

“Eye in the Sky”

Although drones are viewed as surgically precise instruments of war, there is always the danger of “collateral damage”. That is not a problem for terrorists but we make every effort to avoid civilian casualties. That was not always the case, witness the massive bombing raids in World War II. While the mindset which found civilian deaths to be an acceptable consequence of war may have changed, the question is still the same: Is the target so critical that innocents may have to be sacrificed for the “greater good”?

Colonel Powell (Helen Mirren) is a British officer who thinks she has located a group of terrorist leaders in a safe house in Kenya. Surrounded by multiple screens displaying feeds from a circling drone, she wants to wipe them out with a Hellfire missile. So does General Benson (the late Alan Rickman) the military liaison to a group of British ministers who have the last word on the strike. However, the ministers are a hard sell.

Thousands of miles away in the Nevada desert two US Air Force officers piloting the Predator drone sit in front of an array of consoles awaiting orders to launch. It is tense and grueling duty. Tenser still, and infinitely more dangerous, is the task of a Kenyan plainclothes operator who has drawn the risky duty of verifying the identities of the occupants of the home. Flirting with disaster this resourceful and quick witted man makes a chilling discovery.

To Colonel Powell and General Benson the information he provides makes it imperative to launch an immediate missile strike. But they are slow walked by the British ministers who agonize over the decision. The fear of “collateral damage” becomes more than an abstract issue when the drone camera beams a close up of a little girl selling homemade bread at her stand next to the target. Her face is on every screen and the human consequence of the proposed strike become gut wrenchingly clear to everyone. Increasingly desperate attempts are made to lure her away from the site but complications keep arising. It is the classic Hitchcock touch. Put someone in terrible danger while we in the audience are powerless to warn them.

The moral calculus is stark. What is more important? The life of this child who will die in the ensuing blast, along with the surrounding pedestrians, or the

lives of unknown future victims of the terrorists? The ministers go back and forth as the clock slowly ticks away. Will they authorize the strike? It is but one of the many of virtues of this film that you are not sure how it will end. (Amazon Prime)

“The Battle of Algiers” – A docudrama of the struggle between the French Army and Algerian rebels, “The Battle of Algiers” is as timely today as it was when it originally screened back in 1966. A classic film, it has been studied by counter-insurgency experts for years. No film has ever more accurately portrayed the terrible logic of terrorism. (Amazon Prime)

