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# Catastrophic Futures, Precarious Presents & Temporal Politics of (In)security

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In Chapter III of *The Prince*, Machiavelli declares that 'it is necessary not only to pay attention to immediate crises, but to foresee those that will come and to make every effort to prevent them' (1995). While perhaps a basic political truism, this idea of actively governing the future through targeted interventions in the present has been central to the Western-led response to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. Indeed, because transnational terrorism has been widely framed as a novel type of danger that is uniquely 'unpredictable in occurrence, characteristics, and effects' (Anderson 2010b: 228), the most pressing 'security issues have increasingly been defined in terms of uncertain, potentially catastrophic threats' (Aalberts and Werner 2011: 2188, 2191). In this sense, the ever-present spectre of a seemingly inevitable next attack has inscribed a radically contingent, potentially catastrophic future as the primary threat against which security measures must be oriented. This has led the very idea of 'security' to be framed in essentially temporal terms, and equated with taming this future through anticipatory action in the present. The advent of the War on Terror, in short, has 'reconfigured the politics of space into a politics of time' in the realm of (in)security governance (Kessler 2011: 2181).

To be sure, there is an anticipatory element to even the most basic understanding of security, as its pursuit necessarily involves not only responses to attacks, but the identification and ongoing prevention of future threats. The novelty of the post-9/11 reorientation of global (in)security politics along more temporal lines should thus not be overstated. Yet its practical operationalisation has had significant implications for the way political power is organised and exercised that merit critical scrutiny. Among the most notable is the extent to which the attendant institutionalisation of 'pre-emption' as a security rationality has manifested as a politics of 'exceptionalism' under which precarious political subjectivities are enacted. In what follows, I consider how this correlation between pre-emption and exceptionalism is no coincidence, as the latter can be understood as an originary function of the former that stems from pre-emption's underlying temporal imperative to tame a radically uncertain future. In other words, I argue that a pre-emptive politics of (in)security logically presupposes what amounts to a politics of exceptionalism in which the relationships between sovereign powers and the subjects they govern approximate the sort of unmediated confrontation often described in the Critical Security Studies literature informed by readings of Giorgio Agamben's work on sovereignty.

Towards this end, I begin by describing how the post-9/11 'temporalisation' of (in)security has taken the form of a politics of pre-emption in which radical uncertainty constitutes the basis for, rather than an impediment to, anticipatory action. I then consider how this requires a prioritisation of the imagination in the context of anticipatory decision-making, which in turn grants the deciding entity a significantly enhanced degree of discretionary authority. Through a brief examination of the Obama administration's drone warfare programme and the targeted killing of US citizen Anwar al-Awlaki, I subsequently consider how, in practice, this enacts precarious political subjectivities. I

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conclude by considering the implications of these ideas for debates about the compatibility of anticipatory security rationalities with the norms of liberal democratic governance.

## Pre-emption in the Post-9/11 World

An extensive body of Critical Security Studies work has documented the recent proliferation of what can be generally characterised as 'pre-emptive' security strategies (see, for example, Amoore 2014; Stockdale 2013; Anderson 2010a; de Goede and Randalls 2009; Massumi 2007; Elmer and Opel 2006; Cooper 2006). Addressing a wide range of issues—including, but not limited to: the indefinite detention (Ericson 2008) and targeted killing (Leander 2011) of suspected terrorists; the biometric monitoring of mobile populations (Muller 2010); the pre-emptive detention of refugees (Isin and Rygiel 2007); the anticipatory freezing of monies suspected of terrorist links (de Goede 2012); and the so-called 'Bush Doctrine' of pre-emptive inter-state war (Weber 2007)—this literature has comprehensively illustrated that a dominant trend in contemporary global (in)security governance is the turn towards a logic of pre-emption premised on intervening in the present to create alternative futures in which potential catastrophes are precluded.

Looking at this trend from a wider perspective, it can be usefully understood as a function of broader shifts in the way the present and future are framed in the contemporary global security imagination. In this respect, the present is construed as beset by a radical contingency, with the global security environment in particular characterised by the breakdown of established certainties in the face of novel threats (Kessler and Daase 2008). The consequence is that 'decision-makers are simply no longer able to guarantee predictability, security, and control' to the extent that was once believed possible (Aradau and van Munster 2008: 23). Complementary to this framing of the present, the future is understood in terms not just of radical uncertainty but of 'expected and undeniable catastrophe', typified by the proverbial next attack, with the precise moment of its emergence remaining continually unknown (*Ibid.*). In other words, the future embodies an impending catastrophe that is seemingly both inevitable—in that it *will* at some point occur—and unknowable—in that we cannot be certain *when* it will take place (Anderson 2010a: 779-80; Opitz and Tellmann 2015: 107). What more broadly results is what Paul Virilio has termed 'a culture of the imminence of disaster' (2010: 7), in which—to wax Rumsfeldian—contemporary life is haunted by the spectre of a disastrous unknown that is paradoxically known to be lurking in the future's unknowable depths.

Approaches premised upon taming these uncertainties by controlling the unfolding of the future through anticipatory interventions in the present have accordingly come to dominate the post-9/11 global politics of (in)security. In practice, this perspective implies the necessity of acting pre-emptively, even without an established base of verifiable knowledge upon which to make such decisions (Aradau and van Munster 2007: 101). In other words, radical *un*certainty about both the nature of the threat and the moment at which it might emerge is not an *impediment* to acting anticipatorily; it instead provides the very *impetus* for it, such that 'the absence of specific evidence serves as justification for action' (Elmer and Opel 2006: 481). This places governing authorities 'in the uncomfortable position of having to take drastic action in the face of an inescapably elusive, uncertain threat' (Cooper 2006: 119).

A key consequence is that established mechanisms and logics of (in)security governance nominally premised upon data collection and deliberation appear inadequate, and strategies based primarily on conjecture and speculation emerge as the most viable options (de Goede 2012). The Obama administration's use of 'predictive assessments about potential threats' as the basis for the inclusion of individuals on so-called 'no-fly lists' and other 'watchlisting' initiatives central to US counter-terrorism efforts is an instructive example here (Ackerman 2015). At a May 2015 a federal court proceeding, for instance, two officials from the US Justice Department described the watchlisting programme's chief goal as 'identifying individuals who may be a threat to civil aviation and national security' through 'predictive judgement[s] intended to prevent future acts of terrorism in an uncertain context' (quoted in *Ibid.*). This testimony provided official confirmation that decisions to place particular individuals on no-fly lists are 'based on predicting crimes rather than on records of demonstrated offenses' (*Ibid.*). And despite an FBI official telling the court that 'mere guesses or 'hunches'...are not sufficient,' a former CIA counterterrorism analyst responded by testifying that 'there is no indication that the government has assessed the scientific validity and reliability of its predictive judgments,' and as such, these judgments 'amount to little more than the 'guesses' or 'hunches' that [the FBI official]

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says are not sufficient' (quoted in *Ibid.*). Considered in light of the importance of watchlisting practices to US counter-terror strategy (Herman 2011), the CIA analyst's testimony and the revelations of the court proceedings more generally illustrate both how the importance of taking action in the face of radical uncertainty defines the post-9/11 politics of (in)security, and that this has a significant effect on the way decisions are made in the security context. Indeed, if the mere possibility of danger emerging at some point in the future can serve as the basis for anticipatory action in the present, the implications for the organisation and exercise of sovereign power in the security context are not insignificant.

## The Future and the Imagination

To begin to understand these implications, it is useful to understand the reformulation of (in)security governance associated with a politics of pre-emption in terms of the prioritisation of the future over the present. In this respect, we have seen that a pre-emptive approach requires that some sort of anticipatory action be taken for the purpose of governing an uncertain future; yet such action must necessarily take place in the present, since this is where humans agents act. The ontology of security is thus constructed in such a way that the future itself becomes the referent to be secured—with catastrophic iterations thereof constituting the threat to be secured *against*—while the present is instrumentally constructed as the location of the interventions necessary accomplish this. In other words, the logic of pre-emption prioritises the governance of the future, which in turn implies the legitimization of potentially disruptive interventions in the present, thus effectively placing the latter in subordinate service to the former.

Importantly, this prioritisation of the future alters the epistemic basis of political action by enacting a decisional logic that relies upon 'knowledge' derived primarily from the exercise of the imagination. Indeed, as Aradau and van Munster put it, 'imagination acquires epistemic primacy in relation to the unknown' (2011: 85); and because pre-emptive interventions act upon a radically uncertain (and thus ultimately unknown) future, the imagination is vital to rendering that which is to be pre-empted intelligible and therefore actionable in the present. In other words, 'imagination is constitutive of security knowledge' (*Ibid.*, 84), and any security decision through which anticipatory action is taken will rely upon the imagination to a significant degree. The result is that a pre-emptive politics of (in)security shifts the epistemic basis for action from the realm of verifiable fact to the realm of speculation, conjecture, and suspicion (de Goede and Randalls 2009: 868). What follows is that anticipatory action is in practice based to a significant extent upon evidentiary foundations constructed by the deciding authorities (or their designated surrogates). Under a politics of pre-emption, therefore, those tasked with making anticipatory decisions are also ultimately tasked with creating the epistemic basis for these decisions through the exercise of the imagination. This has the effect of greatly enhancing the scope of discretionary authority granted to those who decide how and when to act in a pre-emptive security context.

An illustrative example can again help clarify these points. On 29 March 2011, Mohamed Hersi—a 25-year-old Somali-Canadian—was arrested by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) as he tried to board a flight from Toronto to Cairo via London. Hersi was charged, tried, and ultimately became the first Canadian convicted of 'attempting to participate in a terrorist activity'—an offence for which he was sentenced to the maximum of 10 years in prison. Like most Western states in the post-9/11 era, Canada has adopted a pre-emptive approach to governing terrorism premised explicitly upon 'protecting Canadians from terrorist acts before they occur' (Government of Canada 2011: 32). The country's anti-terrorism guidelines have thus been developed to allow security agencies to act in such a way that threats are 'dealt with on more of an *a priori* basis rather than more of a post facto basis' (Svendsen 2010: 320). The RCMP was operating under this regime when Hersi was detained, and the inchoate nature of his offence also highlights this pre-emptive ethos.

The RCMP alleged that Hersi intended to proceed from Cairo to Somalia to train as a militant with Al-Shabaab, a group designated as a terrorist organisation under Canadian law. At the time of the arrest, however, the RCMP offered a rather candid admission that their investigation 'did not indicate that the suspect was a direct threat to his country or Canadians' at the time of his detention (Teotonio 2011). In other words, the threat that was pre-empted by Hersi's arrest did not tangibly exist at the moment he was detained. He was, rather, subjected to an intervention by the Canadian state based on an *imagined future threat* that he *may have one day* posed. This conjectural aspect of the case was used unsuccessfully in Hersi's defence at trial, after which his lawyer promised to appeal, claiming that

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the conviction relied on speculative evidence that was 'so far removed from reality as to make it a thought crime' (Humphreys 2014).

Of course, the decision to detain Hersi was presumably not entirely arbitrary; and liberal legal norms have long included conspiracy provisions permitting the anticipatory arrest of those taking preparatory steps to commit a serious crime who have not yet followed through. So while it is certainly arguable whether the Hersi case falls outside the normative boundaries of a liberal legal order, it still usefully illustrates how the praxis of pre-emptive security operates through the privileging of imagination as the epistemic foundation for action, which in turn enhances the discretionary authority of those tasked with deciding upon such action by requiring them to construct that foundation. When considered in a broader context, this suggests that pre-emptive security measures function through a paradigm of political power in many ways reminiscent of that which is associated with a politics of 'exceptionalism.'

## Pre-emption and Exceptionalism

The Critical Security Studies literature includes myriad engagements with the work of Carl Schmitt, Giorgio Agamben, and others who have extensively theorised the concept of political 'exceptionalism'. Described most simply, exceptionalism denotes a condition where the prevailing legal order is effectively annulled and a more arbitrary, unconstrained form of power vested in a particular person or office emerges (Schmitt 2005: 12; Huysmans 2004). As I have argued elsewhere (Stockdale 2013), political exceptionalism can therefore be understood as characterised by two core components: the suspension of the juridical order (Agamben 2005: 23), and a 'decisionist' paradigm of political authority (Schmitt 2005: 33). With respect to the first, a politics of exceptionalism involves freeing the highest form of legitimate political authority—usually the executive—from limitations imposed by the rule of law (Schmitt 2005: 11; Lazar 2006: 260). Political action thus takes a more arbitrary form, since the absence of effective legal constraints grants an enhanced degree of discretion to the acting authority. The decisionist component of exceptionalism thus follows from this, as it describes a condition where the executive does not simply apply the law, but rather is effectively 'the source of law' (Lazar 2006: 257). Under a state of exception, in other words, a decision taken by the relevant authority is purer, such that, in Schmitt's words, it 'emanates from nothingness' (Schmitt 2005: 33).

When these points are read against the discussion of pre-emptive security in the preceding sections, it becomes clear that a paradigm of political power comprising these two core elements of exceptionalism bears a close resemblance to that which accompanies the logic of pre-emption as applied to the contemporary governance of (in)security. Indeed, by prioritising the imagination and concomitantly augmenting the deciding authority's discretion, a politics of pre-emption effectively presupposes what amounts to a politics of exceptionalism by both suspending the juridical order and enacting a decisionist paradigm of political authority. It is worth considering each of these points in more detail.

Regarding the first, a corollary of pre-emption's focus on governing a radically uncertain future is that no imaginable possibility can be dismissed—which implies more specifically that no individual can be presumptively absolved of suspicion in the present (Ericson 2008). In other words, when dealing with imagined futures, there is no way to prove an accused's innocence once the imagination has been activated, since accusations relate to an act that has not yet taken place. This undermines the basis of almost any type of juridical order, since the collection and evaluation of evidence via designated channels is rendered largely impossible when dealing with imagined future events. The power to assess an individual's (future) guilt—and thus to subject her/him to (present) interventions—is therefore transferred from the mechanisms of the legal system to the whim of a designated political authority. Of course, in practice this rarely translates into the state detaining those suspected of posing a potential threat on entirely arbitrary grounds. The point, however, is that the logic of pre-emption conflicts in crucial ways with the established norms of a liberal juridical order, since the latter are not equipped to handle the extended temporal horizons and evidentiary uncertainties that inevitably accompany anticipatory action (Aradau and van Munster 2009: 697).<sup>[2]</sup> In this sense, pre-emptive approaches to (in)security governance suspend the juridical order almost by default, since questions regarding threat, culpability, and response become the purview of sovereign political authorities.

Regarding the second core component of exceptionalism, the type of decision required by pre-emptive security

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strategies demands what amounts to a 'decisionist' form of political authority. In this respect, we have seen that because the futures against which anticipatory decisions are framed exist in the realm of the imagination, decisions to act pre-emptively are premised to a significant degree upon knowledge constructed by the deciding authority. The purity of such a decision is thus quite striking, since it involves not simply the weighing of existing evidence, but the active creation of knowledge about the future to serve as the evidentiary basis for interventions in the present. In other words, precisely because the unknown future being acted upon is something of an epistemic abyss, any decision to intervene pre-emptively 'becomes in the true sense absolute', to again quote Schmitt (Schmitt 2005: 12). Just as they suspend the juridical order by default, therefore, pre-emptive security practices also enact a decisionist form of political authority by what amounts to logical necessity. These two points suggest an originary conceptual relationship between pre-emption and exceptionalism, whose consequences for the organisation and exercise of political power, as well as experiences of political subjectivity, are profound and must be taken seriously if we are to adequately understand the contemporary global politics of (in)security.

## Precarious Subjectivities

A particularly important consequence in this regard is that the exceptionalist politics presupposed by the logic of pre-emptive security brings into being a relationship between sovereign authorities and those governed thereby in which the latter are rendered continuously vulnerable to sudden and potentially violent interventions by the former. This is because the only effective limitations on the exercise of sovereign power in this context are the limits of the sovereign imagination itself. Indeed, relevant sovereign deciders are tasked with taming the future's radical contingency; and because the epistemic basis for action towards this end will rely on imagined futures of the sovereign's construction, targets are identified based on subjective discretion rather than more objective juridico-normative guidelines. And since none can be summarily absolved of suspicion, all are always already constructed as possible targets for pre-emptive action (Ericson 2008). What thus emerges is a condition in which *any* individual may be subjected to what amounts to an arbitrarily decided anticipatory act at any time, such that regimes of (in)security governance premised upon a logic of pre-emption enact a decidedly precarious experience of political subjectivity.

To be sure, for almost all individuals, this perpetual vulnerability to potentially violent interventions based on conjecturally imagined futures will never be translated into an act of arbitrary sovereign violence. But the conceptual point being made here concerns the ever-present *potential* of this occurring, since even if no such action ever takes place, the continuous *possibility* that it will is a defining feature of the relationship between sovereign and subject under a pre-emptive security regime. And this possibility is a direct consequence of the enhanced decisional discretion vested in the sovereign by the logic of pre-emption, in that anticipatory decisions are placed outside the circumscriptions of the juridical order, thus removing the normative barriers that protect individuals from being targeted on the basis of speculative knowledge that they have no capacity to contest. The point, in other words, is that even if such arbitrary targeting never actually takes place, this will not be because of any normative constraints upon the sovereign's decisional authority; it will be because the sovereign decides against it.

The relations between sovereign and subject enacted by a logic of pre-emptive security in this sense closely resemble those that characterise the 'exceptional' political spaces theorised extensively in the Critical Security Studies literature. These are typified by what Agamben terms the 'camp,' which is characterised by sovereign power confronting its subjects 'without any mediation,'—meaning the sovereign's ability to act is unbound by legal norms while subjects are deprived of any agency to contest its decisions (Agamben 2000: 41; 1998: 171). Just as in the proverbial camp, therefore, the possibility for any individual to be arbitrarily subjected to violent sovereign interventions is always there under a pre-emptive security regime. Indeed, even in states ostensibly committed to the rule of law and human rights norms, the adoption of pre-emptive security strategies creates an ever-present *potential* for anyone to be inscribed as the sort of 'bare life' against which 'everything is possible' (Agamben 1998: 170).

The September 2011 targeted killing via drone strike of Al Qaeda operative and US citizen Anwar al-Awlaki provides a useful illustration of these considerations, as the incident highlights both the type of action made possible by the logics of pre-emptive security and the precarious subjectivities that are thereby enacted. The Obama administration's decision to target al-Awlaki can be read as an exercise in pre-emptive security, in that the broader 'killing programme' of which it was a high profile example has been framed in precisely such terms by its proponents

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(Leander 2011). In a 2012 interview, for instance, former National Counterterrorism Centre head Michael Leiter asserted that targeted killing was embraced by Obama as the most appropriate response to the 'situation where he is being told people *might* attack the United States *tomorrow*' (quoted in Becker and Shane 2012, emphasis added). This suggests the administration sees drone warfare as an effective strategy for ensuring that such catastrophic futures do not come to pass. Moreover—and with respect to the al-Awlaki case in particular—the pre-emptive character of the killing is highlighted by the administration's subsequent framing of the incident, whereby its legitimacy was affirmed by specifically invoking a pre-emptive imperative. The administration's initial response to critics thus asserted that al-Awlaki 'posed some sort of imminent threat', which justified such 'extraordinary measures' as the government killing a citizen without what would conventionally be understood as due process (Koring 2011).

Besides being an exemplar of pre-emptive security, however, the al-Awlaki case also represented a prototypically 'exceptional' act, as it embodied both components of political exceptionalism discussed above. Regarding the first—the suspension of the juridical order—a strong case can be made that the killing was extrajudicial, in that it was not authorised through established legal channels or in accordance with associated standards of evidence, and as such, was both ordered and carried out absent the due process of law constitutionally guaranteed to US citizens. The act can thus be understood as having suspended the legal order at the moment of its occurrence. Moreover, that targeting al-Awlaki in this way would contravene the juridical order seems to have been apparent to the Obama administration, as it sought to further justify the killing through claims of executive discretion on issues of national security. This can be seen in an internal memo from the Justice Department obtained by the *New York Times*, which was prepared with specific reference to the al-Awlaki case and asserted that 'while the Fifth Amendment's guarantee of due process applied, it could be satisfied by internal deliberations in the executive branch' alone (quoted in Becker and Shane 2012).

This circumventing of the juridical order hints at how the al-Awlaki case also embodies the second core component of exceptionalism—a decisionist paradigm of sovereign authority. In this respect, the decision to kill al-Awlaki—as with nearly all instances of drone strikes—was made through a by now well-established process that assigns such life-and-death prerogatives to a highly select group of officials within the executive branch. This process was outlined in a controversial *New York Times* investigative report published in 2012, which is worth quoting at length to illustrate the degree to which the exercise of sovereign authority in the context of drone warfare takes a distinctly decisionist form:

Every week or so, more than 100 members of the government's sprawling national security apparatus gather, by secure video teleconference, to pore over terrorist suspects' biographies and recommend to the president who should be the next to die. This secret 'nominations' process is an invention of the Obama administration, a grim debating society that vets the PowerPoint slides bearing the names, aliases and life stories of suspected members of Al Qaeda's branch in Yemen or its allies in Somalia's Shabab militia (*sic*)... [N]ames go off the list if a suspect no longer appears to pose an imminent threat...The nominations [then] go to the White House, where by his own insistence and guided by [chief counterterrorism advisor Jim] Brennan, Mr. Obama must approve any name (Becker and Shane 2012).

This description highlights how the final authority to decide who is to be killed and when is granted directly to the president alone. Thus, starting from the assumption that executive branch deliberation followed by the president signing off constitutes due process, the executive is freed from any normative circumscriptions regarding this use of violence in this way. This vests within the person of the president the discretionary capacity to determine who to target, when to strike, and what counts as adequate evidence that someone poses a sufficient threat to be killed. Such prerogatives conspicuously mirror those ascribed to the decisionist sovereign under a politics of exceptionalism.

By thus illustrating how the anticipatory exercise of sovereign power shifts relations between sovereign and subject towards an effectively unmediated confrontation, the al-Awlaki case highlights both the originary relationship between pre-emption and exceptionalism, and the implications of this link for the character of political subjectivity under a politics of pre-emptive security. Indeed, once the president made the pre-emptive decision to target al-Awlaki, the

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latter could immediately be killed with impunity by the agents of American sovereignty. The law thus no longer served as an effective mediator between sovereign and subject, since despite being a US citizen, al-Awlaki could still be killed on the basis of what amounted to an executive decree. The juridico-normative limitations on the president's decisional authority were therefore subordinated to an imperative to govern the future with which such limits are in many ways incompatible. When faced with a sovereign power that could unilaterally decide when he would be killed and against which he had no practical recourse, al-Awlaki was therefore constructed as precisely the sort of 'bare life' that Agamben and others associate with the exceptionalism of the 'camp' without actually being located in the sort of explicitly defined space with which this term is more often associated (Agamben 2000). The al-Awlaki killing thus provides an instructive example of the sort of exceptional practices that are made possible by the logic of pre-emptive security. The crucial point in this regard is that, under the pre-emptive security regime being prosecuted through the American drone programme, if President Obama had decided *not* to kill al-Awlaki, this would not have been because of any perceived legal limits upon his doing so; it would have instead been because the president himself simply *decided* not to.

To be sure, the heated debate over the legitimacy of the al-Awlaki killing suggests that alternative understandings of the case and its implications are also compelling. For instance, al-Awlaki's propagandistic activities on behalf of Al Qaeda—with whom the US has been engaged in a 'war' since 9/11—might be understood as rendering the killing neither pre-emptive in nature—since it can be viewed merely as an operation against a combatant during ongoing hostilities—nor extrajudicial—since al-Awlaki can be seen to have forfeited his citizenship protections by actively aiding an enemy force on foreign soil. These considerations reflect the Obama's administration's views and must be taken seriously in any discussion of the strike's legitimacy. Yet regardless of one's position on this normative question, the incident still illustrates the key conceptual point being made in this section—namely, that the imperative to tame temporal contingency conflicts with key normative mediations between sovereign and subject in a liberal democracy. Indeed, the very fact that the al-Awlaki killing could take place at all suggests that a state of perpetual vulnerability to anticipatory sovereign violence is a defining feature of political subjectivity under a pre-emptive politics of (in)security, even if subjects are never actually targeted in practice. Again, this condition is a result of the *de facto* elimination of juridico-normative mediation between sovereign power and political subjects, which in turn stems from a prioritisation of the imagination that is itself a function of the imperative to tame a radically uncertain future. The creation of such precarious subjective conditions is thus precisely what is at stake with the implementation of pre-emptive security strategies—a point that must be taken seriously whenever the adoption of such strategies is being considered.

## Conclusion

What I have termed the 'temporalisation' of (in)security represents merely one example of a broader trend in societal governance characterised by a 'shift from responding to past events to preventing future harms' (Dershowitz 2006: 7). Evidence of this shift can be found across myriad areas of human affairs, as sectors as diverse as financial regulation (Porter 2009), public health management (Cooper 2006), crime prevention (Ericson 2007), urban planning (Coaffee 2009), and natural disaster management (United Nations 2013) are increasingly characterised by strategies, technologies, and rationalities based on anticipatory logics. The arguments developed above suggest that framing key problems of societal governance in this way can pose significant challenges to the constitutive norms of the liberal democratic polities often in the vanguard of this trend. Indeed, the exceptionalist politics that I have argued are presupposed by the temporalities of pre-emption in many ways run counter to such basic precepts as the rule of law and associated limitations on the prerogatives of sovereign authority. Yet this need not to imply that a politics of pre-emption can never constitute a legitimate approach to a particular problem, as the radical contingencies of late modernity may leave few other options (Beck 2008). The point is rather to emphasise that only when the sorts of practices made possible by the underlying logics of anticipatory governance are adequately considered can decisions to implement practical strategies based thereupon be made responsibly. And in an era when the effective governance of a political space is increasingly reliant upon a capacity to govern the unfolding of time, such questions are perhaps more 'timely' than ever.

## Notes

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[1] This paper presents a condensed version of the arguments developed in my book *Taming an Uncertain Future: Temporality, Sovereignty, and the Politics of Anticipatory Governance*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016). I thank the anonymous reviewer(s) from E-IR for a number of productive comments and critiques that have helped me refine the arguments developed below.

[2] One way this tension has been negotiated is through what some critical commentators have termed 'counter law' (Opitz and Tellmann 2015, Ericson 2008). This term refers to legislative moves aimed at embedding practices that undermine the constitutive norms of a liberal juridical order within that order. Importantly, Ericson links counter law specifically to the emergence of pre-emptive security measures, describing it as the creation of new laws and/or 'new uses of existing laws' that 'erode or eliminate traditional principles, standards, and procedures of criminal law that get in the way of pre-empting imagined sources of harm' (2008, 57). Prominent examples include exceedingly generous readings of entrapment provisions by the courts in cases where informants are used to goad suspects into hatching terror plots that are then pre-emptively foiled (Greenwald and Fishman 2015), or the European Union's expanded use of financial 'blacklisting' practices that significantly lower the evidentiary threshold for enacting 'targeted sanctions' against suspected terrorist financiers that effectively preclude their participation in any type of financial transaction (de Goede 2011, Sullivan and Hayes 2010).

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