Terror and Territory
THE SPATIAL EXTENT OF SOVEREIGNTY

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The *territorium* is the sum of the lands within the boundaries of a community [*civitatis*]; which some say is so named because the magistrate of a place has the right of terrifying [*terrendi*], that is exercising jurisdiction, within its boundaries.

—Pomponius

*Manual*, in the Digest of Justinian

In the history of colonial invasion, maps are always first drawn by the victors, since maps are instruments of conquest; once projected, they are then implemented. Geography is therefore the art of war but can also be the art of resistance if there is a counter-map and a counter-strategy.

—Edward W. Said

*The Politics of Dispossession*
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In a television broadcast, a U.S. president addresses the U.S. population, explaining air strikes abroad taken in response to terrorist attacks. The target was “terror,” made more concrete as facilities linked to Osama bin Laden. Groups associated with the bin Laden network are described as sharing “a hatred for democracy, a fanatical glorification of violence, and a horrible distortion of their religion to justify the murder of innocents,” and as hating the United States “precisely because of what we stand for and what we stand against.” He underscores that “countries that persistently host terrorists have no right to be safe havens,” but that the actions are “not aimed against Islam, the faith of hundreds of millions of good, peace-loving people all around the world, including the United States,” but rather target “fanatics and killers who wrap murder in the cloak of righteousness, and, in so doing, profane the great religion in whose name they claim to act.” Then, seeing these actions as part of a long process, the president concludes:

My fellow Americans, our battle against terrorism did not begin with the bombing . . . nor will it end with today’s strike. It will require strength, courage, and endurance. We will not yield to this threat. We will meet it, no matter how long it may take. This will be a long, ongoing struggle between freedom and fanaticism; between the rule of law and terrorism.

We must be prepared to do all that we can for as long as we must. America is and will remain a target of terrorists precisely because we are leaders; because we act to advance peace, democracy, and basic human values; because we’re the most open society on Earth; and because, as we have shown yet again, we take an uncompromising stand against terrorism . . .
INTRODUCTION

There will be no sanctuary for terrorists. We will defend our people, our interests and our values. We will help people of all faiths, in all parts of the world, who want to live free of fear and violence.
We will persist and we will prevail. Thank you, God bless you and may God bless our country.¹

The president was Bill Clinton, the date was August 20, 1998, and the specific instance was the bombings of U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar as-Salaam, Tanzania, on August 7, 1998; the response was Operation Infinite Reach, in which a total of eighty-eight Tomahawk cruise missiles were sent against camps in Afghanistan and a pharmaceutical plant in Sudan that was erroneously thought to be making chemical weapons. Yet Clinton does not see the bombings or the response as unique: an open-ended script was clearly envisaged. Take away the specificity of the African embassies and this could have been delivered word for word by either President George W. Bush or Ronald Reagan.

The events of August 1998 are significant, but they have complex interrelations of cause and effect and action and response that do not fit a straightforward narrative. The cruise missile attacks were scripted as a reprisal, but so too did they have an effect. Little over two years later, on October 12, 2000, an attack was launched on the USS Cole, moored in Aden Harbor, apparently in part because it was the kind of destroyer that had launched the 1998 cruise missile attacks.² The East African embassy bombs were timed exactly eight years after U.S. troops had arrived in Saudi Arabia to fight the first Gulf War. Other interrelations, contexts, and putative justifications could be added to the story.

The politics of response is thus more nuanced than Clinton, or later Bush, would have us believe. Searching for an origin for the “war on terror” is thus a complicated and ultimately misguided task. Where to begin, when to start? With events that can be dated and located? The attacks by terrorist groups include the Yemeni hotel bombs of December 29, 1992; the attempt to bomb Tower One of the World Trade Center in New York City on February 26, 1993; and the Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia on June 25, 1996. The year 1998 is particularly significant, as this was when bin Laden declared his jihad against Jews and Crusaders; the East African bombings followed. Looking further back, there is the succession of attacks on U.S. targets in Beirut in the 1980s and the bombing of Pan Am 103 in 1988.³ Many other attacks across the world—directly or tangentially linked or entirely disconnected—might be added to this list, each of which provoked consequences and actions in response, either spectacular or covert.
Yet the actions of the United States do not simply follow from these events. Depending on the way you look at it, a whole host of U.S. foreign policies provide a context for all this conflict and enmity. Taking a wider perspective, these incidents can be understood as responses of a kind: to U.S. support for Israel, in particular its occupation of the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and the Golan Heights and its invasions of Lebanon; to U.S. arming of opposition to the Soviets in Afghanistan; to the 1991 Iraq war and its consequences, notably the continued stationing of troops in the Saudi peninsula, the impact of sanctions, and the constant bombing of Iraqi positions in the policing of the “no-fly” zones; to the intervention and ignominious withdrawal from Somalia in 1993; and to a host of other complicated networks and alliances with regimes across the world. This was not lost on the Bush administration, of course, which realized that U.S. policy has implications, but part of its tactics were to deny that this is the case.4

Yet despite these complicated lineages, the “war on terror” is now often taken to begin with the events of September 11, 2001, in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania. In terms of a visible event, this is understandable. In terms of sheer loss of life, these were greater than any single terrorist act that preceded them; however, the number of people who died as a result of sanctions in Iraq following 1991, or those who died as a result of the lack of drugs that were formerly produced by the Sudanese pharmaceutical plant certainly exceed this number, though dispersed through time and space, rather than concentrated in one time frame.5 Other events, such the destruction of Grozny in Chechnya, failed to visually register for the West due in part to the particular politics of the media. And as some have been quick to remind us, more than twice as many children died of diarrhea on September 11, 2001, and die every day, than died in the more-publicized events.6 A similar figure is given for AIDS-related deaths in sub-Saharan Africa alone.7 In 2005, President George W. Bush himself put a figure to part of the consequences of his response, suggesting that at least 30,000 people had died in Iraq since the invasion,8 while other counts have put the figures much higher.9

Inevitably, these tallies risk losing sight—and losing the site—of the problem in making such numerical accounts; there is accountancy in place of grief. Let us not forget, then, that these events are a political, spatial, and temporal marker; yet they are one that we give a particular significance to through our complicity in a construction. The shorthand of “September 11,” or the more loaded “9–11” or “9/11,” masks the spatial context of the events in favor of a temporal indication10—one that is reduced to a
Locations of attacks by nonstate terrorists since 1998
States with U.S. or Allied intervention since the end of the Cold War
calendar date and seeks a privileging of this date for American pain, occluding other events on that day in this and other years. Indeed, this date has been seen as a caesura, dividing world history into a “before” and “after.” Unlike the December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor, which is conveniently referred to only by a place, the lack of a single geographical site has turned the “new Pearl Harbor” into a simple date. In addition, New York City and the “Twin Towers” are much more often noted than the other sites of the September 11 attack.

Yet the implications of these events have not been concentrated in a single point, either temporal or spatial; there is continuity as well as a break; dispersal as much as intensity. Instead, they are widespread in space and time, spreading across spatial scales from the local to the national and from the regional to the global. As Neil Smith indicates, this was both an “utterly local” and a “global event.” But Smith’s important question is, “How did September 11 become a national tragedy?” suggesting that the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were targeted, which are financial and military symbols, rather than more obvious cultural, social, or political symbols of American identity.

A whole range of media, political, and emotional responses indicated these shifts. CNN, for instance, initially used the banner title of “America Under Attack,” which they changed the following day to “America at War.” While there was some concentration on the national, in order to create an international coalition, the emphasis was placed at other times on the eighty different nationalities whose people died on that day. In Bush’s words, “[T]he attack took place on American soil, but it was an attack on the heart and soul of the civilized world.” And, as Le Monde famously declared, “Nous sommes tous Américains,” suggesting a shared experience of suffering that transcended national boundaries. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) invoked Article 5, declaring that the events of September 11 were attacks on all members. But from these different scales of response, it is clear that these events were not, as conventional international relations scholars have tried to suggest, “out-of-geography.” Rather, as Derek Gregory argues, the convoluted origins “have surged inwards and their consequences rippled outwards in complex, overlapping ways.”

Geography and the War on Terror

On September 27, 2001, Bush gave a speech in which he argued that standard practice was no longer valid and that new geographies needed to be conceived for the “war on terror.”
We’re also a nation that is adjusting to a new type of war. This isn’t a conventional war that we’re waging. Ours is a campaign that will have to reflect the new enemy. There’s no longer islands to conquer or beachheads to storm. We face a brand of evil, the likes of which we haven’t seen in a long time in the world. These are people who strike and hide, people who know no borders . . . people who depend upon others. And make no mistake about it, the new war is not only against the evildoers, themselves; the new war is against those who harbor them and finance them and feed them.20

Bush here outlines a number of ways in which geography and the “war on terror” intersect, in part producing a set of circumstances through his invocation of them. He suggests a particular set of geographies, referring back to previous U.S. victories in the Pacific and Europe in World War II, and perhaps the 1991 Gulf War, far more than Cold War events such as Vietnam, which are perhaps intended to be forgotten. This produces imagined and material geographies of terror and response, which both work in different ways. On the one hand, there is the hint of new geographies of threat, where the “enemy” cannot be located straightforwardly; where borders are crossed and permeable. In practice, though, the geographical challenges have been reduced to solutions that fall back on previous ways of doing things, on a basis that is not very far from a fairly conventional political geography. A clear sense of this trajectory can be seen in the explicit linkage of the “evildoers” to those who harbor them, for the most direct targeting has been of states. Indeed, Smith notes that October 7, 2001, is a more appropriate date for the beginning of the “war on terror” than September 11, 2001, for this is when Afghanistan was attacked and war actually started.21 Yet the 1998 strikes and the 1986 bombing of Libya could equally be seen as part of a broader “war on terror.”22

Geographers and others have offered many spatial insights in their analysis of the “war on terror.” This has included looking at the geographical spread of U.S. bases and mapping their interventions in recent years. The ideas of imperialism and colonialism have been given a specifically geographical focus; and the impact on cities has been explored in pioneering ways. Other work has concerned the violent geographies of internment in sites like Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib and the geography of extraordinary rendition. In recent years, there have also been studies of the geographical dimensions of issues concerning hatred and terror more generally.23

Not all work has been critical. A little over a year after the 2001 attacks, the Association of American Geographers (AAG) offered its own contribution to the “war on terror.”24 This was a book edited by two past
presidents and the executive director of the AAG, and thus it served as an almost “official” statement of the relation between U.S. geographers and the Bush administration. In its preface, John Marburger, who became Bush’s Director of Science and Technology Policy, Office of the U.S. President, notes:

When President Bush introduced the notion of War Against Terrorism, my first thought was how a map for such a war would differ from a conventional battle map. Conventional wars are fought for territory, easily measured on a chart with latitude and longitude, but the fronts in the war against terrorism cover multiple dimensions. How can we detect an unprotected flank in this complex territory? How do we measure progress?25

Marburger goes on to suggest that geographers are best qualified to respond to such questions. This is a particular kind of geographical approach: “while technology has aided terrorism, it is to technology that we must turn for tools to counter terrorism.”26 Thus, in this volume, which Marburger calls “timely,” the modern tools of geography—geographical information systems (GIS), remote sensing, data modeling, and the like—are brought to bear on the issues.

What is at stake in Marburger’s claims? Leaving aside the peculiarity of his first thoughts, the core is the idea that territory, understood to be two-dimensional, destined to be conquered, and easily charted, is passé, and that the “war on terror” is more complex, more multiple, and more diverse. Dimensions beyond those of latitude and longitude—presumably including verticality, and potentially including virtuality and temporality—need to be taken into account. Geographers can, on this reckoning, be relied upon to offer new insights into surveillance to detect unprotected potential targets for terror, or to provide new models by which to “measure,” in a particular sense of calculative politics, what counts as “progress.” This relates to Donald Rumsfeld’s 2003 memo bemoaning the lack of “metrics to know if we are winning or losing the global war on terror,” which later led to a Pentagon call for contractors to develop just such calculative measures.27

Interrogating the basis for just such claims, questions, and assumptions is at the very heart of any truly critical perspective on the “war on terror.” In a number of ways, the “war on terror” has demonstrated the importance of Henri 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 “there is a politics of space because space is political.”28
Considering the interrelation of the spatial dimension of politics and the political dimensions of space provides an important, arguably essential frame for understanding the “war on terror.” This book approaches that topic from a very particular, yet crucial, angle. This is the question of territory.

Much of the work on the geographical aspects of the “war on terror” has operated within what might be called a geoeconomic register. Matthew Sparke, for instance, speaks of “a globalist geoeconomics that both builds on and buttresses the metanarrative of globalization’s integrative inexorability,” analyzing what he and colleagues call “neoliberal geopolitics.” Neorealism is, on these terms, the political and military support for neoliberalism. Neoconservatism imposes a particular political and economic system, constructing a neocolonialism of “democracy promotion” and “freedom,” which are effectively ciphers for a Western model of how a state should operate. Thirty years ago, Giovanni Arrighi suggested that the United States had “freed itself from the shackles of formal imperialism, which had ended by cramping its military and financial supremacy, in order to exercise its hegemony through market forces.” Yet the “war on terror” has demonstrated that military force may be needed to shore up the financial hegemony; a shift from the “hegemony of consent” to the “hegemony of force.” In a sense, this development was an inevitable consequence of the neoconservative criticism of Clinton. While he was hoping to spread freedom and democracy through the extension of global markets, his interventions were criticized as lacking a defining logic or purpose. Globalization is thus the economic strategy, and U.S. militarism its political counterpart. Indeed, the interrelation of politics and economics is central: nicely summarized by Phillips as “trumpets of democracy, drums of gasoline.” Yet the aim is broader and more subtle than one that can be grasped by the claim that it is “all about oil.” Rather, the project is to “make the world safe for capitalism.” It is therefore revealing that the conflict was portrayed by Bush as a “global war on terror”—global both in its scope and in its goal.

In his analysis of the “long twentieth century,” Arrighi argues that there is a “recurrent contradiction between an “endless” accumulation of capital and a comparatively stable organization of political space.”

Central to such an understanding is the definition of “capitalism” and “territorialism” as opposite modes of rule or logics of power. Territorialist rulers identify power with the extent and populousness of their domains, and conceive of wealth/capital as a means or a by-product of the pursuit of territorial expansion. Capitalist rulers, in contrast, identify power with the extent of their command over scarce resources
and consider territorial acquisitions as a means and a by-product of the accumulation of capital.³⁸

Arrighi notes how these discrete logics actually operate in relation to each other “within a given spatio-temporal context,” and that as a consequence, “actual outcomes have departed significantly, even diametrically, from what is implicit in each logic conceived abstractly.”³⁹ It is this insight which David Harvey has illuminatingly brought to bear on U.S. practice in the current moment, drawing out the tensions between what he calls, following Arrighi, the logic of territory and the logic of capital.⁴⁰

The wider economic aspects of the “war on terror” have received extensive analysis, and this book does not seek to repeat these discussions. Instead, through a focus on the territorial questions, it adds a crucial element: an insistence on one aspect of the “geo” in the geoeconomic and geopolitical. Deborah Cowen and Neil Smith suggest that “where geopolitics can be understood as a means of acquiring territory towards a goal of accumulating wealth, geoeconomics reverses the procedure, aiming directly at the accumulation of wealth through market control. The acquisition or control of territory is not at all irrelevant but is a tactical option rather than a strategic necessity.”⁴¹ While sympathetic to this argument, this book seeks to dig a little deeper into the specifically territorial aspects of this change. As Cowen and Smith caution, “the rise of geoeconomic calculation is highly uneven temporally as well as spatially, it is episodic, and it can never fully supplant geopolitics.”⁴² What this requires is an understanding of the territorial in order to recognize the relation between the ongoing geopolitics in the geoeconomic moment.

Territory itself cannot be assumed to have remained unchanged as strategies toward it morph into tactics. Indeed, while territorial acquisition may have generally become a tactical rather than a strategic goal, this does not mean that there is no territorial aspect to state practice, nor that territory does not continue to be an object of nonstate actors. Today’s territorial logic is not the same as previous imperial practices. Indeed, a complicated set of territorial and political divisions and incorporations have occurred over the past several years, the underlying structures of which become more evident if the temporal scope is broadened beyond simply the period since 2001. Yet while we should certainly rethink and examine, and be open to analysis of the new, we must not forget that the war has thus far been fought with a very conventional sense of territory in mind—territory that has been targeted, bombed, and invaded.

This book, therefore, offers an interrogation of the territorial logic of the present, suggesting that this is a crucial ingredient of any examination of
the tension between capitalist accumulation and state-territorial constraints around the distribution of resources and the accumulation of wealth. Despite the importance of this topic, as this book aims to demonstrate, there has been little work looking at the question of territory explicitly. Indeed, at times the territorial has been distinctly underplayed. Al-Qaeda has often been portrayed as a deterritorialized network rather than as operating within, between, and against existing territorial frames; and while the challenges to international law have been widely discussed, there has been little analysis of the implications for the legal basis of the relationship between sovereignty and territory. This book seeks to provide such a corrective angle. In addition, while the term “terror” has been widely employed, there has been little examination of what it actually is. The definition and scope of terror and territory, and their relation to the state, require careful analysis.

**Terror and the State**

In this book, “terror” is understood in a broad sense—from the practices of the nonstate actors traditionally labeled as terrorist organizations to the actions of states in their international relations; and from the bombs, missiles, and bullets of death and destruction to the imagined geographies of threat and response. States clearly operate in ways that terrify. The terrorism of nonstate actors is a very small proportion of terrorism taken as a whole, with states having killed far more than those who oppose them. This is as true in the “war on terror” as in countless other conflicts. For many writers, therefore, the distinction is one of degree, one of tactics, rather than a complete disassociation. This leads to a number of provocative formulations, which act as a spur to thought even in their glibness: “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter”; “a terrorist is someone who has a bomb but doesn’t have an air force”; the car bomb is the “poor man’s air force.”

In his book *Luftbeben: An den Quellen des Terrors*, which literally translates as “Air Tremors: At the Source of Terror,” the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk argues for an analysis of terrorism from and of the air, recognizing the power of aerial assault, poison gas attacks in World War I, and the gassing of Jews in the Holocaust. These are, of course, actions of states. He broadens the analysis to look at radioactivity, meteorology, pneumatology, and thus provides a series of analyses of how commanding the air can terrorize the earth. To express this idea, he coins the term “atmoterorism”—a broadening of terrorism from the earth to the atmosphere. Sloterdijk’s point is that many forms of terrorism target
We hope you have enjoyed this short preview. Terror and Territory: The Spatial Extent of Sovereignty by Stuart Elden can be purchased from Amazon here:

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