperialist superstructure postulates the slaughter of entire populations as an act of bravery.

IV. Drone warfare is a “productive” imperialist endeavor that fixes the gap between supply and demand in the historical era of the structural crisis of capital (since the 1970s).

The drone, while inherently neutral, serves as a tool shaped by the interests of the class that wields it. Since 9/11, it has predominantly been employed as an instrument of imperialism. This reflects a broader reality: imperialism now dominates technological development and innovation, a dominance rooted in the historical triumph of capital over labor since the onset of colonialism. Labor has fought back over the centuries and achieved some positive political changes, but the class hierarchy of capitalism has remained unchanged, with a growing population of poor people primarily in the Global South. With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the events of 9/11, the USA – leader of imperialism since World War II – renewed its ideological hegemony and intensified its strategy of unlimited warfare in the Middle East. This renewed hegemony, rooted in the fight against terrorism and the principles of neoliberalism, sought to legitimize unlimited warfare as a means to address the looming crisis of capital (marked by overproduction and underconsumption). Unlimited warfare allows monopoly-financial capital to invest and produce commodities in an economic sector that circumvents reliance on consumption by laborers. Within this framework, the drone has become the cornerstone of unlimited warfare, playing a role uniquely tied to this stage of US imperialism, as we elaborate in this section.

In the three volumes of *Capital*, Marx demonstrated that capitalism was inherently flawed and prone to crisis. In contrast to classical political economists, Marx did not see a perfect equilibrium between supply and demand. On the contrary, there was an unavoidable contradiction between the two which led to crises. Capitalists, due to the blind and coercive competition between capitals, are forced to compete and reduce their price of production by increasing the organic composition of their capital. This general tendency that compels all capitalists to replace living labor with dead labor (and hence create a growing “reserve” of unemployed laborers) is in contradiction with the consumption of surplus value in the circulation sphere. Indeed, the living laborers are the main consumers of commodities that contain surplus value. The accumulation of capital, which generates an ever-growing mass of poor people, simultaneously reinforces and increases the dislocation between production and

consumption. The internal threat to the logic of capital accumulation has always been the permanent lack of absorption of value, including surplus value, by the laborers. This persistent contradiction, tied to the tendency of the rate of profit to decline, led to numerous explicit economic crises during the early “competitive” era of capitalism, preceding the rise of imperialism. Engels described the manifestation of a crisis of overproduction in 1877: “Commerce is at a standstill, the markets are glutted, products accumulate, as multitudinous as they are unsaleable, hard cash disappears, credit vanishes, factories are closed, the mass of workers are in want of the means of subsistence because they have produced too much of the means of subsistence, bankruptcy follows upon bankruptcy, execution upon execution” (Engels, 1877).

To avoid recurrent crises of “overproduction” (which are also “underconsumption” crises since products are unconsumed), the contradictory system of capital must find strategies to stimulate consumption without hiring more laborers or paying laborers more money (since the source of profit is the exploitation of labor). Some strategies to do that are: (1) the increased concentration and centralization of capital, which allows a tighter control of the prices of production and thus enhances the social control over the population (because options become limited); (2) the increased influence of financial capital that allows profit-making without spending on wages or the means of production; (3) the use of the state’s and other institutions’ power to control the laboring class despite its increased immiseration; (4) the control of the supply of the “world currency” (the US dollar since World War II); (5) the super-exploitation of Third-World nations where labor is cheap, and the rate of exploitation is high and (6) the creation of useless needs that allow the production and consumption of value unrelated to basic human needs (hence a production cycle that can maintain the wages to a minimum).

In this section, we are particularly interested in the strategy that implies the production of “useless needs” since the production of killer drones is, in fact, useless from a “basic human needs” standpoint; even worse, it is entirely destructive of human life. Marx explained this strategy through the following words:

The production of relative surplus value, i.e., production of surplus value based on the increase and development of the productive forces, requires the production of new consumption; requires that the consuming circle within circulation expands as did the productive circle previously. Firstly, quantitative expansion of existing consumption; secondly: creation of new needs by propagating existing ones in a wide circle; thirdly: production of new needs and discovery and creation of new use values. (Marx, 1857)

During the era of colonialism (the 15th century to the late 18th century) and the early competitive capitalist era (the late 18th century to the long 19th century), warfare primarily served as a means for territorial domination and the social control of populations. It also helped strengthen European states in terms of bureaucracy (Kiser and Kane, 2001). Overall, warfare functioned almost exclusively as a political tool for acquiring new territories and subjugating groups or nations, with the victors reaping significant economic benefits. The cost of warfare was seen as a burden for nations, sometimes leading to economic collapse or heavy indebtedness. However, with the rise of imperialism at the beginning of the 20th century, warfare gained a new (and secondary) economic purpose in addition to its primary political one: it became a means of profit-making in itself, regardless of its political or geostrategic consequences. Rosa Luxemburg was among the first to observe this historical transformation in the role of warfare, linking it to the evolving economic imperatives of capitalism. She

explained that with imperialism, warfare became a permanent part of the production sphere of capital, allowing both the production and consumption of value (especially weapons, arms, and other materials needed for warfare) (Luxemburg, 1913).

Imperialism emerged when the concentration and centralization of Western capitals reached a point where, instead of numerous “dispersed” capitals, a few large enterprises allied with banks, through the systemic super-exploitation of colonies, came to dominate entire branches of production to control prices of production and market prices. The fundamental difference between competitive capitalism and monopolistic capitalism is this: in the former, businesses are subject to the prices of their products, while in the latter, certain enterprises impose the selling prices of their products (Baran and Sweezy, 1960). Imperialism, as first argued by Vladimir Lenin, was inseparable from continuous warfare, as monopolies from different countries had to fight to impose their social control on new markets, resources, and strategic nations. Without social and political power over Third-World countries, the monopolies were unable to maintain their power of pricing vis-à-vis the competition. As such, Lenin viewed World War I as a direct result of inter-imperialist competition for the control of the colonies, seeing it as evidence of inherent instability and aggression within the capitalist system (Lenin, 1917).

Lenin’s theory of imperialism remains relevant to this day: the political purpose of warfare continues to be the primary driver of conflict within imperialism. This is because imperialism is a social system rooted in socio-political class relations; that said, imperialism’s tight control over the world economy gives warfare a secondary, purely economic purpose. Rosa Luxemburg observed that in this new imperialist context where giant enterprises could charge monopoly prices, the crisis of overproduction had become a permanent aspect of capital accumulation. Indeed, when all “pre-capitalist” areas (the colonies) were integrated into global capitalism, and the market for capital expansion became saturated, overproduction remained a persistent issue on the agenda. Considering this situation, Luxemburg highlighted before the onset of World War I, in 1913, that military expenditures for imperialist warfare were sources of value that mitigated the permanent crisis of capital. Rosa Luxemburg identified this profitable process of military spending:

Capital itself ultimately controls this automatic and rhythmic movement of militarist production through the legislature and a press whose function is to mould so-called “public opinion.” That is why this particular province of capitalist accumulation at first seems capable of infinite expansion. All other attempts to expand markets and set up operational bases for capital largely depend on historical, social and political factors beyond the control of capital, whereas production for militarism represents a province whose regular and progressive expansion seems primarily determined by capital itself. (Luxemburg, 1913)

Since Luxemburg wrote these words about “militarist production,” we have witnessed the emergence and consolidation of the “military-industrial complex” in the USA in response to the global crisis of 1929-1933. This complex was progressively established through the power of the state, becoming a permanent façade of the capitalist system.

Imperialism can be divided into two historical phases: British imperialism (late 18th century to World War II) and American imperialism (post-World War II to today) (Amin, 2001; Wallerstein, 2003). Britain was the first leader of imperialism for several interconnected reasons. The Industrial Revolution gave Britain an early advantage in economic and technological development, enabling the production of goods on a mass scale. The United

States, France, Germany, Russia, and Japan were its strongest competitors in the struggle for imperialist domination. The Royal Navy's supremacy allowed Britain to control key sea routes and establish naval bases strategically. Its global trade networks provided access to raw materials and markets, fueling economic development. Through active territorial exploration and acquisitions, Britain expanded its empire across Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Oceania. Economic motivations, technological advancements, political stability, and legal systems played key roles in sustaining Britain's imperial dominance. During the 19th century, Britain made significant innovations in military technology. Rifled muskets replaced the older smoothbore muskets, and steam-powered ships, including ironclads and steam frigates, supplanted sail-powered vessels. The period also saw advances in telegraph communication and the development of rifled cannons and explosive shells (Marsden and Smith, 2004; O'Brien, 1988).

The inter-imperialist competition forced each imperialist nation to advance its military technology. It was during World War I that the development and testing of military "drones" began. Two significant developments were the British Aerial Target and the American Kettering Bug. Both were radio-controlled aircraft designed for specific purposes – the Aerial Target for training and the Kettering Bug as an aerial torpedo. Despite successful flight tests, neither the Aerial Target nor the Kettering Bug were deployed in actual combat during World War I. However, their development laid the groundwork for further advancements in unmanned aerial technology (Imperial War Museums, 2024). According to the Imperial War Museums organization, it is believed that the term "drone" may have originated during this period, possibly inspired by the name of one of the British models, the DH.82B Queen Bee (Imperial War Museums, 2024).

Following two World Wars between imperialist nations, it was the US that emerged victorious primarily due to its minimal human losses (compared to the other countries at war), insidious methods of war financing, and the power of the US dollar. Thanks to military spending throughout the Second World War, the US became a country generating an annual budget surplus (revenues exceeding expenses), allowing it to become a creditor. In just 6 years, from 1939 to 1945, the US experienced a 70% economic expansion (in terms of real GDP), largely attributed to military spending by the state. The major problem of the Great Depression – the imbalance between supply and demand – was resolved. Between 1942 and 1945, the net profit of the 2,000 largest American companies had increased by 40% compared to those of the period 1936-1939 (Brandes, 2014). Moreover, the US's military spending during World War II accelerated military innovations within the arms industry, including advancements such as the development of drones. Following the British model, the United States began creating a new generation of drones specifically designed for target practice in training exercises. The US Navy spearheaded the creation of full-sized drones, while the Army opted for smaller model airplanes. Additionally, the US explored the concept of bombers from which pilots would safely parachute after takeoff, relinquishing control to pilots in nearby aircraft (Gusterson, 2016, p. 9).

At the end of World War II, the New Dealers, who had been leading Washington since 1932, recognized that history had presented them with a unique opportunity to finance the reconstruction of imperialist nations severely damaged by the war. This opportunity led them to establish a new world order around the American dollar. The pillars of this new world order were the newly established Bretton Woods system, the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The US government also started giving and lending US dollars to the damaged countries of Europe and Japan, which made those countries dependent on the US dollar. The policies of the New Dealers at the time

were largely based on the economic ideas of John Maynard Keynes. They were aimed at achieving “full employment” through increased state expenditures, without undermining the profits of the American elite. Continued military spending emerged as the ideal solution for applying Keynesian economic theory, as evidenced by the economic growth spurred during World War II. Military spending after World War II satisfied various domestic interests: increased state expenditures stimulated job creation and provided significant benefits to major corporations—particularly those in the arms industry and the numerous interconnected sectors supporting conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, and elsewhere (Mészáros, Orr, & Ward, 2009). The devastating consequences abroad were not considered.

In a 1943 essay titled “The Political Aspects of Full Employment,” Michal Kalecki observed how Keynesianism in the US could only properly function through increased military spending. He explained that monopoly-financial capital strongly opposed increased civilian government spending because it was not profitable. Such spending was even threatening for monopoly-financial capital since it gave more social power and resources to the American working class. However, Kalecki observed that this opposition did not apply to military spending, which was viewed by capital as augmenting profits rather than threatening them. Similarly to Luxemburg, Kalecki argued that militarism was a profitable productive process that facilitated the investment of capital. The US state, following the will of monopoly-financial capital, was able to boost military spending through its ideological and political influence (especially through the mass media), creating a fictitious balance between supply and demand (Kalecki, 1943). Behind the direct economic benefits of military spending, there were also, of course, political and geostrategic interests driving the pursuit of warfare abroad.

By the time President Eisenhower – who had played a role in the expansion of military spending – raised concerns about what he termed the “military-industrial complex” in his farewell address on January 17, 1961, the situation had already spiraled out of control, firmly establishing this complex as a permanent feature of American political and economic life. Eisenhower had not only warned against the growing influence of the military-industrial complex but also expressed his fear regarding its monopolization of scientific and technological innovations (Mészáros, 2003). This monopolization, however, had already well crystallized during World War II. Albert Einstein’s theory of mass-energy equivalence, for instance, provided the theoretical foundation for the creation of atomic bombs, which the United States used to devastate the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Despite Einstein’s lifelong opposition to the militarization of science, his ability to influence the practical applications and misuses of science and technology remained negligible. Reflecting on this in a speech to his students, he conveyed his frustration:

In times of war, applied science has given men the means to poison and mutilate one another. In times of peace, science has made our lives hurried and uncertain. Instead of liberating us from much of the monotonous work that has to be done, it has enslaved men to machines; men who work long, wearisome hours mostly without joy in their labour and with the continual fear of losing their pitiful incomes. (Weekly Worker, 2005)

From the 1950s to the 1970s, the United States engaged in warfare in Korea and Vietnam while also playing a significant role in supporting Israel during its conflicts in the Middle East – a support that continues to this day. During this era of warfare, the US developed a new type of drone primarily for surveillance purposes. Known as the Lightning Bug, this early drone was jet-powered and preprogrammed, differing significantly from modern drones. Typically launched from beneath the wing of a larger aircraft, it was deployed for surveillance

missions over North Vietnam. In the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Israel demonstrated an innovative use of drones (which were supplied by the US and also developed in Israel with American assistance). These drones were employed to identify the locations of Egypt's missile batteries, allowing manned aircraft to target and destroy them. Acting as sacrificial planes, the drones effectively reduced the risk of pilot casualties. Later, during the 1982 Lebanon War, Israel once again utilized drones, showcasing their growing role in modern warfare (Gusterson, 2016, p. 10).

In the early 1970s, in addition to widespread stagflation, the American elite experienced a slowdown in its rate of profit. There are different measures of the general rate of profit in the United States, but they all show essentially the same strong negative trends during this period (Moseley, 1997). More broadly, the world economy started to experience a “structural” global and permanent crisis because the inherent crisis of capitalism – characterized by overproduction and underconsumption – could no longer be temporarily mitigated through Keynesian national policies, as was possible during the “golden age” of capitalism following World War II. The underlying crisis of capitalism became “permanent” and “global” because it now even affected the privileged laboring classes of imperialism. Keynesianism had to be eliminated since it led to a real fall in the profit rates of the largest American banks and companies. Shortly before the crisis began, the dollar had been devalued against gold, and government spending proved insufficient to cover war expenses, impacting the profits of the “military-industrial complex.” American industrialism and high wages had become burdens on an economy increasingly dominated by banks, monopolies, and the war industry (Mészáros, 1995, p. 247).

Under the pressure of the structural crisis and the interests of monopoly-financial capital, the US and other imperialist states were forced to progressively withdraw the concessions granted to workers during the golden age of Keynesianism. To support this transformation, the ideology of neoliberalism was propagated by politicians such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The goal of neoliberalism was to amplify further and globalize the rate of exploitation of social labor time through monopolistic practices and financialization, framing the system with principles of individual responsibility and free-market ideology to appeal to Western audiences (Mészáros, 2010, pp. 14-19). By the mid to late 1980s, the imperialist class emerged stronger than ever from this crisis, thanks to neoliberalism, the erosion of Keynesian “working-class” gains, and the abandonment of the Bretton Woods system in 1971, which eliminated all physical constraints on the expansion of the US dollar. According to Hudson, with the end of the Bretton Woods system, the US could finance profitable warfare while making other countries bear its war costs, as US treasuries and bonds enjoyed high demand. Every nation required US dollar reserves to conduct business, rendering US militarism (fueled by global geopolitical ambitions) essentially costless. What simple accounting obscures is that a country with the seigniorage power of the dollar can never lose by borrowing in its own currency; indefinite dollar borrowing by other countries gives the United States the ability to have the world finance its military adventurism, necessary to maintain its global hegemony (Hudson, 2003).

Alongside the promotion of neoliberalism and the financialization of the economy, the US war machine had a vital role in curbing (not eliminating) the effects of the structural crisis of capital. Indeed, military expenditures cushion the effects of the crisis in two ways: by perpetuating US imperial hegemony over Third-World nations (hence securing geostrategic interests against competitive countries) and by absorbing the economic surplus of monopoly-financial capital. According to Mészáros, militarism consumes resources, goods, and funds

supplied by dominant monopoly-financial capital. It then destructively “produces” value and surplus value by generating investment opportunities through ongoing warfare, including prospects in reconstruction, arms production, and other forms of military-related industries. This “productive” process sidesteps typical capitalist challenges related to the realization of surplus value and competitive pressures because destruction, in itself, disregards the will or basic needs of the subjects targeted in warfare. Mészáros calls the military-industrial complex historically the most “cruel form” of massive capital allocation for the continuous extraction of surplus value based on a parasitic and self-consuming/destructive mode of production fundamentally divorced from basic human needs. In this system, warfare creates an artificial equilibrium between supply and demand by generating a demand for destruction, which comes at the cost of countless innocent lives. The logic behind this is one of inherent irrationality geared toward human annihilation, and the normalization of warfare in the imperialist countries is achieved through appeals to “national security” as justification (Mészáros, 1995, p. 585).

There was one political issue that needed to be dealt with before pursuing infinite profitable warfare: the Vietnam syndrome (which gained prominence in the 1980s). The American public, by the end of the Vietnam war, had generalized PTSD due to the high casualties during the war, which lasted 19 years and produced 58,000 American deaths and 153,000 wounded (Coffey, 2014, p. 272). The American government needed to find a solution to minimize the American human costs during its military adventures. It successfully overcame the US public’s reluctance to warfare during the 1991 Gulf War (when President George H. Bush deployed a UN-backed force to compel Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait). It managed to minimize American deaths through the use of surveillance drones and smart bombs. According to Dixon, drone video feeds were utilized by US Navy Commanders to coordinate operational fires from battleships, specifically directing the firing of the battleships’ 16-inch guns toward Faylakah Island. The AAI RQ-2 Pioneer, a type of drone, played a significant role in this operation. The Iraqi soldiers stationed on Faylakah Island surrendered to a Pioneer drone. They signaled their surrender by waving handkerchiefs, undershirts, and sheets, which were visible to the drone’s cameras. The presence of drones, often accompanied by airstrikes or artillery fire, had become a symbol of impending destruction for Iraqi soldiers (Dixon, 2000). During the Gulf War, only 346 Americans perished, with less than half of them in combat, while casualties on the Iraqi side were far more significant, with approximately four thousand civilians and thirty-five thousand soldiers killed (Coffey, 2014, p. 273).

Drones played a pivotal role in providing real-time intelligence and surveillance during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, particularly in the Kosovo War (1998-1999). This capability allowed NATO forces to gather crucial information about Serbian military positions, troop movements, and infrastructure, facilitating the planning and execution of precise airstrikes while minimizing risk to their personnel. During the 1999 bombing campaign in Kosovo known as Operation Allied Force, precision bombing became a cornerstone strategy for NATO. The alliance targeted key locations, including government buildings, communication networks, and the power grid in Belgrade, aiming to disrupt the Yugoslav government’s ability to sustain its military efforts and maintain popular support. However, the campaign also led to unfortunate incidents, including the bombing of a convoy of Albanian refugees and the destruction of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, which resulted in international controversy and criticism (Coffey, 2014, p. 277).

Armed drones (drones that carry bombs or missiles) began to be used in warfare in the early 2000s, in the context of the war on terror. They were propelled by technological advancements that facilitated the creation of models like the MQ-1 Predator. Equipped with

Hellfire missiles, this drone variant transformed unmanned aerial vehicles from passive observers into powerful offensive weapons. After 9/11, offensive drones began launching missiles in conflict zones such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other countries. This new era of drone warfare, unfolding within the framework of the structural crisis of capital, aimed to secure strategic imperialist interests such as: securing oil resources amidst a growing competition with China and other rising developing countries, maintaining the dominance of the US dollar through the social control of oil-rich countries, and pursuing profitable and perpetual warfare. The latter needed reinforcement at a time when Keynesian benefits were no longer sustainable for the US public. In this post-Keynesian and neoliberal ideological context, the 2003 “shock and awe” campaign against Iraq was designed and employed to reaffirm US militarism as the cornerstone of national security (Cypher, 2007). Operating under this campaign framework, the US was able to pursue military ventures with impunity, sending a clear message to the world that any form of defiance would be met with swift and decisive punishment. According to Cypher, the architects of this new era of neoliberal warfare, devoid of Keynesian benefits, included figures such as Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, Dick Cheney, and Donald Rumsfeld, among others. These proponents of neoliberal militarism saw Iraq as a strategic opportunity to demonstrate the US’s resolve and establish a precedent for pre-emptive action against perceived threats to American interests. A significant portion of the American population was expected to support and consent to this militaristic approach, fueled *only* by the confidence in the righteousness of US military power (Cypher, 2007). Militarism had to be pursued without barriers, at the expense of all social rights, human rights, and basic needs.

The armed drone emerged as the quintessential weapon for this new era of neoliberal warfare supported by the ideology of the “war on terror,” enabling the US public to observe US-inflicted warfare from afar without witnessing significant US casualties. In Iraq, the death toll of US soldiers was around 3,000, with additional casualties among non-military security forces and contractors, although these numbers often went unreported (Cypher, 2007). On the Iraq side, the war devastated the country’s infrastructure and produced hundreds of thousands of deaths. Subsequent major conflicts tied to the war on terror, such as those in Libya, Syria, and Somalia, followed suit. Brown University estimates that the overall human toll of the war on terror (since its start till 2023) on Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria and elsewhere reached (approx.) 905,000 to 940,000 direct deaths and 4.5 to 4.7 million indirect deaths (Brown University, 2024).

Conclusion

The dominant literature on drone warfare, whether aligned with the official narrative or critical of it, remains constrained by an individualistic perspective. This approach fragments the world into atomized objects, subjects, and ideas that have no material basis that could tie them together. This paper tried to go beyond this dominant ethical individualist perspective to understand the role of drone warfare from a perspective that views social human beings as dependent on an ensemble of relations of production. From this alternative perspective, human beings are inherently social creatures who collaborate – using the means of production – within specific historical relations of production to transform both their environment and themselves. The pivot of history lies in these relations of production, inherited from the entirety of human history and weighing “like a nightmare” on the living. Indeed, while humans actively make history, they do not do so as they wish; their actions are shaped and constrained by the pre-existing and historically specific relations of production, which are essential for their

development as conscious, functioning subjects. From this Marxist perspective, an individualist approach that concentrates on the psychology of drone operators or on the drone itself (an inanimate object) holds no theoretical relevance, as it overlooks the true origin and social function of drones within the specific capitalist relations of production and the class hierarchy they produce. Moreover, an individualist approach further fetishizes subjects, their ideas, and objects, reinforcing the perception of the current historical pivot – alienated labor/capital – as a natural and unchangeable fact.

The paper demonstrated, using the logic of dialectical materialism, that the drone is neither inherently good nor bad; it is a tool that emerges from the capitalist totality of the relations of production, making it a tool of class warfare. The armed drone we focused on gained prominence during an advanced stage of capitalism that deemed it essential for pursuing capital's interests amid rising competition and a global structural crisis. By adopting the drone to meet these changed circumstances, capital was able to impose on humanity the inhumanities dictated by its nature on an incomprehensibly larger scale than ever before. Mészáros explains the logic of modern drone warfare from capital's view:

For the ultimate logic of the underlying actual trend in modern warfare, arising from the liquidation of all human frame of reference through the universal triumph of capitalist reification and of the concomitant impersonal logic of the capital system, in complete defiance of human need and reason, is not 'impersonal bravery' but the truly impersonal destruction of humankind in its entirety: Holocaust and Hiroshima combined on a global scale. (Mészáros, 1995, p. 115)

As we have seen, warfare, in the context of the global crisis of capital, is firstly necessary due to geostrategic reasons: US imperialism has to secure its hegemony in strategic regions against rising powers such as China. Warfare is also a means of profit-making by itself for imperialism, as history has shown that investing in self-consuming production is more profitable than addressing the real basic needs of consumers. Because of that secondary reason, for many decades now and even more so since 9/11, the world economy has internalized wars as well as the conditions of permanent warfare in the Arab world. The different industries of imperialism have developed a strategy of cohabitation with the conditions of permanent war and instability in the Arab world. The cloud of fear surrounding Islamic terror, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and Iran's "nuclear plans" permeate global production with steady doses of militarism. Moreover, the drone acts as the perfect weapon to assuage the concerns of the privileged imperialist labor classes when it comes to permanent warfare, assuring them that the loss of lives among their fellow citizens will remain minimal.

The wasteful means of war and destruction enable monopoly-financial capital to bridge the gap between supply and demand, thereby facilitating profit realization. Indeed, monopoly-financial capital must realize surplus value through a productive process that excludes human consumption or anything that could empower labor. This involves generating actual supply through fictitious demand and shifting toward consumption through destruction. This wasteful process has morphed into a normalized model ingrained in the everyday functioning of the entire system, prioritizing "productive destruction" as a routine practice in alignment with the capitalist tendency of replacing real human needs with artificial ones such as inhumane warfare.

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