Antoine Bousquet, *The Eye of War: Military Perception from the Telescope to the Drone*. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2018, 245pp, £18.89 (paperback).

Reviewed by Selbi Durdiyeva

At the Barbican Centre in London in 2019, there was an installation by the artist Trevor Paglen titled “From ‘Apple’ to ‘Anomaly’ (Pictures and Labels) Selections from the ImageNet dataset for object recognition”. It consisted of more than 30,000 printed photographs pinned to a wall. The artist inquired how the images used by technology alter the understanding of politics and the world around us. The images are based on biases and stereotypes, picked up by a word configuration of a mechanical search engine. That installation relates to the implicit question of Bousquet’s book: to what extent can we trust the eye of a machine?

Bousquet’s book is relevant for today, especially in light of the US assassination of Iran’s commander-in-chief General Soleimani, by a drone strike in January 2020. This assassination reaffirms the thesis of the book: warfare is no longer confined to a warzone in a geographical sense. Anyone can be targeted from anywhere in the world. The dissolution of the conventional battlefield did not lead to the extinction of conflict itself. It rather led to changes in the conduct of hostilities. The international crisis following Soleimani’s assassination proves this.

Bousquet’s book is a history of the development of military gaze. His study centres around questions about how the perception of military gaze has changed. Did the development of technology alter the character of contemporary conflict? What does it mean for activities such as soldiering, mobilization, deployment, and so on? What does it mean for the changing architecture of world security and international relations?

Bousquet draws attention not only to the history of machines but also to a “machinic history”. He analyses the relationship between machines and other objects and subjects. The book is not only about the technology, but the knowledge of production, the thought process behind the deployment of technology and the complex assemblages the technology is part of. The author stresses the agency of objects. The objects here are not passive recipients of the human will. Their materiality shapes the way they are being used. Bousquet traces the history of technical apparatuses, but he also puts it in a broader social context. He describes how the development of devices shaped the military and political space at a particular time for an extended period. The machines influenced sociotechnical development of their time.

The first chapter on “Perspective”, focuses on the linear and geometrical links between the device and targeted object. It is a historical and technical account of how perspectives developed, starting from the linear perspective of Renaissance paintings, to a more complex projective geometry. The chapter describes how three-dimensional space was depicted on a two-dimensional surface. The author helpfully relates how the nascent developments became of use for the conduct of military operations. The perspective images helped to identify the proportions and positionality of objects in space.

The second chapter, “Sensing”, moves beyond optical magnification to the targeting of lethal force. It focuses on specific inventions, and notably, the laser. Bousquet gives a short history of the discovery of the telescope and its use in the battlefield of the 17th century. He describes the growing need for optical appliances with the development of artillery and how it changed the nature of warfare in the centuries to come. The author analyses in particular the “four orders of targeting”—aiming, ranging, tracking and guiding. He reflects on different sensory domains, such as the visual, but also acoustic, which is used especially underwater.

In the third chapter, “Imaging”, Bousquet focuses on the role of photography in war operations, the increased proliferation of the synthetic eye and the adaptability of the human eye to the new technology. The author gives a short history of the development of photography. He juxtaposes the perception of photographs to that of the human eye. He describes the interrelation between the camera and weaponry, the role of photography in the documentation of warfare, in training, topographic surveys, revolutionizing mapmaking and the challenges of airborne photography. Bousquet discusses the spatial measurements, topographic surveys, binocular vision, satellite reconnaissance, digital photography, head-mounted displays, simulators, as well as aerial photography to identify industrial and military targets. The noted development allowed the collecting intelligence without infringing someone’s sovereign territory.

In the fourth chapter, “Mapping”, Bousquet talks about the use of maps at a battlefield beyond mere static cartographic representations. The maps are not impartial depictions of the space, but also have embedded social constructs. As throughout the book, the author offers a historical account of the uses of maps at wartime. He describes the triangulation, the marking of territory for property protection purposes and the need for more precise maps as well as to constantly update the maps to reflect the changing landscape. One of the outcomes of the development of maps used for geodic advancement is GPS. The chapter emphasizes the importance of maps, which are no longer considered to be a by-product but rather the process that is inalienably attached to the armed operations.

In the fifth chapter, “Hiding”, Bousquet examines how camouflage plays a crucial importance in cases when distance and protective armour are no longer guarantees of protection. Camouflage implies participation in hostilities as it involves understanding and anticipation of being an object of an attack. The chapter outlines the history of the development of uniform to depict the existing knowledge of camouflaging techniques as camouflage exploits the biases of military gaze. The changes in weapons and their deployment resulted in a different approach to concealment; this involved modern armies adopting khaki-coloured uniforms. Artists and scientists have conquered the art of camouflage in military industry, the first explored the visual aspects of camouflage, while the latter studied camouflage techniques as used by animals. Different angles of martial gaze require different types of camouflage and depend on technical qualities of aerial photography. Bousquet assesses two modalities of camouflage blending (i.e. matching the background) and, the opposite of blending, disruption (i.e. deceiving the eye by the use of bright and bold colours and shapes).

The most stimulating and critical discussion takes place at the very end of the last chapter on hiding. It draws our attention to what concealment means today, given the totalization of war, asymmetric warfare, increased use of urban landscape, as well as what this change of scenery means for the modern conduct of hostilities. Bousquet mentions the use of a body of a suicide bomber as a weapon itself. Although the book takes a rather neutral political stance and represents more of an academic undertaking, Bousquet critically discusses what the war on terror means in terms of moving of the boundaries of conflict. It implies the weakening of the rules of warfare, where a thin line exists between ruses of war (camouflage) and perfidy.

In his critical conclusion, Bousquet draws on the “eruptions of violence” and what they mean for the everyday life of the civilian populations. Armed conflicts today are no longer about distinguishing one army as opposed to another but about singling out specific individuals. The danger of this development is that the martial gaze then becomes directed at the civilian population. This goes against the most important rule of warfare: the differentiation between military and non-military objects, between combatants (or fighters) and civilians.

The totalization of warfare—meaning the war on terror, targeted killings, constant anticipation of an attack—results in the militarization and securitization of public consciousness and the omnipresent “combat cloud”. The relationship between machines and humans thus needs to be reimaged to understand who is a master of whom.

The book is rich in facts, historical details, descriptions about functions and the evolution of technology. It lives up to its title—it describes the evolution of martial

gaze from the telescope to the drone. Bousquet does not aim to provide an exhaustive picture. He rather focuses on the development of functions of devices, and how they faced the challenge of hiding and aiming, in order to provide a representative snapshot for a particular historical period. Being extensively detailed and very technical, Bousquet's book is a necessary read for those who are interested in the logistical order of military perception.

Selbi Durddiyeva, Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University, Northern Ireland.