Cities, War, and Terrorism: Towards an Urban Geopolitics
Edited by Stephen Graham
Copyright © 2004 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

Part III

Exposed Cities: Urban Impacts of Terrorism and the "War on Terror"

---

13 Urban Warfare: A Tour of the Battlefield 251
Michael Sorkin

14 The "War on Terrorism" and Life in Cities after September 11, 2001 263
Peter Marcuse

15 Recasting the "Ring of Steel": Designing Out Terrorism in the City Of London? 276
Jon Coaffee

16 Technology vs. "Terrorism": Circuits of City Surveillance Since September 11, 2001 297
David Lyon

17 Urban Dimensions of the Punishment of Afghanistan by US Bombs 312
Marc W. Herold

Introduction

> Cities are especially vulnerable to the stresses of conflict . . . City-dwellers are particularly at risk when their complex and sophisticated infrastructure systems are destroyed and rendered inoperable, or when they become isolated from external contacts. (Barakat, 1998: 12)

> There is no technical solution to the vulnerability of modern populations to weapons of mass destruction. (Schell, 2001: 4)

> Enclosed space turns out to be a trap rather than a way out. (Lütticken, 2001: 118)

Part III of this book emphasizes the inescapable fact that, in a world of intensifying globalization and urbanization, the "urban" and the "international" blur into one another. The division between "domestic" and "international" politics has now melted away. Terrorist acts, and acts of war, are simultaneously global and local events. Strategies of surveillance, militarization, terrorism, social control, and war are now constituted through transnational webs of power and technology which reconstruct "target" cities both in the advanced capitalist world and in the global South in parallel.

All of these processes provide enormous challenges to the ways in which we conceptualize, experience, and attempt to shape cities and urban life. As the crude war-mongering of fundamentalists on both sides of the current transnational struggle threatens to fatally undermine ideas of the open city, of cultural plurality, of democratic dissent, of robust citizenship before the law, and of positive cycles of immigration and urban, diasporic mixing, this part of the book seeks to begin to address these critical challenges.

The chapters in Part III demonstrate that 9/11, the "war on terror," and the intensifying social controls that are part of the "homeland security" drive must be analyzed in parallel. Chapter 13, by the architect and writer Michael Sorkin, meditates on the urban experiences of catastrophic terrorism, and state terror against cities, across the world. As a New Yorker, Sorkin writes about his own experiences of Manhattan since September 2001 and contrasts these with his experience of a visit to Ramallah in the spring of 2003. While these two cities clearly face radically different situations, Sorkin nevertheless captures similarities: the deep anxieties of urban life; the asphyxiating effects of militarized security on the daily flows of city life; the edginess and the collapsing infrastructures; the palpable fortification of urban space.

Lambasting the emerging architectures, urbanisms, and technologies of what he calls the "national security city," Sorkin ends with a warning that this rapid transformation will divert the city "from its human tasks by the architecture of manufactured fear." The challenge, to him, is for congeniality and citizenship to assert themselves against the progressive militarization and securitization of urban life.

Chapter 14 explores in much more detail the ways in which the 9/11 attacks, and the "war on terror" and "homeland security" drives which have followed, have dramatically reshaped the economic structures, political dynamics, and the treatment of urban planning problems within New York City. Here, the urbanist Peter Marcuse examines in detail how the protagonists in the war on terror – security companies, real estate companies, surveillance operations, and all those set to benefit from the homeland security drive – have sought to rework the institutional fabric of urban governance in New York to directly benefit their own interests. This is

leading to an increased emphasis on the barricading and "citadelization" of strategic buildings and a reduced emphasis on public policy planning. These trends have combined with an accelerating decentralization of corporate office jobs, a collapse of tourism-related industries, a massive fiscal crisis, and a big reduction in social-welfare oriented programs. The result, Marcuse argues, is that downtown New York as a whole faces an unprecedented economic, social, and political crisis. Marcuse concludes by arguing that the strategic discussions that are ongoing about the need to rebuild and replan New York will have a critical influence in the future development of this iconic global city.

The ways in which "global" city cores are being restructured to address the real and perceived threats of terrorist attack are also the focus of chapter 15, by planning academic Jon Coaffee. He provides a detailed analysis of the ways in which London's financial district has been remodeled and remanaged since a series of spectacular terrorist attacks by the IRA devastated key parts of the City of London in 1992 and 1993. Coaffee shows how a powerful governance coalition came together after these events to construct a "ring of steel" around the strategic heart of the financial district. This combined urban design, traffic management and high-tech surveillance elements. The story of this attempt to "design out" terrorism is a complex one. It illustrates the ways in which constructions of security, in response to specific threats, invariably creep into attempts to control wider incursions and perceptions of threat (for example, anti-globalization protestors or small-scale crime). Coaffee also underlines the tensions between barricading and separating off strategic urban spaces, and the imperatives of maintaining flow, connectivity, and the appearance of "normality" in the key geo-economic enclaves of globalized capitalism. Thus, constructions of "security" are as much about image and perception as physical barricades and high-tech surveillance systems.

Coaffee's emphasis on the role of high-tech surveillance systems in urban responses to real or perceived threats of terrorist violence usefully leads into chapter 16. Here, sociologist David Lyon provides a state-of-the-art analysis of the massive "surveillance push" that is occurring in cities across the world as part of the so-called war on terrorism. Stressing the ambivalent tensions that surround the efforts to continually record, monitor, and surveille a widening portion of the day-to-day life of cities, Lyon shows how a whole suite of devices and "technical fixes" are being installed and celebrated. These cover biometric surveillance, ID cards, CCTV, face-recognition technology, and communications monitoring. As such systems become more interlinked, and more automatic, Lyon sounds a note of caution.

While Lyon argues it is unhelpful to construct sinister conspiracy theories to explain this growing urban surveillance "assemblage," he does stress that

a purely technological response to the real or perceived risks of catastrophic urban terrorism is bound to fail even on its own terms. More worrying still, he shows how state power will inevitably be centralized in the process; social discrimination will increasingly be built into hidden, automated, technological systems which operate across transnational scales; and accountability for these systems will probably whither under the carefully constructed imperatives of "homeland security."

Chapter 17 attempts to balance the emphasis of preceding chapters on urban security and the war on terror in affluent, northern cities such as New York and London – placed as they are in the geostrategic capitalist heartlands of the global North. For it is crucial to remember that, as well as a creeping militarization of urban sites in North America and Europe, the war on terror has involved massive aerial and terrestrial onslaughts on the civilians of Afghanistan and Iraq (as well as many smaller scale, covert military operations elsewhere). With both countries already deeply impoverished by war or sanctions, the results of these invasions have been, and continue to be, bloody and catastrophic.

In this context, Marc Herold – a leading analyst of the history of US aerial bombing – looks in detail at how the punishment of Afghanistan by US bombers since autumn 2001 has impacted on daily urban and rural life in this extremely poor country. In particular, Herold outlines in detail the murderous impacts of the use of coercive air power on the civilians in Afghanistan's few cities. Looking beyond the thousands of dead and injured, Herold also traces the long-term devastation that these attacks – and their deadly legacies of unexploded ordinance – have wrought on already-fragile systems of infrastructure, healthcare, survival, and psychological and economic well-being.

Placing the attacks in the context of the long history of aerial US assaults in the past three decades, Herold concludes that, because they had second-degree intentionality – that is, US military planners knew very well that their attacks would kill large numbers of innocent civilians – these assaults need to be seen as acts of state terrorism. These were even more murderous and lethal than the acts of informal terrorism in the USA on September 11, 2001 that they were supposedly meant to avenge.