



Cities, War, and Terrorism: Towards an Urban Geopolitics

Stephen Graham (ed.)

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The volume book *Cities, War, and Terrorism* forms part of the Blackwell Studies series in Urban and Social Change. The aim of the series is to promote debate and empirical analysis stimulated by the change in fortunes of cities and regions across the world. The more than dozen contributors to this collection seek to analyze the historical relationship between cities, war and political violence. The research of the annihilation of cities has for a long time been an analytical and professional taboo, which needs to be done away with – *Cities, War, and Terrorism* helps to bridge this gap. The golden thread running through the whole collection is constituted by ideas implying that war and the city have intimately shaped each other through urban and military history and that the small red-roofed single-family home has replaced the tank as the smallest fighting unit (p. 181). The book examines the possible impact of city planning on warfare, mainly city planning as a result of warfare, and city planning as an instrument of warfare. The contributors primarily stress the role of cities in organized political violence – cities are both the agents and main targets of total war. According to the book, the role of the city in warfare has been changing in the last few centuries. Contemporary cities are the bastions of political and economic power, and accelerators of the expansion of the liberal global order.

Part I – Cities, War, and Terrorism in History and Theory – is very disparate. It is opened by an analysis of urban research into the city and urban destruction. It discusses how warfare and national security discourses have reflected the previous destruction or annihilation of cities (Stephen Graham, Ryan Bishop, Gregory Clancey). Then follows a sociological exploration of the meaning and development of Berlin's spaces and buildings that are linked to the Nazi regime and anti-Semitic genocide (Simon Guy). Part I also offers an examination of the urban dimension of nuclear paranoia in the Cold War United States (Matthew Farish) and an analysis of the links between globalization, urbanization and war, pointing out that vulnerabilities and violent conflicts are being globalized and generalized (Zygmunt Bauman). The first part of the book is concluded by a discussion of urban modernity and its influence on everyday life in cities (Timothy W. Luke).

Part II – Urbicide and the Urbanization of Warfare – unfolds with the polemic about the connections between urbicide and genocide. Urbicide refers to the deliberate killing, or denial, of the city (p. 138), to the 'slaughter' or 'slaying' of that which is subsumed under the term 'urban' (p. 165). Urbicide – as an element of genocidal war – is often the result of wars in the city, cities and the urban civilian population being the victims and targets of modern wars (Eyal Weizman, Graham). Urbicide acts – the destruction of architectural symbols of ethnic heterogeneity – are not the results of war but rather the instruments of warfare. The urban dimension of warfare is demonstrated in the analysis of the Bosnian war (Martin Coward) and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Weizman) and



discussion whether and how military operations reflect the (changing) urban environment and technology. Urbicide is influenced by the functions of the city: firstly, by the city as a war zone in which militarized operations and terrorist attacks need to be prevented and responded to; secondly, by the city as a mobilization terrain where thousands of people come together to challenge various policies (p. 214). This part of the book maintains there is no evidence that the advanced technology has caused or could cause a fundamental shift in the nature or conduct of urban military operations (p. 246) (Robert Warren, Alice Hills).

Part III – Exposed Cities: Urban Impacts of Terrorism and the ‘War on Terror’ – demonstrates that 11 September 2001, the ‘war on terror’, intensifying controls over international flows of money and people, poverty and city planning cannot be analyzed separately. The comparison of post-11 September 2001 New York, the spring 2003 Ramallah (Peter Marcuse) and London’s financial district after the series of Irish Republican Army (IRA) terrorist attacks in 1992 and 1993 (Jon Coaffee) shows similarities in urban life – the militarization of security that affects the daily life of the city through the presence of various control systems, checkpoints, collapsing infrastructure, etc. The book explores the ways in which 11 September 2001, the ‘war on terror’ and the strengthening of domestic security measures have reshaped the economic structures, political dynamics and city planning in various cities (p. 248). The third part of the book highlights the fact that 11 September 2001 and the following events de-democratized daily life not only in New York or Afghanistan but everywhere where the ‘war on terror’ brings the installing of new cameras, security systems in public spaces, etc. and thus affects day-to-day life by increasing control over people and reducing civil rights (David Lyon, Marc W. Herold).

The most interesting contributions that *Cities, War, and Terrorism* offers are Bauman’s, Hill’s and Lyon’s chapters whose research plan is clear and argument strong and convincing. Bauman points out the ways in which the processes of globalization generalize and spread risks, pollution, waste and insecurity from developed cities to underdeveloped ones. Hill and Lyon offer many interesting links between technology, warfare, cities, democracy and the war on terrorism, pointing out the ways technology and war on terrorism have influenced urban life.

The volume also offers many good examples of the process of (de)securitization and the importance of language in the legitimization of the use of security measures. For example, Graham introduces two cases: first, people in post-war Germany who were made homeless in the incendiary and high explosive attacks were described as ‘dehoused’ (p. 32); and second, the language of the ‘war on terrorism’ using a single opposition between ‘civilization’ and ‘barbarism’ while civilization means the United States (US) and Europe and barbarism some of the Arab people (p. 22) that have legitimized the extreme policy instruments (such as war) and security measures. It is demonstrated how language has contributed to the securitization of terrorism and negative change and the militarization of urban life and civil rights.

Despite this, having read the book the reader is bound to be quite disappointed – the arguments of many of the contributors and the editor are weak and frequently repeated, while individual chapters only bring a little new knowledge. What can be challenged is the impartiality of the argument: the driving force of which is a criticism of liberal globalization, of the US’ and Israel’s politics (Graham, Weizman). Further, in many



cases the contributors' perspectives are black-and-white without recognizing the very long history of many conflicts and the fact that group grievances are very wide and have been experienced by all sides to the conflict. The black-and-white character of the argument is particularly clear in Grahams' contentions. Nevertheless, the other contributors (Weizman) do not hesitate to proceed in this way. The contributors are not willing to acknowledge that globalization and US foreign policy are neither Hell nor Paradise.

For example, Graham claims that 'the increasing polarization of cities (meant difference between poor and rich) caused by neoliberal globalization is providing many conditions that are ripe for extremes of civil and militarized violence. Neoliberal globalization *itself* operates through a vast scale of violence, exploitation, and criminality. In fact, in many ways its operation is similar to the "rhizomatic" dynamics of transnational terrorism' (p. 7; emphases in the original). In the context of the 11 September 2001 analysis, a discussion about the causes of terrorism emerges. As many scholars and international organizations' (United Nations Development Program, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) analyses have shown, there does not exist a clear link between poverty and terrorism. Poverty and (neoliberal) globalization itself cannot be causes of terrorism. Of course, the (neoliberal) globalization can on one side strengthen uneven development but, on the other, it also brings the transformation of international anarchy into the international society or even a global governance system which respects human and minority rights, and human security.

Graham and the other contributors analyze the cities of the North and the US war on terrorism, but they completely neglect the issue of the urban terrorism of Latin-American regimes, African regimes (Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo) or of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. The ethnic genocide and ethnic motivated destruction of historical or religious buildings in Bosnia or in Kosovo had little to do with the impact of US military strategies or neoliberal globalization.

In fact, the main argument of the book – that urban warfare or urbicide are products of the policy of the rich North – is quite doubtful. In all periods of human history, the aim of strategic planning and military operations was to hit the enemy, primarily its strategic territory or resources. As Graham himself mentions, the cities in Westphalian (modern) states have maintained their political and economic power and more or less constitute symbols of power (pp. 4–7), thus they are the logical targets of any military attack.

Despite such criticism and the fact that *Cities, War, and Terrorism* does not offer any path-breaking contribution to political geography, international relations or security studies, the attentive reader can still find a range of interesting information.

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