CITIES, WAR, AND TERRORISM

TOWARDS AN URBAN GEOPOLITICS

Edited by

Stephen Graham
“This is a brilliant, disturbing book. Modern cities have often been seen as places of extraordinary creativity and creative destruction, but for this very reason they are also often sites of spectacular military and paramilitary violence. These essays unsettle so many taken-for-granted ways of thinking about cities. Their authors crouch and scurry along streets that, for too long, have seemed opaque to our political and intellectual imaginations. There is a tremendous power and urgency to their arguments that should be confronted by anyone concerned at the intimacy of the connections between cities, war, and terrorism.”

Derek Gregory, author of *The Colonial Present*

“*Cites, War, and Terrorism* is a rare accomplishment. Bringing together a truly interdisciplinary group of authors, it provides the first, original investigation of the urbanization of modern conflict. In their plural ways and myriad sites, the essays in this book investigate the changing nature of the contemporary battlespace and the implosion of distinctions between inside and outside, civilian and military. Together, they mark the beginning of a new and vital field of analysis – an urban geopolitics – that must concern us all.”

David Campbell, author of *Writing Security*

“Acts of war and terror against cities and their inhabitants (both anti-state and state sanctioned) are saturating our contemporary world. Yet urban researchers are in denial of this starkest of contemporary urban realities. Graham brings together the renegade thinkers and researchers who are tracking the ways in which global geopolitics is imploding into the urban world. *Cities, War, and Terrorism* is a stunningly successful synthesis of the subtle interpenetration of global geopolitics and the micro-politics of cities and neighborhoods. It marks the beginning of a new and crucial research domain: that of urban geopolitics. This book must, and will, change the way urban researchers and planners think about and explore city regions. It helps to make sense of the ways in which the historic functions of cities and nation-states (social welfare, education, health, planning) are being overwhelmed by the imperative of ‘security’ and the politics of fear. Purposely provocative and deeply disturbing.”

Leonie Sandercock, author of *Towards Cosmopolis*
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Edited by
Stephen Graham
Studies in Urban and Social Change


The Blackwell Studies in Urban and Social Change aim to advance debates and empirical analyses stimulated by changes in the fortunes of cities and regions across the world. Topics range from monographs on single places to large-scale comparisons across East and West, North and South. The series is explicitly interdisciplinary; the editors judge books by their contribution to intellectual solutions rather than according to disciplinary origin.

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The Blackwell Studies in Urban and Social Change series aims to advance theoretical debates and empirical analyses stimulated by changes in the fortunes of cities and regions across the world. Among topics taken up in past volumes and welcomed for future submissions are:

- Connections between economic restructuring and urban change
- Urban divisions, difference, and diversity
- Convergence and divergence among regions of east and west, north, and south
- Urban and environmental movements
- International migration and capital flows
- Trends in urban political economy
- Patterns of urban-based consumption

The series is explicitly interdisciplinary; the editors judge books by their contribution to intellectual solutions rather than according to disciplinary origin.

Proposals may be submitted to members of the series Editorial Committee:

Harvey Molotch
Linda McDowell
Margit Mayer
Chris Pickvance
This book is the culmination of a widespread, collective effort. Through its production I have generated considerable debts of gratitude.

First and foremost, I must thank Simon Marvin for his friendship and inspiration over the past twelve years. This book is the result of three years’ collaborative work through which Simon and I have tried to unearth some of the links between cities, war, and terrorism. Starting before 9/11, when we began to organize a conference called Cities as Strategic Sites (held in Manchester in November 2002), this collaborative work has been central in the shaping of this book. While Simon’s name is not on the cover, and I have carried out the final stages of the editing, Simon has played a massive role in shaping this work in terms of the organization and running of that conference (which brought together first drafts of many of the chapters here), fundraising, sourcing literature, approaching authors, structuring the book, and developing theoretical and analytical discussions.

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The following authors would like to make acknowledgments for their respective chapters:


Martin Coward would like to thank the University of Sussex for financial assistance in obtaining permissions for the image of Mostar Bridge. Parts of this chapter are based on material from “Community as heterogeneous ensemble: Mostar and multiculturalism,” *Alternatives*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2002, copyright (2002) by Lynne Rienner Publishers. Used with permission. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at *Cities as Strategic Sites: Militarization, Anti-Globalization and Warfare* (a conference at the University of Salford’s Centre for Sustainable Urban and Regional Futures) and the University of Sussex. He would like to thank those present on these occasions for their comments. He would also like to thank David Campbell for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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David Lyon’s chapter was originally presented as a paper at the International Sociological Association meetings in Brisbane, July 2002, and a revised version appeared in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, September 2003. This version is further revised. Some sections appear in Lyon (2003). David Lyon would also like to thank Bart Simon of Concordia University for discussions on the distinction between monitoring and identifying.

The first part of Martin Shaw’s chapter was originally published as “Nueva guerras urbanas,” *Dos, Dos: Revista Sobre Las Cuidades* (Valladolid, Spain), 2, 1997, pp. 67–75, and he is grateful to the editors of that journal for first stimulating him to write about the issue. This work then appeared in English as “New wars of the city” on his personal website, www.martin-shaw.org.

Stephen Graham
Durham
Introduction: Cities, Warfare, and States of Emergency

Stephen Graham

Across the world people who live in, have abandoned or been expelled from cities can testify to the mounting crises of contemporary urban life. (Schneider and Susser, 2003: 1)

Baghdad burns in real time. The global population accelerates towards the seven billion mark. Protestors rally in the streets – from Karachi to São Paulo to Lagos. The Third World is ravaged by an incurable epidemic. Information is constant. Distance is negligible. Sprawl continues its slow march across vast territories, as the world gets hotter by the day. (Johnson, 2003: 7)

To be sure, a cityscape is not made of flesh. Still, sheared-off buildings are almost as eloquent as body parts (Kabul, Sarajevo, East Mostar, Groznyy, 16 acres of lower Manhatten after September 11, 2001, the refugee camp in Jenin). Look, the photographs say, this is what it's like. This is what war does. War tears, war rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. War ruins. (Sontag, 2003: 5)

Being chiefly human, cities can be killed. (Spiller, 2000: 6)

Each new conflagration pushes at the limits of the humanly tolerable . . . All too often, the city's survival hangs in a precious balance. (Lang, 1996: 5)

The Mutuality of War and the City

Cities, warfare, and organized political violence have always been mutual constructions. “The city, the polis, is constitutive of the form of conflict called war; just as war is itself constitutive of the political form called the city” (Virilio, 2002: 5; original emphasis). War and the city have intimately shaped each
other throughout urban and military history. “There is . . . a direct reciprocit
between war and cities,” writes the geographer Ken Hewitt. “The latter are
the more thoroughgoing constructs of collective life, containing the definitive
human places. War is the most thoroughgoing or consciously prosecuted
occasion of collective violence that destroys places” (1983: 258).

The widespread survival of massive urban fortifications—especially in Asia,
Africa, Latin America, and Europe—are a living testament to the fact that, in
premodern and pre-nation-state civilizations, city-states were the actual
agents, as well as the main targets, of war. In premodern times cities were
built for defense as well as being dominant sites of commerce, exchange, and
political, religious, and social power. “The city, with its buttressed walls, its
ramparts and moats, stood as an outstanding display of ever-threatening
aggression” (Mumford, 1961: 44).

The sacking and killing of fortified cities and their inhabitants was the
central event in premodern war (Weber, 1958; Gravett, 1990; Corfis and
Wolfe, 1995; Kern, 1990). Indeed (often allegorical) stories of such acts
make up a good part of the Bible—especially the books of Jeremiah and
Lamentations—and other ancient and classical religious and philosophical
texts. “Myths of urban ruin grow at our culture’s root” (Berman, 1996).

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as modern nation-states
started to emerge in Europe as “bordered power containers,” they began
seeking a monopoly on political violence (Giddens, 1985b). “The states
catch up with the forward gallop of the towns” (Braudel, 1973: 398). The
expanding imperial and metropolitan cities that lay at the core of nation-
states were no longer organizers of their own armies and defenses, but they
maintained political power and reach. Such cities directed violence, con-
trol, repression, and the colonial acquisition of territory, raw materials,
wealth, and labor power from afar (Driver and Gilbert, 2003).

By the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, industrial cities in the global
North had grown in synchrony with the killing powers of technology. They
provided the men and material to sustain the massive industrial or “total”
wars of the twentieth century. At the same time, their (often female-staffed)
industries and neighborhoods emerged as the prime targets for total war.
The industrial city thus became “in its entirety a space for war. Within a few
years . . . bombing moved from the selective destruction of key sites within
cities to extensive attacks on urban areas and, finally, to instantaneous
annihilation of entire urban spaces and populations” (Shaw, 2003: 131).
Right up to the start of the twenty-first century, then, the capture of
strategic and politically important cities remains “the ultimate symbol of
conquest and national survival” (Shaw, 2001: 1).

In fact, the deliberate destruction and targeting of cities and their support
systems in times of war and crisis is a constant throughout the 8,000 years
or so of urban history on our planet. Hewitt, speaking in 1987, pointed out:
Destruction of places, driven by fear and hatred, runs through the whole history of wars, from ancient Troy or Carthage, to Warsaw and Hiroshima in our own century. The miseries, uprootings, and deaths of civilians in besieged cities, especially after defeat, stand amongst the most terrible indictments of the powerful and victorious. In that sense, there is, despite the progress of weapons of devastation, a continuity in the experience of civilians from Euripides’ *Trojan Women* or the Lamentations of Jeremiah, to the cries of widowed women and orphaned children in Beirut, Belfast, the villages of Afghanistan, and those of El Salvador. (Hewitt, 1987: 469)

Given the centrality of both urbanization and the prosecution of political violence to modernity, this subtle interpenetration of cities and warfare should be no surprise. “After all, modernity, through most of its career, has been modernity at war” (Pieterse, 2002: 3).

While far from new, acts of war and terror against cities and their inhabitants are saturating our world. For centuries, it has not been feasible to contain cities within defensive walls or effective cordons which protect their citizens from military force (Virilio, 1987). Just as it is no longer adequate to theorize cities as local, bounded sites that are separated off from the rest of the world, so, similarly, political violence is now fueled and sustained by transnational networks that can be global and local at the same time.

“Security” and the Urbanization of War

Security and fear have become the dominant chords in the politics of liberal democracies. (Jayasuriya, 2002: 131)

While they remain major sites of military, economic, and regulatory power, nation-states are becoming increasingly “decentered.” Within a context of neoliberal globalization, transnational flows between cities and metropolitan regions, and the growth of transnational governance, are undermining their coherence and meaning. In some cases, modern, developmentalist nation-states have collapsed or “failed” altogether since the end of the Cold War.

As a result, “with regard to violence, as with production, the state no longer holds the preeminent position it used to” (Pieterse 2002: 2). Traditional state vs. state wars, driven by imperial or geopolitical imperatives of maintaining, or expanding, national territories, are now rare events deserving special historical scrutiny. In their place, non-traditional, “asymmetric,” “informal,” or “new” wars are proliferating (Kaldor, 1999).

Such wars have not reduced the military and security efforts of nation-states. Rather, the risks thrown up by such wars, which tend to transcend
national boundaries and territories, now mean that “security” “imposes itself as the basic principle of state activity” (Agamben, 2002: 1). Some even argue that the imperative of “security” is beginning to overwhelm the other, historic functions of nation-states that were built up over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (such as social welfare, education, health, infrastructure development, economic regulation, and planning). “What used to be one among several decisive measures of public administration until the first half of the twentieth century,” writes Italian philosopher Georgio Agamben, “now becomes the sole criterion of political legitimation” (2002: 1).

In the “new” wars of the post-Cold War era – which increasingly straddle the “technology gaps” separating advanced industrial nations from informal fighters – cities are the key sites. Indeed, urban areas are now the “lightning conductors” for the world’s political violence. Warfare, like everything else, is being urbanized. The great geopolitical contests of cultural change, ethnic conflict, and diasporic social mixing; of economic reregulation and liberalization; of militarization, informatization, resource exploitation, and ecological change are, to a growing extent, boiling down to often violent conflicts in the key strategic sites of our age: contemporary cities (Sassen, 2002b).

As a result, war, “terrorism,” and cities are redefining each other in complex, but poorly explored, ways. Such redefinitions are, in turn, bound up with deeper shifts in the ways in which time, space, technology, mobility, and power are constructed and experienced in our societies as a whole (Virilio, 1986).

**Warfare Re-Enters the City: The Parallel “Rescaling” of Urbanism and Political Violence**

As the bipolar world fades away, we are moving from a world of enemies to one of dangers and risks. (Beck, 1999: 3)

It is now clear that the days of the classical Clauswitzian definition of warfare as a symmetrical engagement between state armies in the open field are over. War has entered the city again – the sphere of the everyday, the private realm of the house . . . We find ourselves nervous when we use public transport systems or mingle in crowds, due to frequent bomb scares. (Misselwitz and Weizman, 2003: 272)

The last two decades have seen a geopolitical and strategic reshaping of our world based heavily on a proliferation of organized, extremely violent acts against cities, those who live in them, and the support systems that make them work.
The events of September 11, 2001 are, of course, the best known and extensively reported case (see Calhoun, Price, and Timmer, 2002; Booth and Dunne, 2002). But there are many, many others. Catastrophic urban terrorist attacks – fueled by religious or political radicalism, anti-modernism, or resistance to brutal occupation, repression, or perceived biases of globalization – have also targeted urban sites in Madrid, Kitay (Bali), Moscow, Mumbai (Bombay), and Karachi; Jakarta, Casablanca, Delhi, and Islamabad; Riyadh, Mombassa, Kabul, Istanbul, and Nairobi.

Since 9/11, George Bush’s “war on terror” – a purported response to those attacks – has inflicted massive onslaughts by US and British forces on Basra, Baghdad, Fallujah, Kandahar, Kabul, and surrounding areas. In the case of Iraq, this has happened despite the fact there was not a shred of evidence to link Saddam Hussein’s regime to Al-Qaeda. Far from being routes to simple “regime change” and peaceful reconstruction, however, these attacks have been followed by complex, uneven, guerrilla-style resistance campaigns against occupying ground forces. Such forces have to move down from their GPS targeting from 40,000 ft, or out from behind armored plate, to occupy urban sites, and have thus become immensely more vulnerable to political opponents and bitter local civilians alike.

Nor should we forget the leveling of Groznyy by the Russians in 1996; the sieges of Sarajevo and Mostar in the Balkan wars of the early 1990s; the LA riots of 1992; the US’s bloody incursion into Mogadishu in 1993; the continuing suicide bombings in Israeli bars, buses, and malls; Israel’s bulldozing of Jenin and Nablus in spring 2002 and its continuing policies of strangulation, immiseration, and demolition against Palestinian cities; or the resource- or drug-fueled guerrilla wars in Freetown, Bogota’, and Monrovia.

Finally, we must not ignore the increasingly violent, temporary urban sieges that now regularly occur around the planet (Warren, this volume; Cockburn and St. Clair, 2000; Negri, 2002). Anti-globalization or anti-state movements “swarm” together around the fortified urban summits of the IMF, the G8, and the WTO, to protest against the inequities of neoliberal globalization. In postmodern, high-tech replays of medieval sieges, temporary walls, battlements, and massive armed force work – often with extreme violence – to try to separate the “inside” from the “outside” on the other side of the street. This happens even though both sets of protagonists are global organizations temporarily settled in local space for ritualized, bloody combat.

More and more, civilian and domestic spaces of urban civil societies emerge, or in many cases reemerge, as geopolitically charged spaces (Luke, this volume). Both cities and organized violence are “rescaling” together as they are remade through transnational connections, technologies, diasporas, and flows, which tend to transcend and undermine the (always