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## THEMENSCHWERPUNKT

## The Politics of Security:

## A View from New York Five Years After 9/11

Jonathan Bach\*

**Abstract:** The politics of security in the United States after September 11th 2001 has resulted in the expansion of executive power under cover of intense politicization. At the same time a new logic of collective security is emerging centered around »vital systems« as infrastructure becomes increasingly vulnerable to real attacks and natural disasters. The result is a discourse of preparedness marked by a historic bureaucratic reorganization. This reorganization will have long-term effects on the structure and logic of both domestic and global security, and will also co-exist uneasily with the Bush Administration's focus on increasing the power of the executive office.

**Keywords:** Security, United States, Preparedness, 9/11, Rule of Law

When Michel DeCerteau, the late French scholar, famously sipped Manhattans from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center he felt like Icarus flying above the sea-like city, the power of perspective capturing a godlike rationality unachievable 418 meters down in the »dark space where crowds move back and forth.«<sup>1</sup> He described his orderly descent to the Manhattan streets below as an Icarian fall, but we are all now painfully aware of the towers' own Icarian and iconic fall, an eruption amidst the order of the modern world. For us New Yorkers, for whom the skyline forms the daily visual landscape, the collapse of the towers evoked an impossible natural disaster: a mountain vanished;

dust storms transforming lower Manhattan into an eerie, silent, archeological time warp; clouds raining thousands of pieces of paper like a surreal dream; a yawning, smoldering crater marked by a seemingly indelible plume under incongruously clear autumn skies. The sheer excess unleashed by the destruction overwhelmed any single interpretation of the cataclysm. As George Bataille writes, once excess is generated it must be spent, profitably or catastrophically.<sup>2</sup> The legacy of the attack lies not only in the human and material loss but also in the responses it provokes.

Security – national, domestic, »homeland«, global, private, and public – was and continues to be the frame through which

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1 Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 92.

2 George Bataille, »The Notion of Expenditure« in *Georges Bataille: Visions of Excess – Selected Writings, 1927-1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) pp. 116-129.

the attack is processed and evaluated. As an empty signifier, the proliferation of the word »security« complicates its meaningful apprehension. Security is not a static element that can be isolated, deduced, and measured in a formal sense, even if its effect can be clearly discerned. The subject of security certainly includes, but goes beyond, the physical integrity of a state to include the state's ability to form, maintain, and reproduce its given political order. As our understanding of security changes so too will our political society. In this context, the task of understanding the politics of security five years after September 11th, 2001 calls forth two observations. The first concerns the predictable political manipulation associated with security-related matters. The second concerns shifts within the normative rationality upon which the logic of security rests.

Traumatic events are the raw material of history, and it can be no surprise that the attacks of 9/11 provided grist for political opportunism. One can postulate an almost irresistible political payoff that comes from expanding the reach of the term security. Designating something as a security issue, following the analysis of Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, is a form of performative speech that triggers increased levels of state mobilization and »threat-defense« logic. Accordingly, a security designation moves issues from the public sphere into a less transparent, less democratic realm, justifying emergency or secrecy measures that can conveniently be used to mute criticism and remove actions from public scrutiny.<sup>3</sup> The more traumatic the event, the greater its invocation in the name of security.

This dynamic underlies the widespread anxiety about a »permanent state of exception« as a legacy of September 11th.<sup>4</sup> The manifestation of exception does not itself undermine a system. On the contrary, exception is a necessary function of sovereignty and integral to the political order; societal change itself is arguably premised on a productive tension between the system-changing and system-maintaining effects of exception.<sup>5</sup> Major destabilizing events, such as September 11th, however, raise the fear that exception will cease to play a productive function and become pathological. The nightmare is the triggering of a self-sustaining, anti-democratic process giving rise to a permanent state of emergency and its teleological dead end of destroying the system in order to save it.

Such an outcome is never foreordained, though the Bush Administration has provided plenty of fodder for fears of unrestrained and unreflective power. Given the Republican's crude custodianship of the country's conscience after September 11th it is too tempting to be a Cassandra and overlook that the United States has historically weathered worse governmental encroachments on civil rights and democratic principle. By the same token, we should not underestimate how the constitutional crisis being provoked by the Bush Administration under the rubric of national security is the thread connecting

3 Barry Buzan/Ole Wæver/Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder: Lynn Reiner, 1998).

4 Re-articulated, most recently, by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, drawing on Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) and *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

5 See Sergei Prozorov, »X/Xs: Toward a General Theory of the Exception« *Alternatives*, No. 30, 2005, pp.81-112.

the most controversial aspects of US national and homeland security policy, including the use of torture, indefinite detention, »enemy combatant« status, Guantanamo Bay and secret prisons, reporting on implementation of the Patriot Act, warrants for wiretaps and domestic intelligence gathering.

A confrontation is brewing between the executive and the legislative and judicial branches of government that unsettles established principles of judicial review and separation of powers. At stake are the checks and balances that make executive power accountable to the Congress, the courts, and the press. The President has modified more than 750 laws through »signing statements« that assert the prerogative of the »unitary executive« to unilaterally interpret or fully ignore the law.<sup>6</sup> As Bush so succinctly put it (though in a different context), »I'm the decider, and I decide what is best.«<sup>7</sup> The transformation of the Presidency into an increasingly unaccountable office is resulting in new clashes between state's authority and the national security powers of the federal government, turning civil liberties issues into states' rights questions and leading even conservative supporters to worry that Bush considers the executive branch above the law.<sup>8</sup>

It is debatable to what extent Bush is breaking new ground or using September 11th to push presidential powers to the logical extremes identified 32 years ago by historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., who warned then that the tension between the Presidency and other branches of government was producing »a conception of presidential power so spacious and peremptory as to imply a radical transformation of the traditional polity.«<sup>9</sup> The lasting impact of this new version of the imperial presidency is unclear, yet internationally it has already caused a hemorrhage of US credibility among allies. Ill conceived and incompetently administered policies, especially in Iraq, are regularly fortified by a messianic hubris that hinders effective responses to proliferation, extremism, civil conflict, and nuclear programs in North Korea and Iran. As missed opportunities, scandals and setbacks multiply, the arrogance adds insult to injury: »We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality« blithely stated one of Bush's senior advisers, »We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.«<sup>10</sup>

6 John W. Dean, »The Problem with Presidential Signing Statements: Their Use and Misuse by the Bush Administration« *Find Law*, January 13, 2006, <http://writ.news.findlaw.com/dean/20060113.html>.

7 »President Bush Nominates Rob Portman as OMB Director and Susan Schwab for USTR«, News Release, The White House, April 18, 2006. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/04/20060418-1.html>. Bush is known for similar statements, such as the one he made to Bob Woodward in his book *Bush at War* that »I do not need to explain why I say things. That's the interesting thing about being the president. Maybe somebody needs to explain to me why they say something, but I don't feel I owe anybody an explanation.« Elizabeth Drew quotes a Republican lobbyist summing up the Administration by saying »It's we just want it our way and we don't want to be bothered by talking to other people about it.« See both quotes in »Power Grab« *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 53, No. 11, June 22, 2006.

8 Grover Norquist, the arch conservative Bush supporter, said »If you interpret the Constitution's saying that the president is commander in chief to mean that the president can do anything he wants and can ignore the laws you don't have a constitution: you have a king.« Quoted in Elizabeth Drew, *Ibid.* On the issue of state's rights versus national security powers see »New Jersey Demands Data on Phone Call Surveillance and Is Sued by U.S.« *The New York Times*, June 16, 2006, B1.

9 Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), p.xxvi.

10 Ron Suskind, »Without a Doubt« *The New York Times*, Sunday, October 17, 2004, Section 6, p.44.

The Bush Administration's manipulation of September 11th is a textbook illustration of the »securitization« of key issues for political gain and their subsequent relocation from the sphere of »normal« to »panic« politics.<sup>11</sup> But while we endure the manipulative securitization of many areas of social life and the mendacious politicization of serious security issues, we also interact everyday with a globally networked system of unprecedented vulnerability that turns mundane infrastructural systems into targets. This reality has resulted in shifts in the framing of security that are not reducible to cynical political power plays (though not immune from them either).

The most notable shift concerns the bureaucratic reorganization of US institutions of security. Foremost in this category is the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the new, third-largest cabinet department with 180,000 employees whose mission of protecting national territory includes the formerly diversified functions of emergency management, intelligence analysis, customs and border protection, citizenship and immigration, transportation security, coast guard, and the secret service. Other notable bureaucratic restructuring includes the creation of the Office of Director for National Intelligence to integrate information from the existing disparate intelligence agencies, and the United States Northern Command (NorthCom) the first-ever military command for the continental US.<sup>12</sup>

What is striking about DHS and NorthCom is the dual focus on terrorism and natural disasters. This reflects September 11th's catalytic effect on the post-Cold War perception of security issues from the old fear of nuclear war to the new fear of anarchic random attacks. While the vastly more destructive threat of all-out nuclear war led to widespread psychic numbing due to the difficulty in imagining the unimaginable, the threat of terrorism in the wake of September 11th gave rise to a new awareness of vulnerability at the level of everyday life.<sup>13</sup> The randomness, civilian targets, speed and types of destruction called for a response that emphasized preparation for »low probability – high consequence« risks previously associated with chemical leaks and nuclear power accidents.<sup>14</sup> The existing model for this was emergency management, which, as Stephen Collier and Andrew Lakoff explain, grew out of the civil defense efforts and »all hazards« planning from the early to middle Cold War.<sup>15</sup>

Today a discourse of »preparedness« is ascendant, signifying an important shift in the framing and practice of security to include natural disasters as well as human maliciousness. NorthCom's official mission, for example, »includes domestic disaster relief operations that occur during fires, hurricanes,

floods and earthquakes« and flu pandemics, while the DHS is infamously responsible for both terrorism and hurricanes.<sup>16</sup> Collier and Lakoff identify »preparedness« as a new normative rationality for an emerging logic of »vital systems security.«<sup>17</sup> Vital systems security is the security discourse for the era of infrastructure vulnerability, and it is distinct in its aims, objects, form of rationality, and apparatuses from the other major discourses of security dealing with sovereignty and biopolitics.<sup>18</sup>

Vital systems such as roads, water, medical services or stock markets are not only integral to a state's internal political and economic order, but to the global political economy. Port security, for example, is as much about maintaining the circulation of commodities as it is about preventing the importation of a weapon.<sup>19</sup> Stephen Flynn, an outspoken former Coast Guard commander, testified before the US Senate that »the entire worldwide intermodal transportation industry would effectively be brought to its knees – as would much of the freight movements that make up international trade« by the response to a cargo container attack today.<sup>20</sup> This »soft underbelly of globalization« makes vital systems security a form of global security.<sup>21</sup>

The bureaucratic restructuring after 9/11 also brings into sharp relief the conflicted competencies of federal, state, and local, as well as public and private, actors. This is certainly part of any process of institutional change, and as with all bureaucratic restructuring there are new opportunities for boondoggles, inefficiencies, and pork politics that undermine the preparedness principles upon which this massive effort is based.<sup>22</sup> Of greater academic concern is the ambiguity created by the preparedness security discourse and the corresponding bureaucratic reorganization. On the one hand, one could read into the overlapping and crosscutting responsibilities of the DHS and NorthCom a marked blurring of the military and civilian realms. The echo of permanent wartime mobilization

16 See [http://www.northcom.mil/about\\_us/about\\_us.htm](http://www.northcom.mil/about_us/about_us.htm) and Gail Braymen, »NORTHCOM Prepares for Possible Pandemic« American Forces Information Services, United States Department of Defense, February 2006, [http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Feb2006/20060201\\_4070.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Feb2006/20060201_4070.html).

17 Stephen J. Collier/Andrew Lakoff, »Vital Systems Security« ARC Discussion Paper 2006, [http://www.anthropos-lab.net/publications/doc/Collier\\_Vital%20Systems.pdf](http://www.anthropos-lab.net/publications/doc/Collier_Vital%20Systems.pdf). Collier and Lakoff describe vital systems security as referring to »the protection of systems that are critical to maintaining economic and political order. These include key infrastructures (roads, electricity grids, communications, food and water supply), key institutions (markets and governmental entities), and key public services (hospitals).«

18 While vital systems entail a rationality of preparedness, state enemies and population problems such as hygiene and poverty were approached, respectively, through the rationalities of strategy and insurance. See *Ibid.*, Chart 1: Political Logics of Collective Security.

19 *Ibid.*

20 Statement of Stephen Flynn, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, »Cargo Containers: The Next Terrorist Target?» March 20, 2003.

21 Quote from Stephen Flynn on the CBS News Program *60 Minutes*, »On the Waterfront« August 3, 2003.

22 Two recent examples include the furor surrounding the recent allocation of some of the \$3.6 billion in DHS funds for 2006, where Vice President Cheney's home state of Wyoming received 25 times more in preparedness funds per capita than New York, and the controversy surrounding the revolving door of senior officials at the DHS to companies that do business with the department. See Eric Lipton, »Security Cuts for New York and Washington« *The New York Times* June 1, 2006, A1. See also Veronique de Rugy, »What does Homeland Security Spending Buy?» (Washington DC: American Enterprise Institute Working Paper, April 2005) and Shawn Rees, »Fiscal Year 2005 Homeland Security Grant Program: State Allocations and Issues for Congressional Oversight« (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, December 13, 2004.); On the revolving door see Eric Lipton, »Former Antiterror Officials Find Industry Pays Better« *The New York Times* June 18, 2006, A1.

11 See Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Op. Cit.*, p.34.

12 The Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs are the two largest cabinet departments, followed by DHS. The DHS was formed in November 2002, NORTHCOM in October 2002, and the Office of the National Director of Intelligence in December 2004.

13 The classic text on psychic numbing is Robert J. Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (New York: Random House, 1968). See also Alan Winkler, *Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety about the Atom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

14 See Ray Waller, ed., *Low-Probability – High-Consequence Risk Analysis: Issues, Methods and Case Studies* (Heidelberg: Springer, 1984).

15 Stephen J. Collier and Andrew Lakoff, »Distributed Preparedness« Forthcoming in Deborah Cowen and Emily Gilbert, eds., *War, Citizenship, Territory* (New York: Routledge 2007); and Andrew Lakoff, »Preparing for the Next Emergency« *Public Culture* (forthcoming).



appears either as evidence of a permanent state of emergency or an accurate reflection of the domestic dimension of the »war on terror«. On the other hand, to the extent that preparation for terrorism and tornados falls into the same category, the political mobilization quality of the »war on terror« may actually be diminished by its practical homology with the more politically neutral planning for natural disasters.<sup>23</sup> Today we find the new security frontier at the intersection of the new paradigm of preparedness and the older national security state.

The politics of security in the United States five years after September 11th is a mixture of institutional adaptation to the new logics of the preparedness paradigm and the old game of political manipulation for partisan gain. Both of these dynamics affect the role of the United States in global security. Preparedness could be a vehicle for latter-day isolationists, or it could be a basis for new forms of international cooperation on

<sup>23</sup> Which is not to say that the preparations and consequences of natural disasters cannot be terribly politicized. One need only think of the way Tokyo Mayor Shintaro Ishihara has manipulated public sentiment against Koreans and Chinese during the annual disaster preparedness event on the anniversary of the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake, or the pathetically botched response to the destruction of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Nonetheless, it is axiomatic that one cannot attribute intention to a hurricane or earthquake the way one can to a human entity.

topics from trade to disaster response. The misuse of power by the Bush Administration could finally call forth a principled response from Congress, or it could result in an even deeper crisis of the rule of law with perilous consequences both at home and abroad.

In the months after the attack there was a gap between those for whom 9/11 »changed everything« and those for whom 9/11 did not warrant a historical caesura. With our very limited hindsight we can nonetheless identify September 11th as a critical event for the politics of security in the United States in that it acted as a catalyst for widespread bureaucratic reorganization (such as the DHS), provided opportunities for audacious policy adventures (as in Iraq), hardened ideologies (as with radical Islamic groups), and propelled the concentration of executive power (as with Bush's championing of the unitary executive). A historical institutionalist may well consider these last years of the Bush Administration a critical juncture, the path dependent outcome of which will determine the security of us all for a long time to come. We can only work to insure that the dynamics set in motion by the attack will be consonant with the rule of law, not its further attenuation. And I still miss the towers every day.

## Der »Dschihadismus«: Gewaltideologie einer politischen Sekte

Kai Hirschmann\*

**Abstract:** The fight against terrorism with traditional instruments of power like armed forces, police and repressive diplomacy often misses the intended effect. The recognition that organisations of fighters under the ideology of the »jihad« have similarities with the structures of sects, must be taken into account in the fight against the Islamic terror. The leading heads of the Islamic terror are rather »propagandists of the jihad« than hierarchic leaders and, therefore, quickly replaceable. If individual people of a terrorist organisation get killed or force is used on its adherents, the idea of jihad will rather win than lose popularity. Because of that, a theological and political analysis of the ideology of the Islamic terror, by the western-Christian communities and the muslim parishes, must become the aim of all efforts.

**Keywords:** Islamistischer Terrorismus, Terrorismus, Dschihadismus, Sekte, Islamismus, Terrorismusbekämpfung

Der Kampf<sup>1</sup> gegen den Terrorismus wird heute weltweit geführt. Leider oft mit untauglichen Mitteln, weil es häufig an einer detaillierten Analyse dieses Gewaltphänomens mangelt. Eine personen- und gruppenbezogene Bekämpfung mit traditionellen Machtinstrumenten wie Streitkräften, Polizei und repressiver Diplomatie läuft häufig ins Leere, weil der Gegner sich nicht in klassischen, hierarchischen oder personenbezogenen Strukturen organisiert hat. Die derzeitigen Protagonisten des weltweiten gewaltbereiten Islamismus und Dschihadismus sind Dienstleister für eine

Gewaltideologie, nicht aber deren Schöpfer. Die Organisation von Kämpfern unter der Ideologie des »Dschihad«, die sehr wenig mit dem Islam zu tun hat, ist vergleichbar mit Sekten und ihren Strukturen. Daher muss bei der Bekämpfung des islamistischen Terrorismus bedacht werden: Es handelt sich um eine Idee bzw. Weltanschauung in den Köpfen, die sich weltweit wie eine Sekte strukturiert und verhält.

### 1. Charakteristika von Sekten

Der gewaltbereite Islamismus und Dschihadismus ist bisher selten unter dem Sektenaspekt betrachtet worden, da bei der

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