Since the attacks of 9/11, the superficial observer may receive the impression that asymmetrical warfare is a new phenomenon. A host of lectures have been held since, the topic is en vogue in the specialised press, the term ‘three-block war’ has been coined, a decision by the US to place captured enemy individuals outside the context of the law of war is treated is if is unique. This impression, understandable as it is, is wrong. Neither is the deliberate killing by terrorists of innocent civilians a new phenomenon. Rapoport demonstrated that the latter already occurred during the days when Palestine was occupied by the Roman Empire.¹ What is new is the technological dimension: the availability of information technology coupled with the possibility of terrorists gaining access to weapons of mass destruction are indicators of the fact that terrorism since 9/11 is not only an issue at the tactical, but also at the strategic level.² However, convictions, not the technicalities motivate terrorists as well as counter-terrorist experts. Rapoport argued that “…no aspect of terrorism can be more important than the moral questions it raises; yet none in the literature has been more neglected or muddled.”³ The same is undoubtedly true for asymmetrical warfare. Before we offer an overview of the various chapters of this book, we will devote a section to a perspective from the colonial era. It will demonstrate that the issues under scrutiny today are to an embarrassing degree comparable with the era when Western nations considered themselves the legitimate rulers of other realms of the world.

1 Colonial and modern wars
As a young lieutenant, Churchill participated at the battle of Omdurman of September 2nd, 1898. The British Empire was, at the time, supporting the Egyptian government

³ Rapoport, supra, footnote 1, p. xvi.
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in its effort to quell an Islamic uprising. In 1885, Mohammed Ahmad’s rebel army had overrun British and Egyptian troops in Khartoum commanded by General Gordon, and it had subsequently established a fundamentalist Islamic state in Sudan. The death of Gordon was symbolic in Great Britain. Thirteen years later a combined British-Egyptian army under General Kitchener defeated the rebel army at Omdurman on the East bank of the Nile River. The battle was, as Kaplan puts it, “one of the last of its kind before the age of industrial war: a panoramic succession of cavalry charges in which the young Churchill, an officer in the 21 Lancers, took part.” A year later, Churchill publishes a historical work on the battle, thus giving the modern-day reader a vivid impression of his views. He has no qualms in describing the forces battling each other as those of “civilisation” against “barbarism”. At Omdurman, British Maxim guns contributed to killing 10,000 Sudanese and wounding 13,000 others in the space of a few hours. Churchill – at the age of 26 – described the defeat as “… the most signal triumph ever gained by the arms of science over barbarians. Within the space of five hours the strongest and best-armed savage army yet arrayed against a European power had been destroyed”.

Churchill’s book makes uncomfortable reading. The black Sudanese are described as: “Strong, virile, and simple-minded savages (…) with no ideas beyond the gratification of their physical desires. (…) They displayed the virtues of barbarism.” He describes the Arabs as the “stronger race (…) The Egyptian was strong, patient, healthy and docile. The negro was in all these respects inferior”: Kaplan notes that for Churchill glory “is rooted in a morality of consequence: of actual results rather than good intentions”. The restoration of British rule brought not only order, but also prosperity and culture to the Sudan. The defeat of the Italians in 1896 in Ethiopia at the hands of the Mahdi’s could – and eventually did – inspire the Islamic fundamentalists to attack pro-British Egyptian garrisons in neighbouring Sudan. Thus, the restoration of the balance of power in North-East Africa was a key reason for Kitchener’s expedition. Translated into today’s parlance, it was a case of asymmetrical warfare, with a regular army controlled by a state-government battling irregular units of a non-state actor.

In the same era, at another outpost of what was then called civilisation, another future prime minister commenced his career as a young lieutenant. Colijn, who was to become Prime Minister of The Netherlands in the nineteen twenties and thirties, served as a second lieutenant of the infantry. In the 1894, at the age of 25, he was posted

5 W.S. Churchill, An historical account of the re-conquest of the Sudan (1899; consulted edition: 3rd ed. 1949) at p. 300.
6 Churchill, supra, footnote 5.
7 Kaplan, supra, footnote 4.
8 “What enterprise that an enlightened community may attempt is more noble and profitable than the reclamation from barbarism of fertile regions and large populations? To give peace to warring tribes, to administer justice where all was violence, to strike the chains off the slave (…) what more beautiful ideal or more valuable reward can inspire human effort?” Churchill asks (p. 10). He leaves the reader in no doubt however, that replacing such ideals with achievement may become a rather murky affair.