

Self-discipline in a Time of Terror

U.S. Foreign Policy and the U.S. Self

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It has been over five years since the tragic attacks of September 11 2001...

Why is it that one feels as though they *have* to say that 9/11 was a 'tragic', 'terrible' or 'horrific' event? Why is this inclination intensified if one seeks to comment critically on U.S. politics? Is it not clear that death on that scale and in that manner is without exception horrific, terrible and tragic? Or, is it that as a critical scholar I feel compelled to clarify that I am not with the terrorists simply because I intend to critique aspects of U.S. foreign policy? The point of this is not to argue that one should stop referring to 9/11 as 'horrific', 'terrible' or 'tragic', but rather to examine what causes individuals to monitor the way in which they act when they engage with a powerful foreign policy consensus.

This article will demonstrate that the consequences of broad foreign policy consensus are systemic in their effects upon the U.S. self. The current War on Terror waged by the U.S. has subjected its citizens to an indeterminate and ambiguous war. Not only has this war subjected U.S. citizens to the duties and responsibilities that a state requires of its citizens during wartime, but has also provided a powerful and pervasive national sense of purpose behind which to rally. In this way the War on Terror is a foreign policy that helps define 'the self' or what can be seen as the prevailing national identity. Thus it is a war that entails not only the economic and material costs associated with an extended and concerted campaign, but also the social and political costs that come with a 'permanent war mentality'. Under such a mentality, increased military actions, increased military intelligence and increased military surveillance *within* the U.S. seem like 'good common sense'. Under this mentality, suspicion and even persecution of those that may resemble the 'threatening other' is a small price to pay for domestic security. Under this mentality it is important to be patriotic, because dissent or criticism directed at the state only helps the other. Under this mentality it is important to

prepare for the worst. It is this mentality that has been sweeping through U.S. society since 9/11. Whilst this may seem increasingly self-evident, traditional understandings of international politics fail to account for these consequences.

International politics is widely understood in terms of an international and a domestic political realm. In this binary world-view, the state's foreign policy is an externally orientated power that is not understood to have an effect on individuals living within its borders. For example, the Cold War was said to have been fought against the external 'Soviet threat' of communism. The Cold War was at times seen to be fought 'at home', but only when the external threat managed to get 'inside'. The War on Terror, likewise, is understood to be against a 'terrorist threat' from the outside, which since September 11, 2001, poses a direct threat to the U.S. homeland. Foreign policy is thus an attempt to shield the self against threat and overcome these 'external others', even when they penetrate into the 'internal' realm.

Critical perspectives have sought to deconstruct traditional binaries and reconceptualize the everyday practice of international politics. Such approaches have highlighted that the many 'realities' of international politics can be seen as discursive constructions that have taken on the appearance of 'truth'. Critical analysis of foreign policy, in particular, has allowed it to be appreciated as a process other than simply responding to an objective threat.¹ In a similar vein, this article will demonstrate the effect that these representations of the terrorist other have had on the U.S. self. Towards this end, this article will develop a way in which the systemic nature of the foreign policy effects on the self can be conceived using the Foucauldian understanding of discipline. The strength of the Foucauldian analysis is the ability to highlight the subtle processes of social control that the state's foreign policy imposes on the self.² In addition to the Foucauldian analysis, discipline can also be used in its literal sense to capture the more overt use of state coercion against the individuals of the self. Using discipline, particularly in the former sense, allows foreign policy to be understood in a way that most approaches to international politics cannot.

The disciplinary analysis reconceptualizes or 'relocates' the way that foreign policy can be understood. By portraying foreign policy equally as a domestic power, one that can both subtly and coercively alter the way members of the U.S. act, it can be seen as similar to the powers of surveillance, policing, education or even health care. Such an understanding is not meant as a new definitive way of 'knowing'

foreign policy. Rather, by changing the way foreign policy can be understood, this article demonstrates the importance of a greater awareness of the power that the foreign policy has over the self. By using discipline to understand foreign policy, this article provides a unique way of seeing through the stifling, self-regulating ‘permanent war mentality’.

Conceptualizing the Use of the State’s Disciplinary Power Against Its Self

Discipline was never more important or more valorised than at the moment when it became important to manage a population.

— Michel Foucault³

In the spirit of Foucault’s observations on discipline, this analysis of U.S. foreign policy processes using the notion of discipline does not declare the existence of modern disciplinary techniques, nor foreign policy for that matter, completely moribund. Rather (and this is the case with the project of modernity generally), it is to highlight that there are processes, good, bad, but mainly ambiguous, all of which we should try to be aware of. Consequently, a relocation of U.S. foreign policy suggests that as much as achieving liberty, it engenders discipline. As much has been suggested in general terms by Foucault. ‘The “Enlightenment”, which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines’.⁴

No rigid definition of what exactly discipline *is* will be offered here. There is, however, an obligation to convey a sense of the usage of the term and the means through which it might operate. According to Foucault

discipline may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a ‘physics’ or an ‘anatomy’ of power, a technology.⁵

The obvious text from which these ideas of discipline are drawn is Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, or *Surveiller et punir* in its original French. The original French word for ‘discipline’ bears an obvious resemblance to the English ‘surveillance’ and offers some indication of how discipline is understood in the Foucauldian context: as an impassive yet ever-present force. Discipline, here, is largely used in

this Foucauldian sense, although the literal sense can also be observed in relation to U.S. foreign policy.

According to Foucault, the apparent neutrality and political invisibility of disciplinary regimes allows its power to be exercised with maximum effect because it is hidden from view. The application of this power will likely become ever less apparent as it becomes increasingly seamlessly integrated into more and more aspects of modern society. The reason for this is that unlike literal meaning where the individual is *forced* into being a disciplined subject, the Foucauldian understanding sees the individual *subjecting himself* to discipline. This is well illustrated using the example in which Foucault initially observed this phenomenon. Foucault identified this effect in his study of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. The Panopticon

is an annular structure with a tower at the centre, which contains—or might not contain—a guard to observe and through this observation indirectly, non-violently control the behaviour of prisoners, schoolchildren, hospital patients, military trainees, whomever finds themselves on the other side of the one-way gaze.⁶

Thus, the Panopticon was said to 'automatize and individualize power'.⁷ The seemingly omnipotent gaze of the Panopticon places the individual in such a position that they are perpetuating the unbroken psychological effect of the surveillance process, and their subjection to it. The technology of the Panopticon compels the individual to constantly discipline their behaviour, given that they could never be sure that they were free from surveillance.

Foucault's argument based on his reading of the effects of the Panopticon was that the panoptic techniques were used in many instances throughout society.⁸ In this sense, a relationship of asymmetry exists whereby the regime could alter and normalize individual behaviour, yet the individual remained powerless to influence the regime in return.⁹ The individual, following regular subjection to this asymmetry, would of their own accord begin to act as though they were under constant supervision, monitoring their own thoughts and actions. Consequently, panopticism as 'a model of human and/or technical organization is governed by three principles: clarity, docility and utility'.¹⁰ In one sense this gives rise to a very reliable and well run society, a 'system of certainty', although on the other hand it is one that is quite stifling in its lack of plurality.¹¹ While Foucault's critiques and those derived from him do not often extend their analysis of discipline outside the boundaries of the state or to foreign policy,

his critique is nonetheless incisive as the disciplinary power of panopticism is said to ‘pervade modernity’.¹²

The role of discipline in the Foucauldian sense is not so much to explicitly control individuals but to shape and produce the way in which they ‘know’. This involves the construction of what is described as a ‘regime of truth’, a discursive reality whereby rules, codes and procedures are written into everyday life. These processes have a panoptic effect, in that they are an ever-present ‘truth’, ‘reality’, or ‘common sense’ that the individual is constantly subjected to. The individual is thus in an asymmetrical relationship with a discursive regime and is in this sense under ‘surveillance’ from these norms, resulting in the individual subjecting themselves to discipline. The modern individual functions in any number of relationships with various disciplinary regimes and whilst they are not ‘owned’ in any sovereign sense by any one of these regimes, these individuals can become ‘subjected and practised bodies’ or ‘docile bodies’.¹³ It is in this way that U.S. foreign policy exerts control over the domestic populace.

The Use of Foreign Policy Discipline Against the Internal Self

The welding of a hitherto unchecked and shapeless populace into a firm form was not only instituted by an act of violence but also carried to its conclusion by nothing but acts of violence.

– F. Nietzsche¹⁴

The presence of disciplinary forces in U.S. politics can be seen in what could be described as a ‘permanent war mentality’. The historical tendency in U.S. foreign policy to construct threatening others in a way that creates and recreates a domestic sense of self has meant that the U.S. has effectively been on a war footing since World War II: The Cold War closely followed the end of WWII; Wars on Drugs and Iraq punctuated the latter stages of the Cold War and the nineties; and since late-2001 there has been a declared War on Terror that shows no signs of abating. Sheldon Wolin describes wartime as ‘a time of civilian sacrifice, of giving up certain accustomed amenities, even some necessities’.¹⁵ Michael Hardt describes the current counter-terrorism as an ‘intensification of a form of rule that was already in formation [and one] that functions through a permanent state of emergency’.¹⁶ It has been suggested that the current U.S. administration is exploiting

a sense of vulnerability in the current, charged climate of anti-terrorism by making regular alarmist announcements about ‘terror levels’ and the expectation of potential terror attacks.¹⁷ A foundational premise of a permanent war mentality seems to be the idea of sacrificing liberties for ‘security’. Here, the state’s institutions are exercising the power of authority in such a way that the citizens are required to alter their thoughts and behaviour, thus constituting a literal form of discipline. There are, however, more subtle effects resulting from these state actions.

The disciplinary effects of U.S. foreign policy are more diffuse than it would seem in simply literal terms. The ‘permanent war mentality’ also highlights discursive and panoptic effects of this foreign policy environment, which constitute a Foucauldian disciplinary regime. After all, the foreign policy community is a site for an intense rendering of power as knowledge in which prevailing norms and narratives are portrayed as truth. Not only is this a stifling environment for thinking critically and at times intellectually, it also facilitates the panoptic process. The existence of a powerful ‘truth’ that is widely known constitutes an ever-present discourse that circumscribes what it is to be an American, a patriot and an efficient citizen. In short, it dictates what is right and what is wrong. In addition, however, because of the links to foreign policy and the national security discourse, this right and wrong becomes elevated to a ‘matter of national security’, with all the connotations that this implies.

Individuals, both within the foreign policy making community and throughout society more generally, are constantly aware of these circumscriptions. The vast network of information and entertainment ensure there is a constant supply of readymade norms, values and social stereotypes.¹⁸ Whilst there is no immediate, formal, state-sanctioned punishment for breaking them, there is an amount of social stigma and ostracization placed on those who are seen as ‘un-American’. Within workplaces, schools and other public settings, for example, there are social restrictions on the expression of unpatriotic sentiments. This relationship between the individual and the foreign policy regime is one perpetuated by the individual and one that causes them to alter their behaviour as a result of the stifling discursive environment. This process both underpins and reinforces the dominant foreign policy narrative.

The distinction between the two forms of discipline highlighted by the ‘permanent war mentality’ is captured by what Foucault refers to as a ‘functional inversion of disciplines’.¹⁹ Here Foucault argues that

in the literal sense the existence of a legitimate apparatus acting in the name of the state allows it to discipline individuals. Meanwhile, the existence of discipline in the Foucauldian sense reconstitutes the legitimate apparatus above and beyond its actual ability to exact discipline itself. Consequently, in the former, the authority facilitates the disciplining of the individual whilst in the latter, self-discipline by the individual facilitates the authority; hence Foucault's inversion. Foucault also describes how disciplinary processes are becoming more diffuse, relying less on distinct bureaucratic apparatuses, instead working increasingly through discursive means.²⁰ This discursive and panoptic understanding of discipline captures the power of the U.S. foreign policy process over the self especially well. For while there are distinct institutions in the U.S. foreign policy community—the State Department, the White House, the Defense Department, think tanks and universities—they are not formally assigned a mandate by the state to rule over the self, except in vague and parochial terms such as 'pursuing the national interest'. Yet the official discourse used by these foreign policy institutions plays a part in creating a widely held understanding of the world and the effect this has on the self cannot be captured fully by the literal sense of discipline, nor for that matter traditional approaches to international politics.

The power of the language of foreign policy or 'discourses of danger' over the self can be critically scrutinized using the Foucauldian notion of discipline. According to Campbell, the disciplining of elements within a society that refuse or fail to assimilate with 'the secure identity on the inside' occurs when such 'liminal' groups are 'linked through a discourse of *danger* with threats identified on the outside'.²¹ These discourses of danger then form part of the US state's foreign policy discourse. This process can be seen as the

inscription of danger on ambiguity in such a way that the differences within are transformed into differences between. This has to be understood as a process *more complex than either the intentional use of foreign policy threats to contain internal subversion or the creation of myths of identity through foreign adventures.*²²

Campbell's observation usefully highlights the subtle differences in the workings of disciplinary power. Attempts to link internal subversion with external 'discourses of danger' highlight the existence of a binary regime of truth that is impassive yet ever-present. Utilizing the Foucauldian notion of discipline, U.S. foreign policy discourse can be seen as a regime that acts upon the individual in such a way that it pro-

duces an effective patriotic citizen or an abnormal that is not the self and is thus other.

The designation of an 'internal other' could stem from any number of combinations of national, gender, racial, religious, or 'intellectually dissident' social characteristics. Ashley and Walker capture the marginal nature of these groups using their notion of those who live on the 'borderlines' of global understandings.²³ This 'internal other' immediately becomes subject to the disciplinary effects of dominant foreign policy discourse especially if they happen to represent, even if superficially, the constructed 'threatening other' that is being employed to consolidate the domestic self-identity. The disciplinary effect is induced through the process whereby this 'internal other' is made to be constantly aware of otherness as they move in a society of self. Each person representing the self effectively then functions as a means of panoptic surveillance. While the process and its effects may vary in intensity, what is perpetuated is a process of disciplining that encourages assimilation and inflicts normalization.

Articulating the Representation of the 'Terrorist Threat' as a Disciplinary Regime

Homeland security in the 21st century is really about the integration of a nation.

- Tom Ridge²⁴

The current foreign policy discourse of the War on Terror established a potent disciplinary regime. The ubiquity of this discourse has provided a powerful set of norms by which to not only conceive and engage the other but also to define and discipline the self. These norms inform domestic national security, or in current parlance 'homeland security', creating a practically impenetrable regime of truth and stifling critical dissent. This becomes observable as foreign policy objectives saturate the domestic security agenda and form a particularly powerful disciplinary regime or norm, which in turn shapes and produces the individual and the way in which they 'know'. The ubiquity and sense of inevitability about the War on Terror has seen U.S. foreign policy turn upon its self.

The current discourse by which contemporary politics is framed was set in motion, and is represented by the oddly apposite signifier of the new emergency, '9/11'.²⁵ The terrible tragedy of September 11,

2001 was not just the loss of life that resulted from the airborne attacks, but also the resurrection of a powerful and inflexible, predominantly militaristic approach to seeking security. In this sense, the 'new' security paradigm of 'terrorist threat' reintroduced a Cold War sense of surety and mission. This surety stems from the existence of a now clearly designated, albeit amorphous, enemy found in the 'terrorist threat' and clear sense of mission found in the War on Terror. The ensuing anti-terrorist sentiment has produced an inescapable foreign policy discourse and created an organizing principle for U.S. national security both externally and domestically.²⁶

Since the end of the Cold War confrontation with the 'Soviet threat' U.S. foreign policy has been without an 'other' by which to define and discipline itself. Having failed to find solace in the 'War on Drugs', previous perceptions of terrorism, 'rogue states', nor in the brief experiment with the 'End of History', the future direction of U.S. foreign policy seemed uncertain. This complacency and indecision was shattered by the attacks on the New York World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. The righteous anger at these attacks was clear enough and with this came a renewed sense of mission. The evidence of an unambiguous 'terrorist threat' appeared, over and over on every television, newspaper and radio. There was complete media saturation of the images of '9/11'. In this hyperreal state of emergency there was little chance to ponder appropriate responses as the U.S. began to limber up its mighty war machine for its inevitable retributive justice. Within mere hours the 'terrorist threat' had become the new discursively produced and unquestionable reality threatening national security. Critical dissent and alternate policy options such as treating the attacks as a criminal matter were deemed either too abstract or unhelpful in a time that was seen to require realistic and practical policy; read war.²⁷

Representations of the 'terrorist threat' promote a response that is state-based and militaristic and in doing so engender discipline. Indeed, the identity politics based around the creation of an 'us and them' and a reaffirmation of the geographies of 'inside and outside' also suggest that the 'war on terror is morphing into a re-run of the Cold War'.²⁸ The parallels between the Cold War and the War on Terror foreign policies are not just limited to the realist ontology of nation states as actors and dichotomized domestic and external realms; both also adhere to a positivist epistemology. This positivist appeal to a single and objective truth combined with a binary approach to knowledge implies that the only alternative to anti-ter-

rorism and the War on Terror is terrorism itself; witness the famous statement by Bush that 'you are with us, or you are with the terrorists'.²⁹ The War on Terror then, is not just an attempt to resecure geographical borders, but also to resecure 'discursive borders' of traditional understandings of security.³⁰ These profound conceptual continuities have been masked by superficial shifts in diplomatic and military strategies, whereby the War on Terror has been used to justify the rejection of traditional Cold War notions of balance of power and deterrence in favour of a politics of hegemony and pre-emptive war.³¹ Both these 'new' and 'old' foreign policy approaches, however, are still well within the familiar 'dualistic and militaristic Cold War thinking patterns'.³² Framed in this way, the objectives of the War on Terror against the 'terrorist threat' has a sense of 'familiarity' and goes some way in explaining why it has been widely and unquestioningly adopted as 'good common sense' policy.

Simplistic and binary representations of the 'terrorist threat' have furthered the dissemination of the foreign policy regime throughout domestic politics and society. The combination of state authority and familiar logic makes it easy to take at face value the official representations that portray the 'terrorist threat' as a purely evil irrationality. The speeches of George W. Bush and other members of his administration unproblematically portray 'terrorists' as an inhuman, homogeneous personification of pure evil. Take for example the following four public statements made by Bush:

[t]hey embrace tyranny and death as a cause and a creed;³³

[they are] people who have no country, no ideology;³⁴

[t]hey're evil and so dark and so negative;³⁵

[their] only motivation is evil.³⁶

These representations of the 'terrorist threat' rely on racial and religious stereotyping to create a starkly contrasted other.³⁷ Signs such as Islamic faith, 'middle eastern appearance', beards and burkas designate this external other. In so doing, this articulation of the dire threat to national security becomes unavoidably tied to common social stereotypes within the U.S. Domestic difference is no longer just a threat to the national identity; it becomes a national security concern. The discursive weight placed upon these notorious stereotypes make it increasingly likely that members of the internal self who bear these recognizable signs of alterity will become aware of the polarities of self and other and discipline themselves in order to bring them in line

with one of these distinct identities. This further reinforces the demarcation of 'us' and 'them'.

A somewhat contradictory manifestation of the 'terrorist threat' discourse has seen the foreign policy discipline carve deep into the internal self. Diverging somewhat from the articulation of the terrorist as radically other is the discourse of the 'home-grown terrorist' and the 'sleeper agent'. Here terrorists are portrayed as devious schemers that are virtually indistinguishable from any other U.S. patriot by virtue of being born in the U.S. or having immigrated and then assimilated themselves into U.S. society. From this position of anonymity they are seen to be able to freely plot against the U.S., unhindered by the best efforts of authorities. One Fox News report went so far as to state that there are as many as 5,000 potential sleeper agents in the U.S. and many of these are 'believed to be longtime U.S. citizens, fully immersed in American life'.³⁸ While this discourse was observable following '9/11', it has emerged strongly following the London bombings of 7 July 2005. This discourse can be seen in George W. Bush's statement that al Qaeda is a foe that has been able to infiltrate 'our cities and communities' and continues to 'hid[e] in our midst'.³⁹ The representation of patriot and foe as largely indistinguishable will only give rise to a finely attuned suspicion of other members of the self, one that can target those who show or even feel only the smallest amount of alterity. This can be seen as the panoptic gaze becoming more diffuse and pervading more deeply into everyday life.

Using Foucault's notion of discipline, it can be seen how U.S. foreign policy has been played out both domestically and externally as a result of the perceived 'terrorist threat'. Foreign policy in this sense is not just externally focused but a broad array of disciplinary strategies in which the foreign and domestic become blurred. The War on Terror has thus had profound effects upon the politics and society of the U.S. and indeed other countries of the world. These effects can be captured by the notion of discipline, whether it be the coercive, 'literal discipline' or the more subtle, 'Foucauldian discipline'. The particularly violent disciplining of external others that has been carried out under the rubric of the War on Terror will be examined initially, before turning in more depth to the varied use of discipline within the U.S. against the self in an attempt to counter the subversive 'terrorist threat'.

The Use of War on Terror Discipline Against the External Other

We created Saddam Hussein, just like we created Bin Laden. We create our own enemies.

- Jim Hoagland⁴⁰

Whether we bring our enemies to justice, or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done.

- George W. Bush⁴¹

Following '9/11' the U.S. has waged two significant wars against nation states that were deemed to signify a 'terrorist threat' to the U.S. Ironically, both Afghanistan and Iraq owed their existence to the financial and military support they received as U.S. proxies in the Cold War. In this sense, viewed outside of the official War on Terror account, these wars could equally be seen as the disciplining of erst-while allies. Regardless of how just the cause, it is hard to conclude that the terrible devastation wrought by modern military technologies upon disparate and vulnerable populations should be seen as an apt form of justice. Indeed, little measure was spared, as these campaigns could be viewed as symbolic retribution for '9/11', a kind of super-power attempt to 'save face'.

Afghanistan's ruling force, the Taliban, supported al Qaeda training camps in its eastern provinces and as a result it became the first military target of the War on Terror. *Operation Enduring Freedom* began on 7 October 2001, having been planned in the days following '9/11'. Official figures on casualties are either unknown or not released, but civilian deaths are said to be around 3,500.⁴² Following the overthrow of the Taliban, Iraq was subsequently singled out for a number of reasons ranging seamlessly from its status as a 'rogue state', to its links to al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, to its ability to proliferate 'weapons of mass destruction', and finally Saddam Hussein's human rights violations. Invasion was inevitable, regardless of the eventual reason proffered and as such *Operation Iraqi Freedom* commenced on the 20 March 2003, an invasion that has since been deemed by the Secretary General of the United Nations as 'illegal'.⁴³ Even more so than Afghanistan it is hard to determine casualty rates caused by the U.S. attacks, but estimates put the numbers of civilian deaths up around 30,000 during the 'major-combat' phase.⁴⁴ It is not simply, however, a matter of the immediate devastation wrought by

the ‘smart’ weapons designed to ‘shock and awe’, but equally the rupture and social dislocation caused by the U.S.’s attempt to impose through military means a ‘democratic transformation’ on diverse societies. In this sense, these wars are graphically disciplinary as they attempt to create an entirely different form of society based on the modern American interpretation of the ideals of liberalism, capitalism and democracy. These are not necessarily unworthy ideals; they do represent, however, a radical attempt to violently discipline and shape entire societies.

In addition to these more orthodox wars, the U.S. has taken secret police-like disciplinary powers of detention and interrogation out of its sovereign sphere and into the realm of international legal limbo. During the Afghanistan campaign the U.S. established ‘Camp X-Ray’ in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba to indefinitely hold, without charge, captured Taliban fighters that may or may not be linked to al Qaeda.⁴⁵ Defining these prisoners as ‘unlawful combatants’, the U.S. argues, prevents them from falling under the jurisdiction of the Geneva Conventions pertaining to ‘prisoners-of-war’. Neither do they have status within the U.S. as ‘aliens’, because Guantanamo Bay is extraterritorial and consequently not part of U.S. sovereign territory. This means Guantanamo Bay exists as a legal, historical, political and geographical limbo-land. Similarly, Abu Ghraib emerged as a lawless asylum within occupied Iraq, employing dehumanizing interrogation tactics that involved humiliation and torture. Accordingly, Abu Ghraib has been likened to Orwell’s ‘Room 101’, where prisoners’ deepest fears are realized.⁴⁶ That some soldiers have interpreted the discourse in such a way as to condone these actions may not be entirely surprising given the frightening image of a dehumanized other that has been constructed. These actions against the external other constitute a kind of ‘international McCarthyism’ perpetuated by the War on Terror, whereby anything associated with the ‘terrorist threat’ will be disciplined under the rubric of ‘terrorist threat’.⁴⁷

The Use of War on Terror Discipline Against the Internal Self

Intelligence, apart from the height of the Cold War, is normally thought to involve external enemies, whereas policing is generally assumed to relate to domestic populations. But techniques for gathering data on foreign spies and subversives are now to be used internally.

- David Lyon⁴⁸

[Not only is counter-terrorism] certain to demand discipline and sacrifice, this calling will likely do so through disciplinary tactics such as the expansion of surveillance powers and the sacrifice of civil rights.

- Lon Troyer⁴⁹

The War on Terror that has been waged against the ‘terrorist threat’ both within and outside of the U.S., not only constitutes a powerful foreign policy discourse but also a stifling disciplinary regime. Virtually all of the public debate surrounding the War on Terror has been over the legality or otherwise of literal discipline in the form of increased state surveillance and coercive powers. The side of the debate seeking to justify these measures argues along traditional ‘strong state’ lines that increased state security is required in the face of the terrorist threat. Countering this position is the civil liberties position that insists that the increase in security cannot be justified given the loss in freedoms and liberties. While the concern for civil liberties is one of the few points of resistance against the domestic War on Terror, it does however, fail to observe some of the more critical consequences of this foreign policy stance. Using the Foucauldian understanding of discipline these consequences become clear.

The Foucauldian understanding of discipline can be seen in this context in two respects. Firstly, it can be seen specifically in the negotiation of the disciplinary space by the many complex identities that constitute the U.S. self, particularly those who are Muslim and/or of ‘middle eastern appearance’. Secondly, it can be identified broadly in the ubiquity of the foreign policy discourse, which places each individual in an unbroken and asymmetrical relationship with this powerful regime, causing him to subliminally or even consciously alter his behaviour in accordance with this guiding norm.

As was demonstrated earlier, popular representations of the current foreign policy discourse were impossible to avoid. The discursive renderings of the devastation of ‘9/11’, the gravity of the ‘terrorist threat’ and the ‘common sense’ of the subsequent War on Terror have been so widespread and so immediate that it is hard not to see them as ‘reality’. In this sense the positivist and dualistic nature of the War on Terror largely removes the questions of ‘why’ and ‘how’.⁵⁰ Many of the responses to ‘9/11’ have treated it as an event that is ‘an exception that bans critical thought and justifies a state of permanent emergency’.⁵¹ This notion of the state of emergency, akin to the permanent wartime mentality, can be understood as ‘a situation, declared by the state, in which the strategies and tactics of the military [are] employed

legally'.⁵² The emergency or war mentality demands a high level of citizen loyalty and a certain obligation toward the state.⁵³ One such obligation seems to be the sacrifice of personal liberty in exchange for 'security', a false transaction that is likely to 'turn control of our lives over to the police'.⁵⁴

Civil liberties literature has been vital in challenging aspects of the domestic War on Terror that involve the use of literal discipline against the U.S. self. An example of this concern is the Patriot Act's overly broad definition of 'domestic terrorism'. Under this definition 'many forms of civil disobedience, including legitimate and peaceful protest,' can be treated as terrorism.⁵⁵ Another feature of the Patriot Act has been the re-emergence of the 'material-support law', which targets those that may happen to associate with 'terrorists'. Civil Liberties perspectives have highlighted that this law increasingly 'undermines freedom of association and threatens to rehabilitate the [Cold War] notion of "guilt by association"'.⁵⁶ One of the most controversial aspects of the Patriot Act has given investigators the authority to obtain any commercial or personal records that may be held by any person or organisation. In addition, a 'gag order' compels the holder of the records not to inform the suspect of the investigation.⁵⁷ So widespread is the concern over these provisions that over four hundred communities across forty three states have passed resolutions condemning the Patriot Act.⁵⁸

The concern over the preservation of civil liberties in the face of the counter-terrorist measures, however, overlooks cases of much more pervasive discipline. The controversy over the domestic 'spying' or surveillance in the form of wiretapping of phone calls from outside of the U.S. is an important front in seeking to maintain much-valued liberties and resisting the unrestricted presence of government surveillance in everyday life. This concern, however, overlooks the exaction of discipline in at least two respects. Official defences of the domestic surveillance make it clear that forms of dissent such as 'whistle-blowing' are not only illegal but are also a 'shameful act', the very discussion of which 'is helping the enemy'⁵⁹, 'damag[ing] our national security and put[ting] our citizens at risk'.⁶⁰ This is an obvious attempt to discipline the increasing tendency toward whistle-blowing by labelling it as a sign of otherness and a national security concern.⁶¹ On a broader level this high profile focus on the intrusion of surveillance into everyday life furthers the panoptic self-surveillance that individuals enact upon themselves. The way in which this issue is being understood bears the hallmarks of a classic panoptic

regime. On one hand there is widespread awareness of the presence of surveillance measures, yet the scarcity of specific details means that these subjects are unclear to what extent the surveillance is being carried out. Further, because of the object of surveillance are those thoughts and actions that can be tied to the 'terrorist threat', the inscription of discipline by individuals will seek to eliminate such tendencies within themselves and fear that tendency in others.

Throughout the course of the domestic War on Terror, discipline has been inscribed upon the bodies of individuals through a range of highly visible announcements and actions. Such 'panic regimes'⁶² as David Lyons refers to them, have included: the increasingly visible presence and blurred nature of the military and police;⁶³ the trading of personal liberties for 'security';⁶⁴ constant announcement of the 'threat level' of national alert against terrorist attacks; the safekeeping of state secrets and maps and diagrams of potential terrorist targets;⁶⁵ emergency contingency plans;⁶⁶ or a National Preparedness Month that will 'reach millions' of citizens.⁶⁷ Despite seeming relatively benign in comparison to the literal discipline, these regimes perpetuate the panoptic force, which functions to subliminally or consciously generate a widespread fear of the external other and in so doing, re-define the individuals' sense of self.⁶⁸ This is not to say these actions are deliberate and cynical ploys by those in control of state power to manipulate public fear, for that would be to succumb to the very same kind of paranoia. Rather, it is to demonstrate that the individual has been placed in an unbroken relationship with the broader foreign policy regime that is intrinsically premised upon a fear of the other.

Such a fear of the external other inevitably feeds into a fear of what can be described as the internal other. The internal other are those members of the self that happen to reflect aspects of the 'terrorist threat' stereotype. Any number of a range of racial, religious, social or political traits could signify 'terrorist threat' and force the individual to renegotiate their identity such that it can better 'fit' into the disciplinary regime. Take for instance the following actions taken in accordance with the foreign policy discourse.⁶⁹ Firstly, in the seven weeks following '9/11', over 1,000 people, for the most part immigrants or Muslims, were arrested.⁷⁰ The details surrounding these detentions have been kept secret, although some were tried in military courts for domestic crimes not necessarily relating to 'terrorism'.⁷¹ Secondly, the FBI has been conducting sweeps of over 200 American campuses to collect information on students with Middle Eastern backgrounds.⁷² Thirdly, the FBI has been given the power to enter

mosques and churches, for surveillance purposes, without identifying themselves.⁷³ Finally, the Department of Homeland Security has acquired population data on Arab-Americans from the U.S. Census Bureau, including statistics sorted by city, country of origin and ZIP codes.⁷⁴ Quite obviously these actions are of a literal disciplinary nature, especially towards those individuals who are specifically targeted. In addition, however, what these actions do in the Foucauldian sense is intensify the nature of the relationship that the foreign policy regime has with other individuals who may feel as though they resemble the other in some regard. Such individuals may become increasingly aware of their 'difference' and this will accordingly alter the way that they are shaped and formed within the regime. In this sense the power of the foreign policy discourse functions to discipline and normalize difference.

Using the notion of discipline, the U.S. foreign policy of the War on Terror can be seen as having a wide range of effects. Der Derian captures it well when he states that the war against the 'terrorist threat' will be waged on global networks that reach much more widely and deeply into our everyday lives.⁷⁵ This is supported by the arguments made here that suggest the current foreign policy regime represents an intensification of the way in which the Foucauldian and literal understandings of discipline penetrate into the lives of the individuals that constitute the U.S. self.

Foreign Policy, War and Social Control

It has been over five years since the tragic attacks of September 11, 2001 and the paranoia and suspicion of the 'permanent war mentality' shows little sign of abating. The War on Terror will be long, and perhaps will never really be over. The 'terrorist threat' continues to be regarded as an objectively real danger. Furthermore, any understanding of this danger that suggested an interrelationship or any kind of parallel between terrorism and counterterrorism would likely be seen as sympathetic to terrorists and not helpful to the state's War on Terror. In short, the narratives of the War on Terror have been written in such a way that they silence alternate conceptions to these 'truths', and in turn make any attempt to challenge these narratives intensely counter-logical.

The current representation of the War on Terror has put in place a powerful set of discursive strategies. Under the guiding principle of

'terrorist threat' U.S. foreign policy action has brought about a blurring of the traditional understandings of how state power relates to the 'inside' and 'outside'. Heightened by a domestic sense of emergency and permanent war, repressive police-like powers are exercised outside of the sovereign realm, whilst military presence and state surveillance are increasingly observed within U.S. borders. It seems that foreign policy is not just foreign. It also deeply penetrates into domestic regimes. Consequently, the domestic environment of the War on Terror constitutes a stifling disciplinary regime that subjects the individual to a constant relationship with the foreign policy discourse and in so doing shapes the individual, what they know and the way in which they 'know' it.

A disciplinary conceptualization of U.S. foreign policy means that it can be seen as an aspect of the state's means of social control. This disciplinary analysis was vital here in order to penetrate the dense modern logic that surrounds U.S. foreign policy. It is this logic that ensures that a solely external orientation remains just 'common sense'. Like law and order, education and social welfare, foreign policy provides a normative framework around which society is shaped. The War on Terror has clearly delineated what constitutes a patriot and what constitutes the enemy. It is along the lines of this construction that domestic society is moulded with a range of measures, from quite subtle to outright coercive, to ensure that the society of the former is defended against the latter.

Unlike these other domestic institutions, however, foreign policy does not shape society for the purposes of creating a more efficient and predictable society; it does it in order to ensure the continued existence of the nation. Therefore, on one hand, the 'terrorist threat' is elevated to an utmost concern of national security. Yet, on the other, this designated foe of foreign policy has not been determined through open discussion and debate. The 'terrorist threat' has been held as objectively real and not in anyway subjectively constituted. This is the politics of war. The potent nexus of national preservation combined with the perception of an objective threat, which is turned against the self with far-reaching consequences.

It is for these reasons that the disciplinary effects of foreign policy needs to be recognized. This has been the aim of this article; to highlight the power of foreign policy to rend massive domestic social change. Because this article leaves this power largely 'intact' by not suggesting an alternative course of action, it cannot really be seen as a definitive critique of the current politics of war. It is, how-

ever, a step toward a path of action that can resist some of the repressive disciplinary elements that result from the War on Terror foreign policy consensus.

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Notes

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2. See in particular, Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan French (London: Penguin Books, 1991), pt. 3, 'Discipline'.
3. Quoted in Colin Gordon, 'Governmental Rationality: An Introduction', in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991) p.20.
4. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.222.
5. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.215.
6. James Der Derian, *Antidiplomacy: Spies, Terror, Speed and War* (New York: Blackwell, 1992), p.30.
7. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.202.
8. See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp.195-228.
9. Alec McHoul and Wendy Grace, *A Foucault Primer: Discourse, Power and the Subject* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1993), p.71.
10. François Debrix, 'Space Quest: Surveillance, Governance, and the Panoptic Eye of the United Nations', *Alternatives* 24, 1999, p.269.
11. Ibid.
12. James Der Derian, 'The (S)pace of International Relations: Simulation, Surveillance and Speed', *International Studies Quarterly*, 34: 3, 1990, p.304.
13. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.138.
14. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), second essay, section 17.
15. Sheldon S. Wolin, 'Brave New World', *Theory and Event*, 5:4, 2002. Available at: http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v005/5.4wolin.html. [Accessed 17 June 2004].
16. Michael Hardt, 'Sovereignty', *Theory and Event*, 5:4, 2002. http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v005/5.4hardt.html. [Accessed 17 June 2004].

17. This will be discussed further below.
18. See for example, James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network* (Westview Press, Colorado: 2001).
19. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.210.
20. Foucault referred to this as a 'swarming of disciplinary measures.' Ibid, p.211.
21. David Campbell, 'Global Inscription: How Foreign Policy Constitutes the United States', *Alternatives* XV, p.266.
22. Emphasis added, Ibid.
23. Richard K. Ashley and R.B.J. Walker, 'Speaking the Language of Exile: Dissident thought in International Studies', *International Studies Quarterly*, 34:3, 1990, p.259.
24. Speech given at the 'National Preparedness Month Kickoff', 9/9/04. Available at: http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/interapp/speech/speech_0204.xml [Accessed 26/09/07].
25. In this sense I'd like to employ 9/11 broadly, not only literally to represent the damage done on that day, but also metaphorically to represent the perception of a damage to the American psyche that needs to be mended.
26. James Steinberg, 'Counterterrorism: A New Organising Principle for American National Security?', *The Brookings Review*, 20:3, 2002, pp.4-8.
27. The notion of treating the September 11 attacks as a criminal matter is prevalent in civil liberties perspectives, see for example: Kate Martin, 'Intelligence, Terrorism, and Civil Liberties', *Human Rights*, 9: 1, 2002, p.6; Geoffrey Robertson called for a 'revised Lockerbie solution', quoted in Andrew Linklater, 'Unnecessary Suffering' in, Ken Booth and Tim Dunne (eds.), *Worlds in Collision: Terror and the Future of Global Order* (Houndsmills, Basingstroke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), p.305.
28. David Campbell, 'Time is Broken', *Theory and Event*, 5:4, 2002. Available at: http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v005/5.4campbell.html. [Accessed 17 June 2004].
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37. Bleiker, 'Aestheticising Terrorism', p.438.
38. Anonymous, 'FBI Searches for Americans Suspected of Advising Al Qaeda Sleeper Cells', *FOXNews.com*, 12 July 2002. Available at: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,57507,00.html>. [Accessed 25 March 2004].
39. George W. Bush, 'Press Conference of the President', 19 December 2005. Available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/12/20051219-2.html>. [Accessed on 20 December 2005].
40. Craig Unger (screenwriter), *House of Bush*, television documentary screened on the *ABC* (Australia), 27 July 2004.
41. Bush, 'Address to a joint session of Congress and the American people'.
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43. In a BBC interview Kofi Annan stated that, 'from our point of view and from the Charter point of view [the Iraq War] was illegal'. See Anonymous, 'Excerpts Annan interview', *BBC News – UK Edition*, 16 September 2004. Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3661640.stm. [Accessed 12 August 2007].
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49. Lon Troyer, 'The Calling of Counterterrorism', *Theory and Event*, 5:4, 2002. Available at: http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v005/5.4troyer.html. [Accessed 17 June 2004].
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51. James Der Derian, 'War of Networks', *Theory and Event*, 5:4, 2002. Available at: http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v005/5.4derderian.html. [Accessed 17 June 2004].
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54. Hardt, 'Sovereignty'.
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- a government by intimidation or coercion.' Quoted in Romero, 'In Defense of Liberty', p.16.
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 63. Hardt, 'Sovereignty' and Lyon, *Surveillance After September 11*, p.102.
 64. James X. Dempsey, 'Civil Liberties in a Time of Crisis', *Human Rights*, 29:1, 2002, p.8.
 65. Frank Mankiewicz, 'Crisis Mode: Information Dissemination During Times of Conflict', *Human Rights*, 29:1, 2002, p.23.
 66. 'The America Prepared Campaign... utilises the expertise and energy of national leaders... to help Americans prepare for a terrorist attack and other emergencies'. America Prepared Campaign, Inc. Available at: <http://www.americaprepared.org/>. [Accessed 26/09/2007].
 67. Department of Homeland Security, 'Hundreds of Activities Planned, Millions Reached During National Preparedness Month'. Available at: http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/interapp/press_release/press_release_0502.xml. [Accessed 26/09/2007].
 68. Take for example a 2003 report by the National Centre for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP), which found that 'two years after 9/11, 76% of Americans and 81% of New Yorkers are concerned or very concerned about the possible occurrence of additional terror attacks', quoted in National Centre for Disaster Preparedness, 'How Americans Feel About Terrorism and Security Two Years After 9/11', Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, August 2003, p.7. Available at: <http://www.ncdp.mailman.columbia.edu>. [Accessed 26/09/2007].
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 70. See: David Cole, 'An Ounce of Detention', *The American Prospect: How Republicans Hijack Language*, September 2003. Available at: <http://www.prospect.org>. [Accessed 29 September 2004]; Anthony Lewis, 'One Liberty at a Time', *Mother Jones*, May/June 2004. Available at: http://motherjones.com/news/feature/2004/05/04_403.html. [Accessed 11 May 2004]; Ernesto Verdeja, 'Law, Terrorism, and the Plenary Power Doctrine: Limiting Alien Rights', *Constellations*, 9:1, 2002, p.95.
 71. Romero, 'In Defense of Liberty in a Time of National Emergency', *Human* p.17, and Philip B. Heymann, 'Civil Liberties and Human Rights in the Aftermath of September 11', *Human Rights*, 29:1, 2002, p.21.

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