

**Stuart Elden, *Terror and Territory: The Spatial Extent of Sovereignty*,  
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This book forms the latest installment in Professor Elden's examination of the connections between sovereignty and territory. This time, however, rather than an examination of spatiality in political thought, *Terror and Territory* directly connects his theoretical interests with an empirical, politically-engaged study of recent history to demonstrate "that territory is continually being reconfigured; spatial relations are continually in the process of remaking."<sup>1</sup> The introduction connects terror and territory, and not solely on a "suspect etymological basis" (p.xxx). Territory requires a bordering process and the territory of the state forms "a space established and constituted by violence" (p.xxx), allowing literature on "state-terror" to be analyzed from a territorial perspective through the rubric of the "War on Terror." Rather than merely its deterritorializing aspects, Elden wishes to emphasize ongoing processes of reterritorialization (p.xxvii) that "remake" and "reconfigure" territory, considered both here and in his larger project as a "constitutive dimension" (p.xxxi) of geopolitical struggle.

Chapter 1 sets out the development of the U.S. territorial strategy during the "War on Terror," with the familiar figures of Fukuyama, Huntington and Kaplan introduced to illustrate what Elden, following Gerard Toal, calls the "geopolitical vertigo" (p.7) of the post-Cold War period. This vertigo is shown in the U.S. response to 9/11 which displays continuities with prior U.S. interventions, yet moves simultaneously in contradictory directions. Domestically, the importance of "Homeland security" has led to a sealing of U.S. borders and a tightening of sovereign control over its own territory (p.4), yet continuing overseas intervention weakens distinctions between domestic and foreign affairs (p.20). Domestic interests are projected abroad (p.25) through the spread of both markets and democracy, and foreign military intervention. The former creates a core of Kantian peace, defined by being "with" us against states "like" them (pp.24-32), while the latter shows states in what Robert Kagan calls "the outer zone," and Thomas Barnett the "gap," existing in a Hobbesian state of nature (p.21&23). U.S. Strategy consists of both expanding the core and simply "flattening," either figuratively or literally, territory beyond it (pp.22-23).

Chapter 2 deals with challenges "to the *relation* between state, sovereignty and territory" offered by Islamism (p.34), examined through the notions of Caliphate, network and base (p.44). The Caliphate is a "restored Islamic Empire" (p.41) rationalized by Jihad (p.44) as supra-national territory,

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<sup>1</sup> Interview by Leonhardt van Efferink (January 2010), at [http://www.exploringgeopolitics.org/Interview\\_Elden\\_Stuart\\_Terror\\_Territory\\_Spatial\\_Extent\\_Sovereignty\\_Territorial\\_Integrity\\_United\\_States\\_Robert\\_Kaplan\\_Thomas\\_Barnett\\_Al\\_Qaeda\\_Radical\\_Islamism.html](http://www.exploringgeopolitics.org/Interview_Elden_Stuart_Terror_Territory_Spatial_Extent_Sovereignty_Territorial_Integrity_United_States_Robert_Kaplan_Thomas_Barnett_Al_Qaeda_Radical_Islamism.html)

distinct from the *dar al-harb*, the land of war. This shall be realized through the interrelation between networks and bases (p.54), the former indicative of deterritorialization and the latter of territorial control of or within states (p.42&53). Agamben's notion of "spaces of exception" is rejected due to Islamism's reliance on the absence or weakness of sovereignty, rather than its intensification, as shown in Chapter 3 on the "weak" or "failed" states of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Lebanon and Somalia. In these places, the theoretically "inviolable relation between sovereignty and territory has broken down" (p.63), threatening the structure of international law while providing opportunities for non-state actors to base themselves in the State's territory. The paradox Elden highlights is that actions of outside powers to counter such non-state actors in turn limit the "traditional right of non-interference" (p.63), making further explicit this disjuncture between sovereignty and territory.

This disjuncture is the focus of Chapter 4 on Iraq, examining the state's "territorial integrity." This refers ambiguously to either the mere territorial preservation of a spatial area, or the maintenance of sovereignty (pp.116-117). In Iraq the preservation of territorial boundaries has been undertaken and guaranteed by outside powers, and Iraqi sovereignty has become highly "contingent" (p.129) upon three factors: regional stability, terrorist bases, and the material condition of its people. These all provide grounds for intervention, the first two under the rubric of the War on Terror, and the last as humanitarian intervention (p.138). The historical background for this is fleshed out in Chapter 5, where Elden notes the basis of decolonization was the legal principle of *uti possidetis* (as you possess), and that ever since the notion of territorial integrity has trumped other factors (144). However, maintaining territorial integrity through "conditional sovereignty" (p.162) or "sovereignty with responsibility" (p.156), with conditions and responsibilities defined from the outside, has served to render all sovereignty as contingent. The conclusion serves to reiterate the notion of territory as the "spatial extent of sovereignty" and to emphasize sovereignty as at the intersection between territory and terror (p.171).

While the above outline cannot do justice to a fascinating and wide-ranging study, there are issues perhaps worthy of further reflection. Elden sees notions of "territorial integrity" dependent upon "contingent sovereignty" as having been brought into focus since the end of the Cold War, which allowed the Security Council to operate "more as the founders intended" (p.173) and sanction intervention to maintain the "integrity" of states. This argument seems problematic due to the long history of intervention in sovereign states, which Elden fails to engage with sufficiently (p.176). Also, if increased intervention results in "the collapse of the sovereign fiction that states have a monopoly of legitimate violence within their territory" (p.177), then the notion of a "sovereign" state becomes limited to those "like" the U.S., Britain, Israel and Russia, of which "violence can exceed their borders" (p.171). This reduces sovereignty to both the preserve of the powerful, and an aspect of a hegemonic U.S. project (p.175) of *imperium*, along with democracy, stability, and human rights. These values should be read against the notion of the Caliphate offered in Chapter 2, which reveals the latter as a territorial concept, but not based on state or sovereignty. Yet if these are irrelevant to the territory of Islamism/al-Qaeda (the conflation of these two notions is in itself somewhat suspect) this undermines Elden's justification for studying territory through the twin lenses of sovereignty and state.

Ironically the history of territory offered here seems too shallow. In the Introduction, Elden offers the standard view that “[t]he idea that political sovereignty is tied to land, and then to goods, resources, and the people that occupy it, is a relatively recent [late Middle Ages] notion,” and that this depends upon Cartesian bounded space (p.xxvi). However, the role (or indeed meaning) of Cartesian space is never clarified, and consequently the lack of difference between the definition offered above and that of Pomponius which serves as Elden’s epigraph, that “*territorium* is the sum of the lands within the boundaries of a community,” mitigates against a conceptual break between the Roman and modern period. This importantly means that while territory defines and is defined by the community, again these relations need not be limited to those of states and sovereignty.

This has implications for the claim that the “contingency” of sovereignty results in anything that upsets this integrity being seen as damaging to stability, and so “recoded” as terrorism (p.169). Yet secessionist movements also invest territory and boundaries with meaning, and it is the ensuing competition between territorial notions that promotes intervention. Recent events in Kosovo, in Georgia, the post-Saddam conflict in Iraq, centripetal tendencies in Somalia and the ongoing Israeli/Palestinian conflict center on such issues, as do instances of successful secession such as Bangladesh, Eritrea and now South Sudan (see p. xxv, where this is hinted at but not developed). Secession is not only terrorism, but also independence, liberation, and decolonization. It is this “coding” that is contingent, rather than the attribute of sovereignty itself. In his focus on sovereignty, Elden appears to once again dehistoricize territory and render it *a priori*, but as his book shows, in the contemporary world territory remains conditioned by more than sovereignty and the state.

Professor Elden has written an engaging and fascinating study of a vast topic which, in focusing on the relations of politics and space, questions issues fundamental, yet understudied, to our contemporary situation. The reviewer looks forward eagerly to engaging with his wider project on the history of space due for release in 2013.