Terror and Territory

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Abstract: While geographical aspects of the “war on terror” have received extensive discussion, the specifically territorial aspects have been less well explored. This article engages with the relation between territory and terror through three main angles. First, the relation between terrorist training camps and the absence of sovereign power over territory in particular places is examined through a broadening of Agamben’s notion of a “space of exception”. Second, the portrayal of al-Qaeda and militant Islam more generally as a deterritorialised organisation is interrogated, noting the territorial aspects of its operations. Third, the territorial responses are studied, particularly looking at the way the international legal term of territorial integrity, with its dual meanings of territorial preservation and territorial sovereignty is under increased threat. This is illustrated with a study of Afghanistan and Iraq and particularly through an analysis of the 2006 war in Lebanon.

Keywords: war on terror, territorial integrity, weak states, Lebanon, spaces of exception

The events of September 11, 2001 in New York City, Washington DC, and the field in Pennsylvania are a political, spatial and temporal marker. The lazy shorthand of September 11 or, worse, 9/11, masks the spatial context of the events in favour of a temporal indication (see Gregory 2004a:19), one that is reduced to a number in calendar time, and seeks a privileging of the date for American grief, occluding other events on that day in this and other years. As some have been quick to remind us, more than twice as many children died of diarrhoea on this same day than died in the more publicised events (United Nations Development Report figures from http://www.undp.org; see Pilger 2002:1). President George W Bush himself has now put a figure to part of the consequences, suggesting that at least 30,000 people have died in Iraq since the invasion (2005), while others have put the figures much higher. And yet, such mere enumerations risk losing sight—and losing site—of the problem in their numerical accounts; accountancy in place of grief. Unlike the 7 December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, which is conveniently signed by a place alone, the lack of a single geographical site has turned the “new Pearl Harbor” into a simple date. Yet the implications of these events have been widespread in space and time, spreading across spatial scales from the local to the national and the regional to the global (see Smith 2001, 2002). As Gregory suggests, contra Booth and Dunne (2002:1), these were not “out-of-geography”, but rather “their
origins have surged inwards and their consequences rippled outwards in complex, overlapping ways” (2004a:19).

In a number of ways then Bush’s “war on terror” has demonstrated the importance of Lefebvre’s suggestion that space is the ultimate locus and medium of struggle, and is therefore a crucial political issue. For Lefebvre, space is not just the place of conflict, but an object of struggle itself. It is for this reason that he claims that “there is a politics of space because space is political” ([1972] 2000:59; see Elden 2004). Considering the interrelation of the spatial dimension of politics and the political dimensions of space provides an important frame for understanding the “war on terror”. Yet while geographers have concentrated on the spatial aspects generally, there has arguably been less emphasis on the explicitly territorial aspects (Cairo 2004). Al-Qaeda has often been portrayed as a deterritorialised network, and while the challenges to international law have been widely discussed, few have looked at the implications for the legal basis of the relationship between sovereignty and territory.

The linkage between “terror” and “territory” is more than merely coincidental. As theorists such as William Connolly (1995) have argued, territory is formed both from the Latin \textit{terra}—land or terrain—as is generally recognised; but also from the notion of \textit{territorium}, a place from which people are warned. \textit{Terrere} is to frighten away, and thus on this argument “territory” and “terror” share common roots. We can see this in practice too, in that creating a bounded space is, already, a violent act of exclusion; maintaining it as such requires constant vigilance and the mobilisation of threat; and challenging it necessarily entails a transgression.\footnote{This article therefore interrogates the territorial aspects of the “war on terror”, particularly focusing on weak states and the 2006 war in Lebanon. It does not aim to suggest that all configurations of power are territorial, nor that this is the only spatial scale of analysis, but rather that territory is an important and neglected issue which demands sustained interrogation. It moves from the initial events to look at how they were explicitly territorialised; how this trades on arguments about the nature of weak or failed states; and indicates the territorial dimensions of geographical imaginaries of threat and the practices of retribution. This analysis is implicitly informed by a range of thinkers I have found useful in thinking the spatial logics of power and the sites of resistance, and more explicitly related to some of the work of Giorgio Agamben.}

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\textbf{Re-placing Terror}

It did not take long after the events of September 11, 2001 for the US to work out who was going to pay. According to Antony Seldon, British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s biographer, when told that “force could
not be used purely for retribution”, Bush said “I don’t care what the international lawyers say, we’re going to kick some ass” (Seldon 2005:490). Other commentators joined the chorus. Right-wing harridan Ann Coulter (2001) was particularly animated:

We know who the homicidal maniacs are. They are the ones cheering and dancing right now.

We should invade their countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity. We weren’t punctilious about locating and punishing only Hitler and his top officers. We carpet-bombed German cities; we killed civilians. That’s war. And this is war.

Bush too agreed that this action had to be more than “pounding sand” (Seldon 2005:490). This was a reference to the Tomahawk Cruise Missile attacks of Clinton, particularly those launched at Sudan and Afghanistan on 21 August 1998 in the wake of the US embassy bombings in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar as-Salaam, Tanzania. Despite the destruction of a pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum, and camps in Afghanistan this was not nearly effective enough for Bush, who declared that “when I take action, I’m not going to fire a two million dollar missile at a ten dollar empty tent and hit a camel in the butt. It’s going to be decisive” (cited in Roy 2001:140). As the novelist Arundhati Roy suggests:

President Bush should know that there are no targets in Afghanistan that will give his missiles their money’s worth. Perhaps, if only to balance his books, he should develop some cheaper missiles to use on cheaper targets and cheaper lives in the poor countries of the world (2001:140).

A number of moves were thus made. On 12 September Bush said that “the deliberate and deadly attacks which were carried out yesterday against our country were more than acts of terror. They were acts of war” (2001b). The sovereignty of the US was profoundly challenged, and a sovereign response, a decision, was needed. It was therefore important that this branding of the acts, and the response, was as a war: either the “war on terrorism” or the “war on terror” (see Ross 2004:137–138). This was not the only option, but one that marked the political events that followed, and has regularly characterised US projections of its power (see Badiou 2004:26–27). Indeed, in the fumbling speech on the day of the attacks, Bush declared that he had “directed the full resources of our intelligence and law enforcement communities to find those responsible and to bring them to justice”, suggesting a rather different response. But the very next words demonstrated how this was likely to proceed: “we will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them” (2001a). As Bush’s speechwriter David Frum suggested, “with those words, Bush upgraded the ‘war on terror’ from metaphor to fact” (2003:142).
What this enabled was the move to target states. As Cheney expressed it, “in some ways the states were easier targets than the shadowy terrorists” (reported in Woodward 2003:48). A putatively deterritorialised threat—the network of networks of al-Qaeda (Burke 2004), or global Islamism (Roy 2004)3 —was reterritorialised in the sands of Afghanistan and, later, Iraq. For Benjamin Barber, among others, this was tortured logic:

Like the drunk looking on the wrong side of the street for the keys he dropped on the other side because “the light is better over here” the United States prefers the states it can locate and vanquish to the terrorists it cannot even find (Barber 2004:126, see 124–125).

It was then a short step to position al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, although there was an immediate struggle in the Bush administration as to whether this indeed should be the first target, or whether this provided the opportunity for outstanding scores to be settled with Iraq (see Clarke 2004; Woodward 2003, 2004). In the short term, Afghanistan as target was to win out, with an immediate demand that the Taliban shut down the terrorist training camps. Not working with this demand left the Taliban vulnerable as harbourers. For Gregory, “this entailed two peculiar cartographic performances. The first was a performance of sovereignty through which the ruptured space of Afghanistan could be simulated as a coherent state . . . The second was a performance of territory through which the fluid networks of al-Qaeda could be fixed in a bounded space”. As Gregory continues, this required the reterritorialisation of the supposedly “non-territorial” network. Similarly it required a rigid territorialisation of the US as “a national space—closing its airspace, sealing its borders, and contracting itself to ‘the homeland’” (Gregory 2004a:49–50).

Weak States and Spaces of Exception
Agamben’s analysis of the camp, particularly in his book Homo Sacer, has proved a valuable model for analysis of some of the spatial issues in the “war on terror”. This has largely been focused on Guantánamo Bay or Abu Ghraib (see, for example, Butler 2004:50–100; Gregory 2004b; Kaplan 2003; Minca 2005), and can equally be brought to bear on the more recent scandals around CIA prisons in Eastern European countries and the notion of “extraordinary rendition” (see, for example, Gregory 2006; Grey 2006; Paglen and Thompson 2006; Priest 2005). However, the issues he raises about the relation between sovereign power and space can be used more broadly in an analysis of territorial issues, particularly in terms of the relation between sovereignty and territory. Agamben declares that:

The camp is the space which is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule. In the camp, the state of exception, which
was essentially a temporary suspension of ordering [ordinamento] on the basis of a factual state of danger, is now given a permanent spatial arrangement, which as such nevertheless remains outside the normal ordering (1995:189; 1998:168–169).4

Thus for Agamben the camp is “the pure, absolute, and impassable biopolitical space...the hidden paradigm of the political space of modernity” (Agamben 1998:123). Yet while it may be a fundamental example, as Agamben himself notes, it is not the only possible space of exception (2000:24–25; 2002:85–86). What is crucial to remember is that Agamben’s point is both historically precise and geographically bounded. His important claim concerning the relation of sovereign power to its location can be broadened, as he suggests, but it is essential to introduce both historical and geographical specificity into any way in which it is used as a model for other spaces. And, in addition, it is crucial to interrogate the particular configuration of sovereign power in each case.

The relation between sovereignty and territory has been so strong in the past 60 years that the international political system has been structured around three central tenets: the notion of equal sovereignty of states; internal competence for domestic jurisdiction; and territorial preservation of existing boundaries. Various clauses of the UN Charter, along with Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, have continually stressed these central founding principles, summed up in the prohibition on the “threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state” (UN Charter Article 2.4). This provides the foundation of the linkage between the three tenets, as the notion of territorial integrity means both territorial preservation and territorial sovereignty, and political independence requires both exclusive internal and equal external sovereignty. As well as territorial aggression, secessionist movements have been perceived as a danger locally and regionally, and the norms of the United Nations have been established on the basis that preservation of the territorial status quo and the strong link between sovereignty and territory is important to global stability. Even decolonisation happened along the boundaries that marked the lines of colonial division.

In recent years these norms have come under pressure. Repression of populations was used to justify international intervention in places such as Bosnia, Kosovo, and East Timor, and ineffectively discussed in relation to Rwanda. In the context of the “war on terror”, activities within state territory have implications that go beyond the question of human rights, at least to those prosecuting this war. The two key instances are the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and allowing terrorist groups to operate within the territory. One of these pertains to strong states; the other to weak ones. Thus, for those prosecuting the “war on terror” weak
states may be as much, if not more, of a danger than strong ones, which can be treated as more “conventional” enemies (see Gaddes 2004). What this means is that states with nominally preserved borders but ineffective territorial control within them leave a vacuum that other groups may be able to utilise. Afghanistan, both before the 2001 invasion and since, is the obvious example, but so too is Iraq post-2003. Other places include Sudan and Yemen; and certain elements within the Greek and Russian media have portrayed Northern Cyprus as a similarly disordered space; while Lebanon’s 2006 crisis was for precisely this reason. Similarly it is unsurprising that Somalia and the Horn of Africa more generally have become the most recent focus. This is therefore a question not merely of the preservation of territorial extent, but effective control within it. Territorial integrity implies both, though all too often the international community invokes it only to mean the former (see Agnew 2005a; Elden 2005). The US National Defense Strategy makes this clear:

The absence of effective governance in many parts of the world creates sanctuaries for terrorists, criminals, and insurgents. Many states are unable, and in some cases unwilling, to exercise effective control over their territory or frontiers, thus leaving areas open to hostile exploitation.

Our experience in the war on terrorism points to the need to reorient our military capabilities to contend with such irregular challenges more effectively (Department of Defense 2005:3).

Several political science commentators have developed these themes, pointing to the way in which “failed states are hospitable to and harbor nonstate actors—warlords and terrorists”, and therefore calling for a greater “understanding the dynamics of nation-state failure” and the strengthening of such states as a key goal in the war on terror” (Rotberg 2002:85; see Cerny 2004).

They cannot project power much beyond the capital city, or control their national peripheries . . . Collapsed States are rare and extreme versions of a failed state. They exhibit a vacuum of authority. They are mere geographical expressions, black holes into which failed polities have fallen . . . (Rotberg 2003:2–4; see Rotberg 2002:86).

Such “black holes”, or “grey zones” understood as “geographical areas and social contexts where the rule of law does not run” (Cerny 2004:18–19) create numerous potential problems.

In this understanding power vacuums are filled, and sanctuary granted to non-state actors. The US National Military Strategy declares that it “will work to deny terrorists safe haven in failed states and ungoverned regions” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2004:11; see Straw 2002:98–99). The use of the term “safe haven” is revealing here, as it parallels ideas of humanitarian safe spaces (see Elden 2006b; McQueen 2005; Yamashita
Much too has been made of the way in which al-Qaeda has exploited the ungoverned—or, perhaps better, undergoverned—spaces of the world, those places where territorial sovereignty is little more than a myth. As Agnew notes, it “works across state boundaries while exploiting the lack of territorial sovereignty exercised by some of its host states (such as Pakistan)” (2005a:438). The response, laid out in the “National Strategy for Countering Terrorism”, has been to “deny further sponsorship, support, and sanctuary to terrorists by ensuring other states accept their responsibilities to take action against these international threats within their sovereign territory” (The White House 2003:11). Equally, if states fail to exert effective control then there is the danger that their borders become porous too, and that problems get exported to the neighbours or further afield (see Cooper 2004:66; Herbst 2004:311; Yamashita 2004:188).

On this logic, states under threat emanating from such places claim they are justified in taking action within or against them. Of course, the human tragedy is that the occupants of these areas become victims from both sides. Cerny continues to suggest that “their territorial and authoritative boundaries will effectively become more fluid”, even though “of course, legal sovereignty is not formally threatened, state borders still appear as real lines on the map, and guarantees of diplomatic recognition and of membership in certain international institutions remain” (Cerny 2004:23). We have here a stark reminder of how territorial integrity is split apart in the argument: preservation of existing territorial settlements but wholly contingent sovereignty within them (see Elden 2005, 2006a). The stress on territorial preservation is enforced most strongly at the very time territorial sovereignty is disrupted. Territorial sovereignty is challenged by both non-state actors and by intervention; but while territorial preservation is equally challenged by the first, it is fully reinforced by the second. In this context it is worth recalling that almost all of the groups on the US Department of State’s list of terrorist organisations are self-determination movements (2005; see Congressional Research Service 2004).

Terrorist training camps, or more broadly the spaces in which they operate, thus function as another example of the “space of exception”; the other side of the camps Agamben highlighted. But while Agamben’s paradigmatic example demonstrates an intensification of sovereign power; and humanitarian safe areas impose an international presence as a “neutral” sovereign; these camps operate in nominally sovereign space either through the tacit consent or ineffectual control of the sovereign power. These places therefore demonstrate the suspension of sovereign control through absence rather than an executive decision. This is in part created through the unrealistic imposition or maintenance of fixed territorial containers for sovereign power.
Geographies of Threat
Yet this international context is denied, precisely as another is invoked. For, as the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism declares, these issues demonstrate the extent and the limitation of globalisation:

The international environment defines the boundaries within which terrorists’ strategies take shape. As a result of freer, more open borders this environment unwittingly provides access to havens, capabilities, and other support to terrorists. But access alone is not enough. Terrorists must have a physical base from which to operate. Whether through ignorance, inability, or intent, states around the world still offer havens—both physical (e.g., safe houses, training grounds) and virtual (e.g., reliable communication and financial networks)—that terrorists need to plan, organize, train, and conduct their operations. Once entrenched in a safe operating environment, the organization can begin to solidify and expand. The terrorist organization’s structure, membership, resources, and security determine its capabilities and reach . . .

The al-Qaida network is a multinational enterprise with operations in more than 60 countries. Its camps in Afghanistan provided sanctuary and its bank accounts served as a trust fund for terrorism (The White House 2003:6–7).

On the one hand, then, al-Qaeda and militant Islam more generally are positioned as multinational, networks, diffuse in space, but on the other they are placed in particular locales, which can be targeted. The first allows a wide-ranging strategy of international financial controls, border reinforcement and global operations (see, for example, Amoore 2006; de Goede 2003); the second the concentration on particular sites. For Cerny this is common to terrorist groups, which are said to have “both a territorial base (e.g. Afghanistan under the Taliban) and an extraterritorial database with extensive network connections (the original meaning of ‘al-Qa’ida’)” (2004:27). The territorial aspect is raised by Benjamin and Simon:

A more salient question is whether al-Qaeda will make the leap from bricks-and-mortar statehood to virtual statehood. In Afghanistan al-Qaeda was, in truth, a state. It controlled territory, maintained an army and waged war, forged alliances, taxed and spent, and enforced a system of law. The de facto sovereignty it enjoyed in Afghanistan offered great advantages: a territorial base, training facilities, and a secure headquarters. But given the possibility that the United States would do in Yemen, Somalia, or Lebanon what it did in Afghanistan, virtual sovereignty holds fewer hazards than re-establishing camps and training facilities where they will attract the terminal guidance sensors of American bombs. Virtuality has its own advantages. A dispersed group is harder to locate and attack (2003:169).
Thus imagined geographies of al-Qaeda as a “terrorist network” that blurs the boundaries between outside and inside only partially grasp the nature of its construction as a real and imagined opponent. The territorial issues tend to be underplayed, not merely in terms of the territorial bases in which they operate, but also in terms of the wider issues of territorial control by non-state organisations. They should therefore caution us against seeing al-Qaeda in non-territorial terms or as indicative of some wider deterritorialisation. Indeed, the territorial strategies of al-Qaeda would repay careful attention, of which only a few indications can be given here.

Analysis needs to take into account of a particular range of issues which, while not necessarily reasons for terrorism, are often marshalled as justifications. At the very least they are indicative of the widespread nature of territorial problems in the world that have been masked by the end of the Cold War and the supposed triumph of globalisation (see Kahler and Walter 2006, especially the chapter by Newman). These territorial aspects would include, but are clearly not limited to, the Israel/Palestine conflict, Russia/Chechnya, India and Kashmiri Muslims, the Philippines and ethnic Muslims, and the stationing of US troops on the Arabian Peninsula. They have now been joined by events in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon and the Horn of Africa. Some of bin Laden’s statements have brought a number of the territorial claims together: the withdrawal of US forces from sacred land; dealing with the issue of Palestine and the suspension of sanctions on Iraq (bin Laden 2005; see Gardner 2005:70–71; Schwartz 2004). Another aspect that is less well examined is what al-Qaeda may want to do with territorial control, trading on ideas of a new Caliphate which, beginning from one state, may extend to recreate an Islamic empire.

Having dealt with Afghanistan, at least after a fashion, the Bush administration turned its sights to Iraq. This was in part a strategy for the 2002 mid-term elections (see Moore and Slater 2003:308–309) with a shift from the network to a more identifiable, and geographically locatable target. Early in 2003, Bush declared his support for the view put forward by Blair: “As the Prime Minister says, the war on terror is not confined to just a shadowy terrorist network. The war on terror includes people who are willing to train and to equip organizations such as al Qaeda” (2003). Yet one of the ironies of the action that followed two months later is that it created precisely what the wider war was supposed to avoid. After the invasion, Iraq’s borders are nominally still intact, although the ability of the government or indeed the occupying forces to exercise a monopoly of physical violence, legitimate or not, within those borders is profoundly compromised. In addition, borders with Iran and Syria are porous in a way they never were before. A similar argument could be made for Afghanistan following the 2001 overthrow of the Taliban. While the Taliban were not able to control.
all of Afghanistan before 2001, Hamid Karzai is not able to exercise power much beyond Kabul today, and the Afghanistan/Pakistan border, in particular, is equally far from secure. There is the danger that the feuding factions within Afghanistan allow the same kind of vacuum or potential for “safe havens” that allowed al-Qaeda to operate before. In addition, with regard to Iraq, one of the pro-war commentators admitted, there was always a danger of “creating a new swamp in which terrorists could actually breed and flourish” (Shawcross 2004:213). And leaving Afghanistan half finished has increased the chances of a re-emergence of the problem in that location.

This use of metaphors of breeding, swarming and the like is widespread in the positioning of the danger. As Blair declared in a speech to the US Congress:

The threat comes because, in another part of the globe, there is shadow and darkness where not all the world is free, where many millions suffer under brutal dictatorship; where a third of our planet lives in a poverty beyond anything even the poorest in our societies can imagine; and where a fanatical strain of religious extremism has arisen, that is a mutation of the true and peaceful faith of Islam and because in the combination of these afflictions, a new and deadly virus has emerged.

The virus is terrorism, whose intent to inflict destruction is unconstrained by human feeling; and whose capacity to inflict it is enlarged by technology.

This is a battle that can’t be fought or won only by armies. We are so much more powerful in all conventional ways than the terrorist. Yet even in all our might, we are taught humility. In the end, it is not our power alone that will defeat this evil. Our ultimate weapon is not our guns but our beliefs (Blair 2003).

This virus is one which requires medical operations to eradicate. As Benjamin and Simon quote an unnamed Pentagon official: “they keep likening [al-Qaeda] to a snake, but it’s more like a deadly mold” (2003:453). In this positioning they thus pay unconscious tribute to Robert Kaplan’s presentation of the post-Cold War world as one of an anarchy to come (1994), where familiar cartographies of security are forever challenged by chaos and disorder (see Bialasiewicz and Elden 2006).

Further analysis of the exploitation of failed states would need to take account of the way their al-Qaeda involvement in Yemen and Afghanistan was tied to civil wars, and to think about where their operatives may relocate in the future. In speeches in the early winter of 2005, Bush continually invoked a series of locations in the “war on terror”: “from the streets of Western cities to the mountains of Afghanistan, to the tribal regions of Pakistan, to the islands of Southeast
Asia and to the Horn of Africa” (2005). Geopolitical metaphors abound, with the most recent being Tony Blair’s “arc of extremism now stretching across the Middle East” (2006d). But for Bush, Iraq remains the key, both as the central front in the US “war on terror” and in the terrorist’s “war against humanity”, the latter now supposedly justifying the former (see Bush 2005). For Benjamin and Simon Yemen is a possibility again in the future, as “the government’s writ ends at the city limits of Sanaa, leaving large tracts available for secure resettlement” (2003:169), with the Horn of Africa (particularly Somalia), Sudan, Central Asia and the Caucasus other likely locations (see also ICG 2005; Kleveman 2003). These studies are helpful in that they provide a number of hints toward a study of the territorial issues, without necessarily making that analysis themselves. But home-grown issues in the creation of terrorism may be more important than the ghosts of the past that haunt perceptions of Africa (de Waal 2005).5 In addition, US-led actions in the “war on terror” may actually erase differences between feuding groups, thus helping to produce the connections of “global Islamism” that are usually assumed, problematically, already to exist. One recent example is the support given by Ayman al-Zawahiri to the Lebanese, despite Hezbollah being Shia and the leaders of al-Qaeda Sunni.

**Territorial Responses**

There is of course a purpose to portraying al-Qaeda, or Islamic terrorist organisations more generally, this way. Seeing them as “an omnipresent terrorist threat as evil as it is widespread—from Bosnia to the Philippines, from Chechnya to Pakistan, from Libya to Yemen” allows the US to legitimate “any punitive action it might take anywhere at anytime” (Todd 2003:3). Politically, spatially, temporally there are, it seems, no limits to the responses. For Cooper this is a direct consequence both of globalisation, which has eroded “the distinction between domestic and foreign events”, and thus makes interference which used to take place only in “unusual circumstances” more common (2004:110–111), and because of the context of failed states. Cooper repeats the mantra of the strong/weak state problem:

> Where the state is too weak to be dangerous, non-state actors might become too strong. If they become too dangerous for the established states to tolerate, it is possible to imagine a defensive imperialism. If non-state actors, notably drug, crime or terrorist syndicates take to using non-state (that is, pre-modern) bases for attacks on the more orderly parts of the world, then the organized states will eventually have to respond. This is what we have seen in Colombia, in Afghanistan and in part in Israel’s forays into the Occupied Territories (Cooper 2004:18).

This claim is common within both the official US Security, Defence, Military and Counter-Terrorism strategies, as well as in more popular
accounts of the new rules in the “global war on terror”. In the Bush expansion of the “empire of liberty”—yet another temporal/spatial/political marker—“it can no longer respect the sovereignty of any state that harbors terrorists; it must preempt such threats wherever they appear; it will extend democracy everywhere” (Gaddes 2004:109–110).

What is also interesting about this is that the doctrine of self-defence becomes much more complicated in the “war on terror”. Self-defence was part justification in Afghanistan, and this was effectively endorsed by the United Nations Security Council (http://www.un.org/documents/scres.htm; see Resolutions 1368, 1373, 1378, 1383 and 1386) and by NATO’s invoking of its Article Five declaring an attack on one was an attack on all. But there was a definite danger that it would be classed as retaliation—to which the US was no stranger (i.e. Libya under Reagan and Sudan, Iraq and Afghanistan under Clinton)— because of the time lag between the events. With Iraq it was pre-emptive self-defence in that it was prior to any act. Legal advice to the US Congress laid this out, suggesting that Iraq could not be presented as an “imminent threat” that would justify pre-emption, except on two bases: possession of WMD and links to terrorist groups that may use them against the US. It suggested that this necessarily related to the National Security Strategy question of whether pre-emption “ought to be recast in light of the realities of WMD, rogue states, and terrorism” (Ackerman 2003:6; see The White House 2002:15). There are temporal issues here that differ from the common notion of self-defence that implies some coincidence in time between the action and the response.

The events of July 2006 in Lebanon demonstrate a range of these issues in stark contrast, particularly in how US rhetoric and practice has been adopted by one of its allies. Israel here has effectively done the same as the US, but also as it has in Palestine. On the one hand, it expects the Palestinian authority to act as an effective check on terrorism emanating from within their territory, as a “partner for peace”; yet on the other it continually emasculates it through punishment responses that destroy its infrastructure (see Graham 2006), target its leaders and further alienate its population. This is being replayed in their attitude to the Lebanese government. Following the withdrawal of Syrian troops in spring 2005 in the wake of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, Bush and Blair both hailed this as part of wider change within the region. It is notable that this assassination brought Syria a condemnation that Israel’s executions have not received (Ali 2006:11). Perceiving that getting the Syrians out of Lebanon would deal a substantial blow to the al-Assad regime in Damascus, the US were determined to work on a number of fronts. This would include incitement and encouragement within Lebanon, and with Kurd elements in Syria itself. As Glass noted in August 2005, in relation to this strategy, “whether American succeeds or fails, Lebanon will pay” (2005:18). Thus the new government,
unable to project its power throughout the state and leaving a vacuum Hezbollah was able to fill, now has to endure the destruction of what small gains it was able to make. In this we see a replaying of the danger of weak states: in its most successful war Israel was able to defeat three countries’ conventional armies in six days; now it cannot “eradicate” a terrorist organisation on its border. Thus unable to rid itself of Hezbollah, it destroys Lebanon.

Even when Israel declares a unilateral withdrawal, such as Lebanon in 2000 or Gaza in 2005, it never quite finishes the job. Rather than allow a nominally or putatively independent neighbouring entity the full rights and responsibilities of statehood, it continually undermines that basis, while then bemoaning its capacity to live up to implied obligations. A vicious cycle: the failure supposedly legitimates the challenge; which takes away any possibility of transcending the problem. In the case of Gaza, the years of what Roy calls “de-development” (2005) and the inability of its citizens to have access to the West Bank or Israel, let alone control of its own borders, territorial sea or airspace render any charade of “territorial sovereignty” transparent. With Lebanon there is the disputed Shebaa Farms area, occupied in 1967 and formally annexed in 1981, bordering on the Golan Heights seized from Syria at the same time. The key issue is not that Israel is occupying the area, which is undisputed, but whether it previously belonged to Syria or Lebanon. If it belonged to Lebanon Israel has not fully withdrawn from Lebanese territory, and is thus in breach of UNSC 425, a position claimed by Hezbollah to allow a continuation of its military operations, despite UNSC 1559. If it is Syrian, or is thought of as effectively Syrian, then its status can be reserved for negotiations between Syria and Israel, deferring a solution indefinitely. The status of Lebanon, sliced from Syria by French colonists as a compromise for Syrian independence, has always been disputed, something the US is now trying to get Syrian recognition of, by, for example, establishing an embassy in Beirut. Now, just as Yasser Arafat was supposed to control the fighters of Hamas while imprisoned in his compound in Ramallah, the Lebanese government was supposed to rein in Hezbollah when Israel was bombing its cities, destroyed its roads and bridges, blockaded it by sea, targeted its armed forces, and rendered its airport unusable.

The territorial dimension is clear. As well as demonstrating the undermining of the territorial sovereignty of these two particular neighbours, the Israeli process is also one of consolidation of the territorial gains of the 1967 war; the 1948 gains long having been largely accepted. Understanding it could not gain effective control of the whole of the “occupied territories” or “administrative zones”, not even with the settler programme, Israel’s security barrier is both incorporating land and cutting communities off from each other as never before. Aside from any claims about the illegitimacy of these actions, they are rendering a status
of “facts on the ground” which some in the international community, Bush and Blair among them, seem willing to accept as the basis for negotiations. Indeed, the 2006 National Security Strategy portrays the withdrawal of Israeli forces “from the Gaza strip and the northern West Bank [as] creating the prospect for transforming Israeli–Palestinian relations and underscoring the need for the Palestinian Authority to stand up [sic] an effective, responsible government” (The White House 2006). Yet as Roy notes:

Under the terms of disengagement, Israel’s occupation is assured. Gazans will be contained and sealed within the electrified borders of the Strip, while West Bankers, their lands dismembered by relentless Israeli settlement, will be penned into fragmented spaces, isolated behind and between walls and barriers (2005:17).

The much discussed UNSC resolution 1559 concerning Lebanon from 2004 has a range of territorial issues. It first reiterates the Security Council’s “strong support for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence within its internationally recognised borders”, and then states three key issues.

Noting the determination of Lebanon to ensure the withdrawal of all non-Lebanese forces from Lebanon.

Gravely concerned at the continued presence of armed militias in Lebanon, which prevent the Lebanese Government from exercising its full sovereignty over all Lebanese territory.

Reaffirming the importance of the extension of the control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory.

The issue is about the effective control of the Lebanese government over its entire territory, its territorial integrity in both the sense of territorial preservation of “internationally recognised borders” and its territorial sovereignty, an ability to have the monopoly of force within them. Thus the Security Council “reaffirms its call for the strict respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity, and political independence of Lebanon under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout Lebanon”, calling for all foreign forces to withdraw; the “disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias”; and “supports the extension of the control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory”. In the face of the exposure of its sovereign fiction—that all states are in effective control of their territories—the UN simply stresses it more forcefully.

In the debates concerning whether an immediate ceasefire was desirable, or whether Israel should have time to complete its action, Bush and Blair used this as a sine qua non of a settlement: “Lebanon’s democratic government must be empowered to exercise sole authority
over its territory” (Bush 2006; Bush and Blair 2006). UNSC 1701, which finally called for a ceasefire on the 11 August 2006, made similar claims. Yet Hezbollah is unhappy with this being understood in simple terms, suggesting that UNSC 1559 needs to be seen in relation to the Taif Accords which ended the civil war. Indeed, Syria tried to portray its April 2005 withdrawal from Lebanon as the enacting of those Accords, which also call for “the gradual extension of the sovereignty of the Lebanese government over all Lebanese lands”, rather than UNSC 1559. In addition, the straightforward depiction of Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation is to underestimate its integration into the society. Recalling Benjamin and Simon’s depiction of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan as a state, we could make a similar case for Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon, which undertook projects of social welfare including hospitals and schools as well as collecting income for the protection of the population. This contrasts starkly with the Lebanese government’s treatment of the Palestinians in the refugee camps.

The situation in Lebanon has implications beyond merely the plight of the Lebanese or the Palestinians. Various elements within the Bush administration have long seen Syria as at least an honorary member of the “axis of evil”. Let us not forget that Bush’s “axis of evil” speech explicitly noted North Korea, Iran and Iraq, but suggested that “states like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world” (2002, emphasis added). In other words, only a simplistic reading could suggest that the members were merely those three. Reports in The Guardian in 2003 suggested that Rumsfeld’s plans for Syria were vetoed by the White House (Borger et al 2003), although the pressure on Syria was intense on a number of fronts, including the passage of fighters and weapons into Iraq, the assassination of Hariri, and its wider role in Lebanon. As Tariq Ali noted in 2006, “since US forces are now in no position to mount a second invasion, the obvious route to toppling the government in Syria was to create a pressure point in Lebanon, where Western powers can manoeuvre freely” (2006:10). And yet the Israeli attacks on Lebanon hardly weakened Syria—or perhaps more importantly Iran—all the time that Hezbollah was able to resist. This seems to have been realised by the Israeli inquiry into the war.

However a challenge to Syria long predates 2001, notably in a 1996 report by Richard Perle and Douglas Feith, among other key figures of the Bush administration, written for the incoming government of Benjamin Netanyahu urging Israel to “shape its strategic environment . . . by weakening, containing and even rolling back Syria” (Perle et al 1996).

In a section entitled “Securing the Northern Border”, the text reads:

Syria challenges Israel on Lebanese soil. An effective approach, and one with which American [sic] can sympathize, would be if Israel
seized the strategic initiative along its northern borders by engaging Hizballah, Syria, and Iran, as the principal agents of aggression in Lebanon, including by:

- striking Syria’s drug-money and counterfeiting infrastructure in Lebanon, all of which focuses on Razi Qanan,
- paralleling Syria’s behavior by establishing the precedent that Syrian territory is not immune to attacks emanating from Lebanon by Israeli proxy forces,
- striking Syrian military targets in Lebanon, and should that prove insufficient, striking at select targets in Syria proper.

Israel also can take this opportunity to remind the world of the nature of the Syrian regime.

Syria’s regime supports the terrorist groups operationally and financially in Lebanon and on its soil. Indeed, the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley in Lebanon has become for terror what the Silicon Valley has become for computers.

Given the nature of the regime in Damascus, it is both natural and moral that Israel abandon the slogan “comprehensive peace” and move to contain Syria, drawing attention to its weapons of mass destruction program, and rejecting “land for peace” deals on the Golan Heights (Perle et al 1996).

We find a number of revealing claims here. Striking is the inverse legitimacy. Syrian is acting in this way, which is abhorrent, so Israel is justified in acting in the same way. Equally, while Syria can be condemned for its occupation of Lebanon, Israel is justified in doing so—its troops did not withdraw until four years after this advice, and after another change of government—because of the threat. Nonetheless it should use its presence to threaten, or “contain” Syria. And it should continue its occupation of the Golan Heights, rather than surrender them.

Ten years on from this document, the wider “war on terror” undoubtedly has had implications for the US treatment of the Lebanese crisis. The principle of holding weak states accountable for actions emanating from within their territories is well established; figures advocating such positions in 1996 have taken up office, and thus now the US characterises Israel as essentially undertaking the same kind of reactive military action it has carried out, an indiscriminate aerial assault designed to punish, rather than something more specific that may cost greater numbers of its own troops. The same logic helps explain the ongoing events in Somalia, where the US itself is unlikely to send troops given the disastrous 1993 intervention, but where it still claims a strategic interest. In December 2006 Ethiopian forces invaded in aid
of the unpopular Somali government, forcing members of the Council of Islamic Courts to retreat to an area in the south, where the US then launched AC-130 gunship raids early in 2007. As well as targeting three individuals it saw as responsible for the 1998 embassy bombings, the US is also trying to strengthen the new Somali government, aiming to create stability in the region.

Yet both also fit the wider strategy of Condoleezza Rice’s aim of a “new Middle East” (2006), or Blair’s ideal of an “arc of moderation and reconciliation” (2006d). We do not need to sign up to Newt Gingrich’s vision of a “third world war” (2006) to recognise the interlinkages. As Blumenthal (2006) reports, the aim is beyond the immediate situation in Lebanon:

As explained to me by several senior state department officials, Rice is entranced by a new “domino theory”: Israel’s attacks will demolish Hizbullah; the Lebanese will blame Hizbullah and destroy its influence; and the backlash will extend to Hamas, which will collapse. From the administration’s point of view, this is a proxy war with Iran (and Syria) that will inexplicably help turn around Iraq.

It is also revealing that the intervention in Iraq has made both Britain and the US unable to act as honest brokers in any meditation in the Israel/Lebanon conflict; and equally takes away their ability to act as peacekeepers under UN auspices. As some advocates of “humanitarian intervention” have noted, the Iraq war has “squandered a noble cause” (Kettle 2006). Noble or not, this did not seemingly dawn on Blair, who repeatedly advocated the cause in a series of valedictory foreign policy speeches (2006a, 2006b, 2006c). Similarly the use of Christian troops from Ethiopia to act as surrogates for the US in Somalia and the indiscriminate mode of assault by the US itself will further strengthen opposition.

The Contingency of Territorial Sovereignty
As I have stressed throughout this piece, territorial sovereignty is increasingly seen as contingent, but at the same time, territorial preservation or inviolability is asserted even more forcefully, with no acceptance even of the possibility of Afghanistan’s or Iraq’s territorial spatial extent being open to question. With Iraq this is at the very heart of the issue of the country’s new constitution, in that the territorial settlement is an extra-constitutional event, and the resultant problems of federalism, resources and representation are haunting the political process (see Elden 2007). Similarly the very real grievances of Israel’s neighbours concerning the Golan Heights, the Shebaa Farms and of course the Palestinian territories are pushed to the background. It is the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers that is seen as the initiation for the
latest round of conflict, rather than any previous events. Somalia’s territorial extent is a problem internally, regionally and more widely, yet solutions are sought within its existing borders without recognition of the problems they are causing. While the norm of territorial integrity was never really accepted by dominant powers, the difference now is that they are being explicit about the challenge to internal competence or territorial sovereignty while simultaneously stressing the notion of territorial inviolability. Numerous examples could be given where the US or other dominant powers have violated the territorial integrity of other states, but the current conjuncture is somewhat different. It is one where territorial preservation is seemingly paramount and yet at the same time there is a concerted argument against territorial sovereignty, rather than simply its practical violation.

It is unacceptable for regimes to use the principle of sovereignty as a shield behind which they claim to be free to engage in activities that pose enormous threats to their citizens, neighbors, or the rest of the international community. The U.S., its allies, and partners must remain vigilant to those states that lack the capacity to govern activity within their borders. Sovereign states are obligated to work to ensure that their territories are not used as bases for attacks on others.

Similarly, while al-Qaeda looks to use particular states such as initially Afghanistan, and now Iraq (see The Guardian 2005) as the birth of a new Caliphate and the re-emergence of a particular form of imperialism, the US is looking for something rather different. For Bush Iraq is not just the “central front in the war on terror” (2005), but a place which is supposed to act as a beacon of democracy for the rest of the Middle East. Similar logics are at play as with al-Qaeda here, with the idea of one state being a potential catalyst for others. This has particularly been echoed in Rice and Blair’s reactions to the Lebanese crisis.

Yet this goes beyond the much vaunted spread of democracy, but shows the linkage to wider economic concerns. This is the relation of the “connected” and “disconnected”; an imagined geography where economic disconnection is viewed as a security issue, a political threat. Although the relation between the globalised West and the non-integrated rest can be viewed quite differently, such a division has important geopolitical consequences. Take New York Times columnist Thomas Friedmann, on the one hand; and the official 9/11 Commission on the other:

If one thing stands out from 9/11, it’s the fact that the terrorists originated from the least globalised, least open, least integrated corners of the world: in namely, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Afghanistan and northwest Pakistan (Friedmann 2002, cited in Sparke 2003:379)
America stood out as an object for admiration, envy, and blame. This created a kind of cultural asymmetry. To us, Afghanistan seemed very far away. To members of al Qaeda, American seemed very close. In a sense, they were more globalized than we were (The 9/11 Commission 2004:340).

Although they differ on this point, both are intent on inscribing a particular geopolitics of division, and one which functions territorially. For Friedmann, especially in his best-selling book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (2000), he offers an account of the globalised world where everyone desires a Lexus, compared to the particularity of people fighting over olive trees. As Sparke phrases it, “in this account of globalisation, the olive tree world of tradition and backwardness is enframed as outside, behind and beneath the transcending fast lanes of global interconnection” (2003:379). The olive trees are a particular symbol of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, but they are also about *territory*, who controls the resources of scarce and fertile land, the division of which the Israeli wall has marked ever more clearly. A similar logic is found in Friedmann’s more recent *The World is Flat* (2005), which suggests not that the world is not round as much as it is not vertically stratified. This ideal of the world as flat or level is both description and prescription, where those vertical issues that remain—barriers in all senses—need to be removed to aid the free flow of ideas. And yet some barriers—notably those that may prevent terrorism—will either remain, be reinforced, or built. The 9/11 Commission report dissents from some of the analysis of the extent of globalisation, but it agrees that it presents new threats, and allows them to spread more rapidly. The report, which exceeds its initial brief and moves into the realm of strategic advice—hardly surprising given that the Commission Executive Director Phillip Zelikow rewrote the 2002 National Security Strategy on Condoleezza Rice’s instructions. It both describes and prescribes, providing a range of places it thinks warrant special attention in the “war on terror”, including Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Arabian peninsula, the Horn of Africa, West Africa, Southeast Asia, and “European cities with expatriate Muslim communities” (2004:366–367).

This wider economic context and the geopolitical support it is claimed to necessitate raises a range of issues that need to be addressed, but which go beyond the scope of what is possible here. One key point can, however, be outlined. This is that the very nature of the US’s imperial ambitions requires a double standard in its treatment of territorial issues. While it wants to completely enforce the inviolable standing of its own territory, and to reinforce and control that with whatever means necessary, it wants to assert the absolute contingency of sovereignty over territory elsewhere. For if the US is not seeking to simply acquire territory in
its expansionism, what is it seeking to gain? As has been discussed in numerous places, its real achievement will be in the establishment of bases, the facilitation of free passage of its forces, of capital flows and access to energy (see, for instance, Harvey 2003; Johnson 2004). In this it is looking to preserve its own position, but much more generally, to ensure the institutional framework and provide the military support for globalisation. It is for this reason, among others, that John Agnew’s claim (2005b) that we are dealing with hegemony rather than empire is well taken; and why Matthew Sparke’s analysis (2005) of the relation and tension between the geopolitical and the geoeconomic is so valuable.

This overall strategy—a much more subtle one than can be grasped by the claim that it is “all about oil”—is made explicit in Thomas Barnett’s sketching of The Pentagon’s New Map (2004; see Bialsiewicz and Elden 2006; Sparke 2005, chapter 5). It necessitates a rethinking of the sovereignty/territory bind, as internal competence cannot be preserved when boundaries become this porous, when the US and its allies claim an unlimited right to undermine absolute sovereignty, whenever their vital interests are threatened. This is the point Cooper is making when he suggests that the foreign/domestic division no longer holds under globalisation. For Cooper, “the essence of globalization is that it erodes” (2004:110–111). Yet this erosion does not mean that things are thrown into continual flux. Rather than a process of simple deterritorialisation there is a concomitant process of reterritorialisation. And it is for that very reason that “territory” itself bears careful analysis. For the problem for those of us that wish to challenge the contemporary situation is that it requires a rethinking of the territorial and sovereign frames we use in positions of opposition.

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Endnotes
1 We could make a similar claim for the bombings in London on 7 July 2005, which have been similarly reduced to 7/7, or those in Madrid to 3/11.
2 On the linkage between terror and territory, see also Anidjar 2004, especially 54 and Sloterdijk 2002.
3 On this, see also the more problematic claims in Retort (2005, chapter 5). For a commentary, see Jeffery, McFarlane and Vasudevan 2007.
Ordinamento is rendered as “order” in the English translation.

Generally on the links between policy on poverty and terrorism in Africa see Abrahamsen (2004).

Indeed, as Khalidi (2006) notes, “many legal experts believe that Israel remains the occupying power” because of such restrictions.

See also the comments in Rice (2006): “the Government of Lebanon needs to be able to extend its authority over all of its territory”.

References


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