The Politics of Surveillance in a Risk Society

https://www.e-ir.info/2013/09/05/the-politics-of-surveillance-in-a-risk-society/

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This paper demarcates the end of my undergraduate degree. The paper is dedicated to all those who have believed and supported my work over the past three years. Special thanks to Mum and Papa.

Security Rationale

9/11 raised the crucial question of how would the world best prevent another catastrophic attack in the future? For President Bush and the Western allies the answer was to act before a threat could materialise –'pre-emption'. Pre-emption is the use of force against those who pose a potential threat to international peace and security, based on pre-emptive assumptions by (a) state(s) (O'Connell, 2002: Reismann and Armstrong, 2006). This logic has shaped the way in which the recent War on Terror (WoT) has been fought both overseas in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as in Western nations including the US and Britain through surveillance technologies.

Pre-emption is rooted within the environmental movements' 'precautionary principle', which argued: if an action or policy has a suspected risk of causing harm to the public or environment, the world must react. Scientists advocate waiting for the collection of an evidence-base would be too late, thus we need to react 'ahead of time' (O'Riordan, 1995). The US's Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) at the end of the Cold War harnessed this principle, and deployed it within its armed forces using information, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) technologies as a response to spending cutbacks, and failures of Vietnam (Rasmussen, 2006). In 2003 over 100,000 global positioning system units were deployed throughout Iraqi battlespace to remove the 'fog of war' (*ibid*). ISR technology enabled Coalition forces to "collect and distribute a steady flow of information" to provide ultimate panoptical vision over battlespace and pre-empt future threats by gathering intelligence" (Cohen, 1997:03). Strategy became focussed on the management of multiple risks to move away from a Newtonian understanding of mechanics and order. Strategy is used to predict the future of war and security.

RMA became the way to define the rationale of strategy, focussing on contingency, rather than war, as a means to an end. In 2000, the then Vice-President Al Gore informed the graduates of West Point Military Academy, US military success relied on the managerial capability of politicians to harness the information age (Daalder, 2007). Military technology, including surveillance, became a tool of the politician in managing the future of battlespace. For example, the effectiveness of the closed-circuit television (CCTV) camera to identify a suspicious individual relied on a decision-making process of who is suspicious, often based on ethnic, sexual and religious profiles (Amoore, 2006). The practice relies on a political decision of what is deemed 'suspicious', as well as the opportunity cost of forgoing a definition of 'suspicious', is deliberate, and thus, a political, choice (Wood, 1992).

The underlying politics driving forward the RMA ISR technologies raise the question of: what is the role of surveillance technologies in the WoT?

The question is based on three major assumptions that are used throughout the remainder of this paper to explore the role of surveillance. Firstly, there is a need for such surveillance technologies than in previous conflicts. I question whether the WoT is a new era for war? I argue the politics of surveillance technologies is nothing new, but the ways in which technologies change the security culture towards pre-emption is world-changing. Secondly, the question implies surveillance as a necessary technology and with this assumption I advocate such technologies are a

necessity in fulfilling political objectives of the managers of war (politicians). Finally, I question the narratives driven by surveillance technologies and raise an alternative way of thinking the politics of risk in the WoT. I argue technologies are only successful in achieving political objectives and are only able in producing particular truths.

New Era for War

Old Politics

The political orchestration of surveillance in war is nothing new. After the French Revolution ,in Paris Baron Haussmann designed wide-roads and open boulevards to increase public vigilance (Schnieder, 2008). In the US's colonial history, memorandum books were kept to track the migration of slaves. Both World Wars and the Cold War saw the extensive use of signals intelligence and aircraft as an extension of the political ideological tensions between Nazism and Western democracy, and Capitalism and Communism. These kinds of surveillance operated through processes of dissembling and reassembling where people are broken down into classifications based on political criteria to decide whether someone can be determined as 'enemy' (Haggerty and Ericson, 2006; Amoore, 2006). The process can be thought of one as re-humanization, stripping down identity to the dry-bones and overlaying new identities of 'terrorist' or 'suspicious person' to the rest of the world. There is an opportunity cost in forgoing other choices of identity categorisation, thus as surveillance involves deliberate choices, such decision-making is political (Wood, 1992).

The deployment of surveillance technologies in Baghdad, Iraq, include the US's MQ-1 Predator drone, which removes values of a person to refine their identities to simple categorisations of target, ally or civilian. Introducing new surveillance technologies, including the drone, can alter social structures and practices through omnipresence achieved by using ubiquitous surveillance (Tenner, 1996). Neo-imperialism emerges from surveillance technologies using practices that redefine the cultural landscape by reshaping identities. Furthermore, a political force of domination is imposed upon people with the capability to watch all without being seen (Lyon, 2007). The Camero Xaver 400 allowed US Special Forces' black operations to observe the enemy through walls. Therefore, surveillance can become a covert practice that enhances power greatly, as information can be collected without disturbing the banal to become absent from battlespace. "Visibility replaces force as a tool of control." (Los, 2004:1478). Benthem's (1791) panopticon is revived to become an important feature in the technology of power, rationalising human organisation based on utilitarian principles to project dominance over people.

During the Vietnam War, President Johnson commissioned projects to improve reconnaissance drones in order to collect photographs of potential targets as part of the military operation 'Rolling Thunder'. Vietnamese airspace became subordinate to US authority and as a result, surveillance operations strengthened military power and destruction on the ground (Gregory, 2011). Surveillance in Vietnam created a neo-colonial presence as civilians become dependent on surveillance technologies for their own safety. Civilians relied on the political decision-making within such technologies by military commanders of whether they fit into the category of enemy. The allegorical relation to these kind of practices are reflected in President Obama's Foreign Policy to expand the use of aerial surveillance in the WoT on places including Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan to fulfil a 'kill list' (Harris, 2012). Life and death thus becomes a matter for political consideration by politicians and military commanders. Surveillance technologies are inherently driven by politics, from Benthem's panopticon philosophies, through the World Wars and the Cold War, to the WoT.

New Security Culture

Politics has been established as a driving force of surveillance, and subsequent technologies are nothing new. However, there has been a dramatic transformation in the role these technologies perform in the globalised, post-Cold War world. In the globalised world, conflicts are no longer independent, but interconnected through the flows and connections of globalisation; thus war and its insecurities are continuous and part of a global network (Freidman, 2007). At the end of the Cold War, strategic logic of 'deterrence' and game theory were dismantled and transformed into the management of risks. Surveillance technologies in the new era for war 'filter' risk continually flowing from the processes of globalisation (Rasmussen, 2006). Surveillance technologies are no longer concerned with the

immediate and foreseeable threats to create enduring security, but focussed on managing risks and imagined 'worse-case futures' based upon pre-emptive security and foreign policy.

Obama's desire to continue the WoT through sophisticated surveillance technologies, such as the MQ-1 Predator drone, imposes a strategic rationale for anticipatory defence or pre-emptive security. The US at present deploys drones beyond the borders of Iraq and Afghanistan to anticipate the rise of future threats, including Pakistan, North Korea, and Iran, which raises questions on whether distant (both in time and space) risks should be left to lie, or woken up by military invasion. The information collected through pre-emptive practices drive forward this new security culture as intelligence, is harnessed to aid creative scenario-making by civil servants in Whitehall (De Goede, 2008). The new security culture created by surveillance technologies becomes a risk, with pre-emptive policy often 'boomeranging' rather than achieving the desired outcome (Daalder, 2007, 2006; Bigo, 2002). For example, Obama's plans to create stability in the Middle East as well as new strategic options are bogged down in continual drone operations that kill more civilians than what may be deemed as 'terrorists' (Harris, 2012). Clausewitz's scientific and rational, 'means to an end' military strategy is replaced by imaginative, risk-based scenarios, driven by the political mind. Thus, war becomes an art; a way of doing politics (Machiavelli, 2004[1521]).

The role of surveillance technologies in facilitating a pre-emptive security culture are not bound to the 'Orient' or so-called 'rogue states', but manifest themselves within banal environments of homeland nations. CCTV has dominated London's cityscape with the aim to manage the unpredictable security environment. Amoore and Hall (2008) note the management of risk rests upon identification and verification of the body, decided by security professionals who are based upon a particular bio-politics. The body becomes the platform of political decision-making, as well as an objectification of security practices by using technologies of risk (De Geode, 2005). Surveillance technologies as a management of risk have significant political implications in that security professionals and politicians view them as "inevitable structural threats" (Aradau *et al*, 2008:151). Security becomes filtered down to the everyday through the usage of CCTV, as well as biometric borders through systems of data-surveillance to determine whether an individual is understood as a risk to the political narrative of the state (Braverman, 2011; Foucault, 1997) (Plate 1). Security within the homeland, as well as the Orient, relies on pre-emptive technologies that generate *a priori* information (Harraway, 2000). Therefore, this new security culture is based upon a political imagination and those in positions of power are able to re-inscribe the societal landscape by determining who and what constitutes as a threat (not a risk).

Surveillance technologies are furthering the change in a security culture towards pre-emption and anticipatory logics within the risk-society, although such technologies have always been and will continue to be powered by political decision-making. The security culture of pre-emption is new, but the pre-emptive logic is not. Rooted within the environmental movements' precautionary principle, the risk-management approach was away of advancing action on climate change and environmental issues before an evidence-base could be established (O'Riordann). The argument of Lomborg (2001) suggests an evidence-base would take too long to collect, thus it would be too late to deal with the risks from environmental change, and instead politicians were required to act now. Furthermore, stamping on risks before they materialise into greater threats was also part of former Mayor of New York City, Rudolph Giuliani's order maintenance policing that dealt with petty crimes in 'radical ways' which was understood to prevent risks from much larger forms of crime (Morris, 2003). Pre-emption is rooted within a political and policy-making history, but has recently been developed into a new security culture as a result of the role surveillance technologies perform in the WoT.

Necessary Surveillance

Understanding the role of surveillance technologies in the WoT implies these technologies are a necessary component in undertaking practices for a war on terror. Developing the current theme of this paper, I argue surveillance technologies have been necessary in fulfilling a particular political narrative casted by President Bush and Prime Minister Blair in the WoT. The risk-society marks a transformation from military personnel commanding threats in the Cold War to politicians managing risks in the 21st Century.

Foreign Policy

Nation-building has been a central part of Bush's WoT foreign policy, with the intention to make major investments in post-conflict states and regions, both economically and politically. Secretary of State Colin Powell's once-you-break-it, you-own-it 'Pottery Barn Rule' has become a major part of the political narrative embedded in US Foreign Policy (Sperling, 2010). Nonetheless, the stabilisation of post-conflict territory has a darker and cynical side to it performed through the usage of surveillance technologies at US operated checkpoints, including the Musayyib, south of Baghdad.

The Musayyib checkpoint serves as a demarcation between north and south Baghdad, with an aim of identifying suspicious individuals who may attempt to challenge the reconstruction of Iraq. Like Israel, Iraq has become "a state of checkpoints" whereby the authority of two states becomes blurred and unclear (Braverman, 2011:01). The

Musayyib checkpoint is part of a larger policy in deploying the ultimate panopticon, with little controversy in foreign territories. The Combat Zones That See (CTS) program aims to network thousands of sophisticated cameras and UAVs with complex computer code located in databases to monitor the entire City of Baghdad.

The roots of the US's Foreign Policy are not concerned with economic and political reconstruction but militarisation and reconnaissance of foreign territory in the anticipation of future risks. Foreign policy becomes part of the broader security culture of filtering risks through pre-emption to prevent worse-case scenarios imaged by politicians. The role of surveillance technologies in reconstructing post-conflict territory becomes a process of militarisation with the aim to continuously monitor the future development of Iraq. Statesmen, such as Bush and Obama, narrate a positive political narrative to the public, whilst using surveillance technologies to drive forward the true purpose of reconstruction in Iraq. Shedding light on the truth of US Foreign Policy obviously presents issues over America's role as the 'World Police'. The Republican senator Gary Hart argues America is in a dichotomy of becoming an Empire when it is a Republic, through using surveillance technologies as ways to practice neo-imperialism in the WoT (Hart, 2007).

National Security

Surveillance technologies are necessary in fulfilling political goals through two-sided foreign policies in the WoT. Nonetheless, technologies have also become a necessary part in the national security narrative, most loudly spoken by Prime Minister Blair. Blair harnessed CCTV beyond its capabilities of detecting crime, to a technology that can work on algorithmic data to pre-empt acts of terrorism before they are committed within homeland nations (Amoore, 2009). Nonetheless, from this discussion, it will appear that surveillance technologies only become necessary in the WoT to carry out political doctrine. Politics drives forward these technologies and gives them a purpose; an image of necessity in combating international terrorism.

Protecting London's economic heart is the ring of steel with over 1,500 cameras, 10% of which have facial recognition capabilities able to detect facial characteristics from up to 20 meters away (Coaffe, 2004). Similar to US Foreign Policy, UK national security strategy attempts to control and regulate territory through the deployment of the camera. The politics emerges out of the classification in which is established based on sex, ethnicity, and age to inform security professionals whether a decision should be made to arrest or interrogate an individual based on the grounds of pre-emption. Unlike its former self, the ring of steel does not act as a deterrent as it did during the Provisional Irish Republican Army bombings, but an attempt to filter risks based on political criteria. Facial recognition technologies operationalise the liberal project of globalization, modernity, and identity in which the body becomes subjected to political debate and contestation of whether an individual is a terror suspect (Reid, 2006).

The role of facial recognition cameras is moving beyond the political narratives of Blair and Bush's rhetoric on protecting the homeland, to being used as a marketing tool to decide what kind of advertising people receive based on the systems own criteria (Booth, 2012). The politics of risk management, with regards to surveillance technologies, has blurred national security with the profit-motive, which inevitably leads to a failure of the liberal project. In 2003, the CIA launched a futures market for terrorism as a way to collect intelligence on where and when a terrorist attack would happen. The belief was that future markets had proven incredibly accurate in anticipating elections results, thus collecting information on terrorism could aid scenario making. The market would become the rationality for future conflict and security, rather than relying on expert opinion or the individual analyst (Daalder, 2007, 2006). Giddens (1998) argues that the risk society makes technological necessary by becoming dependent on it in generating a diversity of possible futures. He argues that having such surveillance technologies with capabilities of pre-empting bridges the gap between the present and the future. Dillon (1996) argues that making security and war a decision of the market actually leads to a paradox and generates greater insecurity rather than security. This liberal way multiplies the reasons for making war, as acts of terrorism are driven by the profit motive. In a credit society, with more finance available, this leads to vast insecurity (*ibid*).

Facial recognition cameras are part of fighting the next war, but within the homeland, they aim to prevent risks from becoming threats that cause domestic insecurity, as well as result in overseas conflict. Technological innovation "makes the perceived demands of the future determine present action" which is no longer controlled by military

practices, but politics (Rasmussen, 2006:65). Technologies within the homeland extend the pre-emptive narrative beyond the boundaries of Iraq and Afghanistan, bringing risk-management back to the homeland as a way of fighting future wars.

Counter-Surveillance Technologies

In this final section I introduce an alternative way to understanding the role of surveillance technologies in the WoT by presenting a counter-narrative. Surveillance technologies driven by politics as they fail to produce an 'actual' sense of security, beyond what the Copenhagen School coin a social construction of security (Buzan *et al,* 1998).

The success of surveillance technologies in generating security relies upon the political goals established by the new managers of war- politicians. Surveillance technologies have been successful in achieving political truths created by politicians. This has denied the public to fully understand the counter-narratives at work and the role they perform in undermining technological success (Paglen, 2009). Surveillance technologies are now being countered by grassroots projects that attempt to undermine the political narratives constructed in the WoT. The artist Adam Harvey's clothing design produces possibilities of a 'counter-surveillance fashion', coined 'Stealth Wear', that is part of the counter-narrative undermining the politics of pre-emption, by making the body invisible from politics (Maly, 2013). Although such practices have a novelty and jovial aspect, they are important in challenging the bio-politics of security governing the think of security, in particular within the WoT. Constructing counter-surveillance practices is claimed by Harvey and some members of the public to "feel more comfortable….more protected." from the invasion of privacy by politicians (Maly, 2013:01). Furthermore, the clothing counters the 'new security culture' of pre-emption, as individuals become undetectable by facial recognition cameras, CTS, UAVs, biometric checkpoints/borders, and CCTV.

Conclusion

Blurring the historical boundaries between Vietnam and Iraq argues politics has always been a driving force in the practice of surveillance. Nonetheless, surveillance technologies in the WoT have marked a transformation in a new security culture both overseas and at home of an anticipatory logic which has justified their deployment as necessary. Both in foreign policy and national security surveillance technologies have become necessary to achieve political narratives embedded within the WoT. Surveillance technologies are extremely problematic in producing a sense of security that stretches beyond the political realm and therefore, it is important in understanding alternative narratives of the WoT. Ultimately, surveillance technologies construct a pre-emptive understanding of security as a result of WoT political rhetoric, and foreign and domestic policy.

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Date written: June 2013