Seeing Red: Baghdad and the event-ful city

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ABSTRACT

In late modern war visuality plays a vital role in both the conduct and the rationalization of military violence. This essay explores the techno-cultural apparatus of US military operations and media briefings in occupied Baghdad from 2003 to 2007. It traces the visual reconfiguration of the city as a space of events rather than purely objects. These digital mappings were an intrinsic part of the US Army's counterinsurgency strategy, and their performances were punctuated by a dialectical interplay of geopolitical and biopolitical imaginaries that was focal to the abstraction and legitimation of American military intervention.

Keywords: Baghdad biopolitics counterinsurgency mappings visuality war

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> 'As you come out of the heavily guarded [Baghdad] airport compound, the last message from the US military is written in English on a small metal signpost: "Weapon status red. Lock and load."'
>
> Rory McCarthy, 'The view from the Red Zone',
> *Guardian* 29 January 2005

> 'After so many weeks in the Red Zone, you have a duty to make a visit to the Green Zone … You go through at least fifteen checkpoints … [to] a parking lot… You drive for scarcely twelve minutes (you tell yourself you could easily have made the journey on foot), but it's enough time to pass to the other side of the looking-glass…'
>
> Anne Nivat, *Bagdad Zone Rouge*

INTRODUCTION: FIELDS OF VISION AND FIELDS OF VIOLENCE

The intimacy of the relationship between geopolitics and visuality has become a central motif of critical analysis (Campbell, 2007; MacDonald, Dodds and Hughes, 2010). Their coupling assumes a special significance in late modern war, where the post-Vietnam formation of the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment network has allowed visualization to modulate into a virtualization that drives both the execution and, so Der Derian (2007: xxiv) claims, the endorsement of military violence. 'The new wars are fought in the same manner as they are represented,' he insists, 'by military simulations and public dissimulations.' In what follows I explore

this conjuncture by analyzing how visuality – by which I mean culturally (and in this case specifically techno-culturally) mediated ways of seeing – was involved in the conduct of US military operations and media briefings in Baghdad between 2003 and 2007. I focus on three issues that suture fields of vision to fields of violence.

First, I emphasize the productive power of visuality. Wars have always been shaped by visual fields, but they have become ever more important under the sign of a Science – the Revolution in Military Affairs and its successor projects – that emphasizes the role of digital imagery in the surveillance and reconnaissance that supposedly ensures the precision-strike capacity that distinguishes advanced militaries. These visual fields are more than enclosures, however, separating what is seen from what cannot (or must not) be seen, because their destructive force depends upon a no less profound productive power. As Harris (2006: 102) argues, these techno-cultural systems 'not only *detect* objects and people but also *produce* both objects on the ground and surveillant subjects.' In doing so, they traffic in the narrowing space between the military and the public spheres, where actors and observers are interpellated as political subjects for whom military violence is 'rendered everyday, bureaucratic and even mundane by the technologies and practices of image production.' There is nothing axiomatic about interpellation – we are not acquiescent (or as Foucault would say, 'docile') subjects-in-waiting – but the apparatus of military violence is now so closely entangled with that of visualization that Butler (2009: 29) claims 'there is no way to separate, under present historical conditions, the material reality of war from those representational regimes through which it operates *and which rationalize its own operation*' (my emphasis). From this

perspective, a vital consideration is the way in which advanced militaries represent their operations as surgical, sensitive and scrupulous so that, at the limit, 'virtual war' bleeds into 'virtuous war' (Der Derian, 2007). Death disappears from the field of vision to sustain what Coker (2004) sees as a twenty-first century 're-enchantment of war' – or, more accurately, of 'our' wars. This rhetorical effect is enhanced by the way in which those same militaries render the actions of their (non-state or para-state) enemies as indiscriminate, insensitive and illegitimate. Militias, gangs and terrorist groups are engaged in an altogether different set of 'new wars' to those in Der Derian's sights. Their violence is viscerally corporeal and even diabolical. In this field of vision death stalks the battle space, saturated in blood and bodies by ethno-sectarian violence and an exorbitant cruelty directed overwhelmingly at civilians, and insurgency becomes the proving ground for a *dis*enchantment of war – which is to say, of 'their' wars (Gregory, 2010).

This repeated accent on the performativity of the visual field intersects with a second issue: the power of the map. It has become commonplace to say that maps are not mirrors of the world, that mapping, 'even as it claimed to represent the world, produced it' (Pickles 2004: 93), and it is scarcely surprising that the Pentagon's new maps of the world became instruments of the Bush administration's plans for a New American Century (Dalby, 2007). But performativity is always contingent and conditional; as Pickles (2004: 66) notes, the map 'is not a representation of the world, but an inscription that does *(or sometimes does not do)* work in the world' (my emphasis). To unravel that 'not', Dodge and Kitchin (2007: 335) have proposed a revision to Pickles' prospectus, which they argue continues to privilege the map as

object. In their contrary view the map should be seen as an event, and analysis should be directed towards the *mappings* through which it flickers into momentary presence:

> 'A map is brought into the world and made to do work through practices such as recognizing, interpreting, translating, communicating and so on. It does not re-present the world or make the world (by shaping how we think about the world); it is a co-constitutive production between inscription, individual and world; a production that is constantly in motion, always seeking to appear ontologically secure.'

In outlining the practices through which maps emerge, Dodge and Kitchin challenge their ontological security, and in particular the conceit that they are immutable mobiles located outside the interpretive fields through which they are co-constituted, and re-present them instead as transitory, fleeting, so many performances of-the-moment. They are right to be skeptical about the claim of ontological security, which is a peculiarly powerful one. As I will show, the scientificity of the map – the presumptive objectivity of the practices through which it is produced and the validity of the truth claims that this allows it to register – was an important means through which the US Army asserted its command of the battle space of Baghdad. Yet even as Dodge and Kitchin widen their analytical focus, they confine their attention to mapping and say next to nothing about the wider ensemble of practices within which mappings are activated. I want to show that the military affirmation of cartographic reason was more than the instantiation of a distinctive spatial imaginary of Baghdad, with its overlay of American grids,

routes and names, and that the US Army invoked the ontological security of the map as a rhetorical *substitute* for the operational security of the city and as a biomedical *screen* on which to confirm its pathological diagnosis of Baghdad.

Third, I connect these performances to biopolitics. Biopolitics is a contested term, of course, and its use here is further complicated because occupied Baghdad was subjected to multiple biopolitical programmes, from the ethno-sectarian violence of the 'Battle of Baghdad' through the covert discrimination in ante- and post-natal care by the Shia-controlled Health Ministry to the bio-medical armature deployed by the American military in its counterinsurgency operations. Common to all of them, however, is the figure of population. Population was focal to Foucault's development of a biopolitical imaginary, and he even argued that it was 'the problematization of population' that had made possible the epistemological transformations that haunted his early work: from natural history to biology, from general grammar to philology, and from the analysis of wealth to political economy (Foucault, 2007: 77-78). I emphasize this – to Foucault 'marginal' – claim because he made it in a series of reflections on security, and Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero (2009: 16) have proposed a further transformation of this 'life, language and labour' triad into animation, code and information that connects directly to my own concerns. For it is not only that maps must be understood 'as events rather than objects', as Dodge and Kitchin (2007: 342) suggest, but also that the mappings of late modern war are increasingly required to produce a space *composed* of events rather than objects. After the fall of Baghdad the American military found itself moving in a trickster landscape where it was hard to distinguish insurgents from the rest of the

population, and its intrinsic indeterminacy compelled the Army to assemble and animate the new battle space through the fleeting traces of insurgent encounter: the loci of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and car bombs, of dead bodies dumped in the streets and rivers, and of operations against terrorist cells and death squads. The quicksilver capacity of insurgent mutation could not be captured by the stock figure of the monstrous, which had been central to the Bush-Blair characterizations of the 'war on terror', and as the American military acknowledged that insurgencies had their own rationalities so it initiated a cultural turn to comprehend – to problematize – the population that it now placed at the centre of its counterinsurgency operations. This involved more than the conflict ethnography proposed by some of its practitioners because it required an intimate knowledge of the processes and 'operational codes' (culture) that sustained social life: it was an intrinsically biopolitical audit that involved a real-time monitoring of vital signs. This is no simple metaphor. Tracking this 'evental life' – 'a moving, mutable, mutating and metamorphosing target' (Dillon and Reid, 2009: 44) – diagnosed the insurgency as adaptive, emergent and, above all, malignant : a scopic regime that reinforced the re-enchantment of 'our' wars.

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE AND THE OBJECT-CITY

In the months before the US-led invasion of Iraq, and despite constant allegations about the difficulties of United Nations weapons inspections (Findlay and Mines, 2003), the Bush administration consistently represented the projected battle space as fully transparent. This was clear in Secretary of State Colin Powell's presentation to the UN Security Council on 6 February

2003, which relied on a cascade of communications intercepts, maps and satellite images to establish a rhetorically powerful distinction between (Iraqi) deception and (American) discovery, (Iraqi) evasion and (American) exposure. Later that month, leaflets were dropped over Iraq warning: 'We can see everything. Do not use nuclear, biological or chemical weapons' (Figure 1).

Figure 1: 'We can see everything'
(US Department of Defense/US Central Command Leaflet IZDO38)

The ability to see not only what was there but also what was *not* there must have bemused Baghdad, but the rapid-fire success of the invasion was widely seen as a vindication of the Revolution in Military Affairs and the force transformation demanded by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. The Air Force identified a 'cultural divide' of 'precision and information' in its strike capacity – the gap between 'industrial-age' and 'information-age' warfare – and drew particular attention to the enhanced speed of its targeting

decisions (Deptula, 2008). During the first Gulf War in 1991 the targeting cycle was around three days, but in 2003 the kill-chain was sometimes less than 10 minutes (Harris, 2006). The Army had initiated its own Battlefield Digitization Program in 1994, and when American troops crossed the Iraqi border barely ten years later many of them were crossing a digital divide too. Commanders had an unprecedented capacity to track their forces using transponders and satellite communications ('blue force tracking') and they too could rely on sophisticated surveillance and targeting systems. These developments were supposed to mark a move from close combat to 'standoff precision', in which most future fighting would be conducted safely – for Americans – over long distances. Boosters like Boot (2003) declared the inauguration of 'the new American way of war', while others hailed the invasion as the apotheosis of network-centric warfare. Minimal ground forces (less than 10,000 troops) had defeated the much larger Iraqi army in 26 days to establish the holy trinity of 'lightning speed, precise targeting [and] information dominance.' The key was information technology: sensors, weapons systems and communications systems had been networked to 'cut through the fog of war' and gave troops 'the clearest picture of the battlefield that soldiers have ever known' (Nider, 2003).

But this triumphalist view looked very different to observers on the ground, where one reporter discovered that the image of techno-supremacy was replaced by 'an unsung corps of geeks improvising as they went, cobbling together a remarkable system from a hodgepodge of military-built networking technology, off-the-shelf gear, miles of Ethernet cable, and commercial software.' During two weeks in the war zone, he added, 'I never heard anyone mention the Revolution in Military Affairs' (Davis, 2003). The

view was also different in hindsight. A review for the Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College concluded that faith in the power of an American technological fix overlooked the degradation of the Iraqi military machine by the first Gulf War and the post-war sanctions regime and, crucially, the significance of Iraqi mistakes, not least 'their systematic failure to exploit the military potential of urban terrain' (Biddle et al, 2004: 26). Even Boot conceded that the new technology was not able to monitor the dispositions of the Iraqi Army ('red force tracking'). Worse, he continued, 'the *Fedayeen* and other Iraqi irregulars did not employ the kinds of heavy equipment and robust telecommunications networks that US surveillance systems were designed to monitor. They generally drove civilian vehicles not T-72 tanks and spread orders by word of mouth not radio' (Boot 2006: 397).

That last would change – General John Abizaid later complained that 'this enemy is better networked than we are' (Shachtman, 2007) – but the immediate problem of distinguishing irregulars from civilians turned out to be symptomatic of a far deeper one. For the visualization of the battle space remained embedded in a traditional object-ontology. This was self-evidently the case for air strikes against fixed Iraqi targets ('deliberative targeting'), but ground troops were directed to take a series of fixed objects/objectives whose codenames conjured up the wars of the past ('Objective Patton', 'Objective Monty', 'Objective Rommel', even 'Objective Custer') (Fontenot, Degen and Tohn, 2005: Chapter 5). The situation was even more desperate when they entered the cities. American troops operated with urban models – some formalized in Field Manuals, computer simulations and Mission Rehearsal Exercises, others improvised in the field out of poker

chips, shell casings and even Lego bricks – that reduced places like Baghdad and Fallujah to three-dimensional envelopes of buildings and physical infrastructures (Gregory, 2009b). But as war bled into occupation and back again, and as resistance and insurgency, crime and terrorism jostled for dominance, so these object-ontologies conspicuously failed to capture the new battle space. As Lieutenant-General William Wallace observed, 'this is not exactly the enemy we war-gamed against', and the claim of a transparent battle space yielded to an admission of its opacity. The 'military potential of urban terrain' was now being exploited, not by the Iraqi army but by a gathering, intensifying insurgency. A Pentagon study recognized the difficulty of identifying, locating and tracking such 'unconventional targets' in 'hostile, highly cluttered environments' like cities where insurgents were indistinguishable from the population at large, and called for the military to move to 'intrusive, close-in, terrestrial means' of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (Defense Science Board, 2004: 153-4, 163-4). Smart commanders in the field had already acknowledged the imperative need to close the gap between their troops and local populations, and it was their 'rush to the intimate' which was eventually codified in the new doctrine of counterinsurgency operations (COIN) that positioned the population at its centre (US Army, 2006; Gregory, 2008a). As I must now show, however, this was not only a conceptual but also a technical challenge: 'population' was to be apprehended in particular ways and by particular means. During his command of Multi-National Corps – Iraq (MNC-I) in 2006-2007, Lieutenant-General Peter Chiarelli expressed his frustration at those who still imagined the conflict came down to 'a line that was drawn somewhere in the desert … [with] the good guys on one side and the bad guys on the other side.' He was adamant: 'We don't see that out here.' Instead, 'we see

Baghdad, a city of anywhere from 5.5 to 7.5 million people, where no one's wearing a uniform' and it was 'very difficult to pick out who's for you and who's against you' (Briefing, 13 December 2006). [i] In an attempt to make those discriminations, to visualize this new space of military operations, the standard issue object-ontology was overwritten and increasingly overridden by an event-ontology: Baghdad was transformed into an event-ful city.

THE EVENT-FUL CITY

In April 2004, as part of the second rotation of US military forces in Iraq, the 1st Cavalry Division assumed responsibility for Baghdad, and its commanding officer (then) Major-General Chiarelli ensured that it would be the first unit to trial the Army's Command Post of the Future (CPOF). This is a networked visualization and collaboration system, a sort of super GIS, that allows commanders to see 'anywhere in the battle space' and their subordinates to see their own courses of action within the evolving operational situation. In Baghdad the system tracked the real-time movement of troops and the incidence of events to produce the city as what Croser (2007a: §56; 2010) calls an 'event-ful battle space'. In contrast to conventional visualizations derived from static (dead) databases, however, CPOF operates on live data. Croser explains that the system provides multiple screen images of the battle space which 'do not cohere but exist layered (side by side), and do not stay the same but alter moment to moment' (Figure 2). As she emphasizes, within this system Baghdad was 'never resolved into a single, definite picture' – the sovereign map (cf. Mirzoeff, 2009: 1741-3) – and the urban battle space was *made* to appear as 'constantly updated, fluid and always in the process of construction.' The

system integrated what its engineers termed ‘top sight’ (overview) with information liquidity to enable the military to assert visual and hence – at least in principle – physical control over the contingent. This is the fulcrum of late modern security practices, where contingency is both an epistemological and an ontological category.

Figure 2: Command Post of the Future (Photograph courtesy of US Army)

In Baghdad, these security practices performed a continuous audit that compiled reports of events (Significant Activity Reports or SIGACTS) and correlated the incidence of ‘enemy-initiated attacks’ and other ‘enemy

actions' with a series of civil, commercial and environmental indicators of the population at large: moments in the production of a generalized bio-economy (Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero, 2008). Thus Chiarelli was convinced that the standard doctrinal progression from combat to 'stability operations' was mistaken. He concluded that a purely offensive approach to insurgency risked alienating local people not only through its spiralling circles of violence but also through its indifference to their own problems. 'We went after the insurgents,' he explained, 'while at the same time – really simultaneously – we maximized non-lethal effects' that targeted the provision of basic services, local government and economic regeneration. (Chiarelli and Michaelis, 2005). These multiple, overlapping lines of operation reappeared on the multiple screens of the CPOF, and Croser (2007b: 38) suggests a close correspondence between the technical and the conceptual: 'CPOF was in some ways the perfect technology for COIN operations.'

But it was insufficient; indeed, Shachtman (2007) likened CPOF to 'a God's eye view' – peering down on Iraq 'from another planet' – and argued that the system betrayed its design origins in 'short, decisive battles against a regular army.' This was not the situation in occupied Baghdad where, as one of the lead authors of the counterinsurgency manual told him, what mattered 'is what the screens *don't* show.' The point was that the Command Post of the Future was a command-level system whereas counterinsurgency required a closely textured *local* knowledge. Chiarelli had anticipated some of these objections by introducing a simple intranet ('CAVNET') at lower echelons. This was a secure, online message board that enabled soldiers returning from one patrol to post information for the next patrol. It was so

successful that the 1st Cavalry worked with the Defense Advanced Projects Research Agency to develop the more elaborate TIGR-NET (Tactical Ground Reporting Network), which was tested in Baghdad in early 2007. Chiarelli describes this as a virtual notebook, a militarized version of Google Earth and a Wiki, where troops can input their own digital images, videos and field observations into a collaborative, interactive database that includes standard satellite imagery and maps. In March 2007 the database contained over 20,000 cumulative entries; by September there were over 40,000, and more than 60,000 by the end of the year. Like CPOF, the focus was on a map-based user interface, so that soldiers could 'pull back' events, people and places within a designated area or along a specified patrol route (Figure 3) (Talbot, 2008). Unlike CPOF, however, the system was permissive not prescriptive – Chiarelli (2009) explains that patrol leaders could 'adopt, adapt or discard as their mission analysis dictates' – and it was predicated on the rapid, horizontal transmission of information rather than the standard vertical model of command and control. For this very reason it met with resistance. In a revealing metaphor, Chiarelli claimed that TIGR 'spread like a virus' at lower echelons while the Army's 'institutional antibodies' tried to kill it (Clark, 2008), a response presumably reinforced in some quarters by hostility to the new counterinsurgency doctrine with which it was closely aligned. TIGR's emphasis on local knowledge is clearly conformable with the new doctrine; so too is the transition from a sovereign model of information to a more capillary model, where the threshold of visibility is lowered towards the close-in and intimate. These lower-level developments reinforce the production of Baghdad as an event-ful city, because they invert the pyramid in which satellite feeds and imagery from high-altitude drones and other centralized resources are analyzed at command levels and then

filtered down through directives – 'usually 48 hours later than they needed to be,' as Chiarelli (2009) tartly observed – and substitute a much more responsive, fluid, 'just-in-time' system of monitoring, analysis and decision.

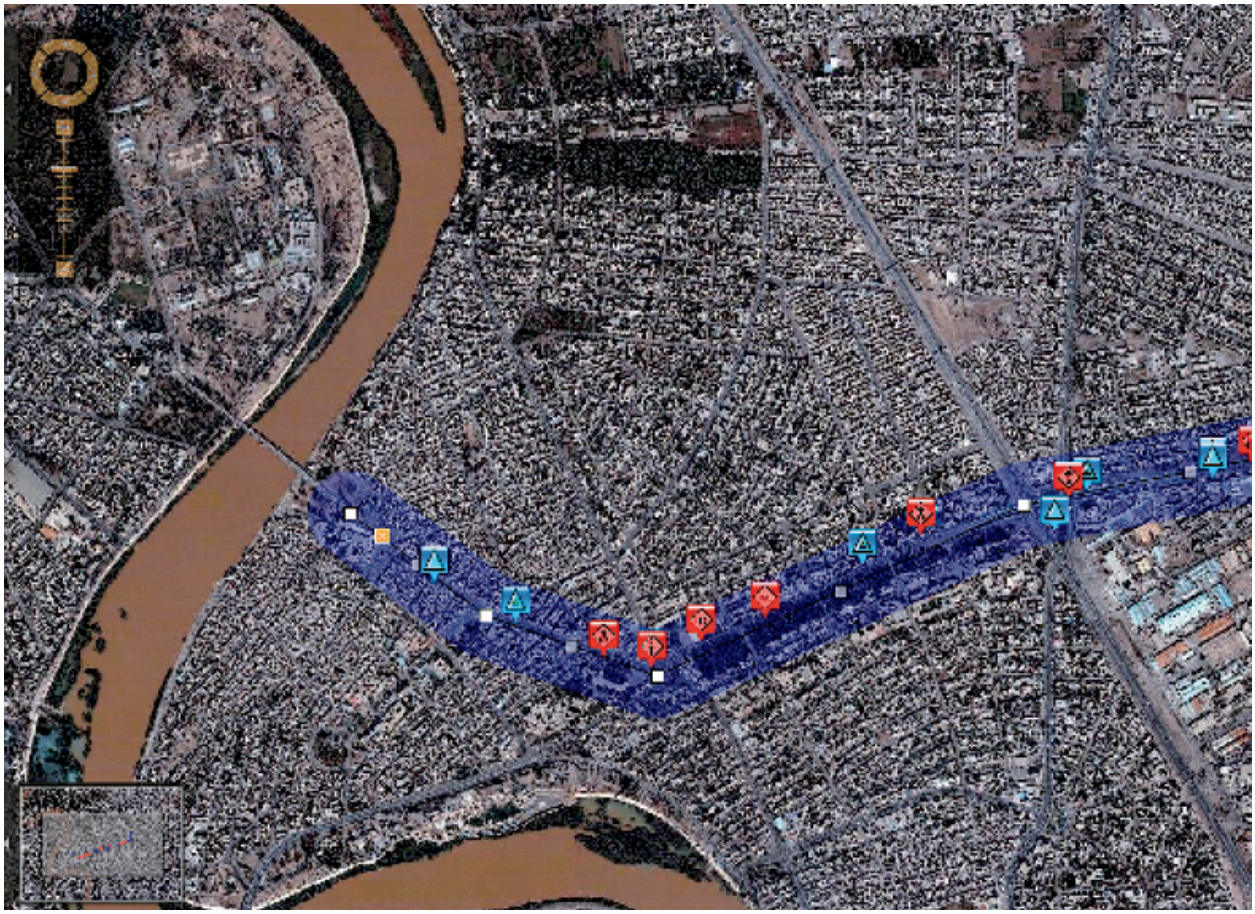


Figure 3: TIGR screen (Photograph courtesy of DARPA)

Both CPOF and TIGR were experimental systems, and in the early years of the occupation it was formidably difficult to integrate information flows across the battle space, either vertically or horizontally, because there were so many other systems in operation. Wortman (2008: 15) found that Army divisions outside the experimentation process had customized

commercial off-the-shelf systems (COTS) 'to visualize data in the way that [made] most sense to them', and in consequence the Iraqi theatre 'was flooded with non-Program of Record and COTS equipment' to fulfill exigent operational needs. Several reviews sought solutions to the problems of interoperability and data fusion, and in 2007 it was finally decided to 'migrate to a single authoritative SIGACT reporting/analysis tool': the Combined Information Data Network Exchange (CIDNE) (Figure 4).

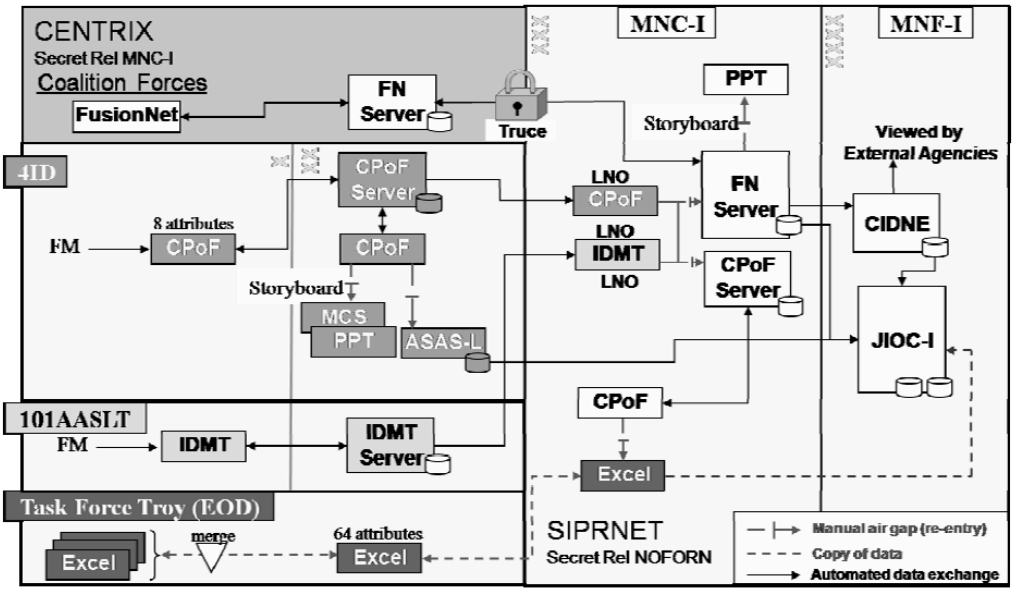
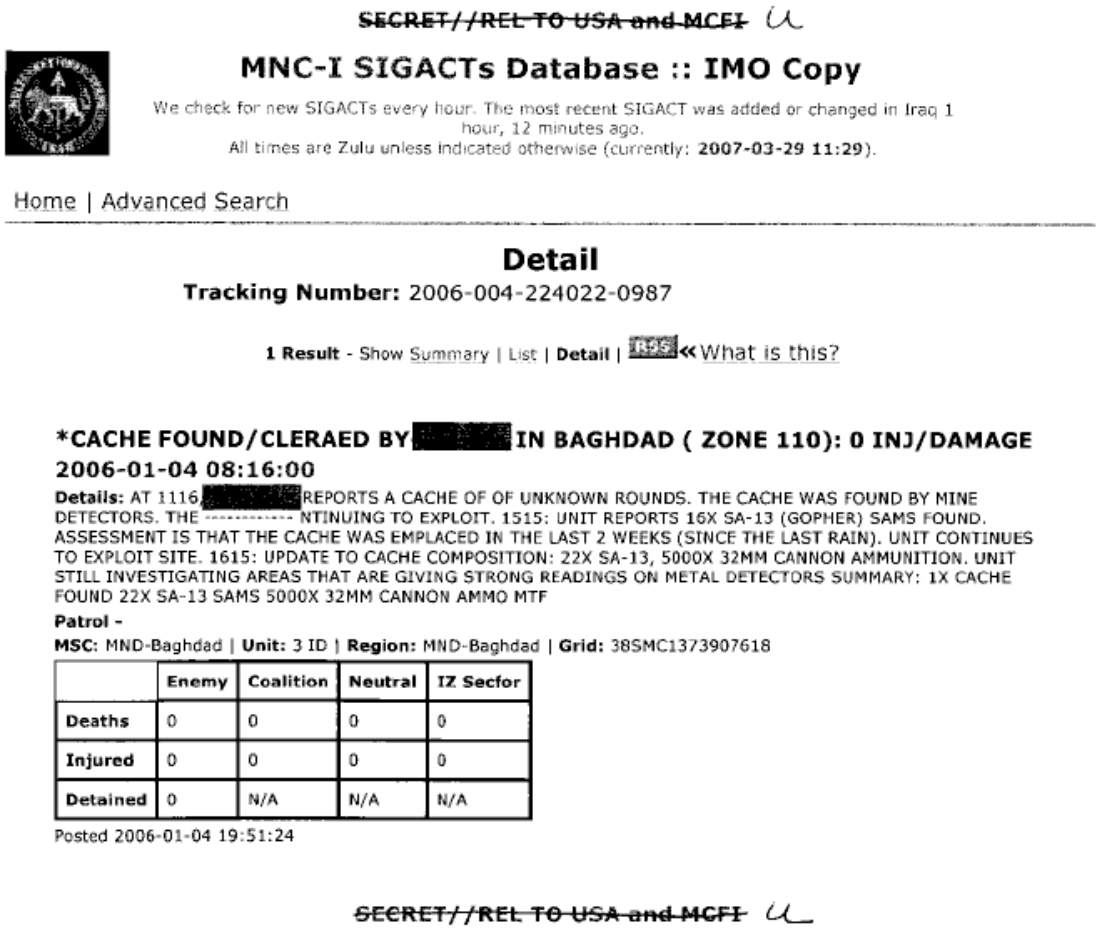


Figure 4: MNF-I Event Reporting, May 2006 (Wortman, 2008)

The core of the system was the report of a SIGACT. Even in this raw form, data capture was far from uniform or consistent. Blank spots on the map could simply indicate an absence of American patrols in an area where insurgent or militia control was unchallenged; there were even claims that SIGACTS went unreported in cases where battle-weary troops elected to conduct so-called 'search and avoid' missions rather than 'just riding around

to get blown up' (Jamail, 2009). Reporter Thomas Ricks was allowed to see the SIGACTS database for the Baghdad neighbourhood where he was living in January-February 2006. Although the area was constantly rocked by explosions, mortar fire and firefights, he was astonished to see that it was shown as 'secure and rated green'. 'That was insane,' he said. 'I knew to move through there you needed armed men and armored cars.' But then he realized that this was more or less the official definition of 'secure' too: 'if you could drive a Humvee with a 50-caliber machine gun atop it and most of the time not be attacked.' He concluded that the database 'failed to capture most of what was happening to Iraqis' (Frontline, 2007). As this vignette suggests, the initial focus of event reporting was 'kinetic' (offensive operations and attacks), and it was not until the new counterinsurgency doctrine came into effect that political, social and economic data were incorporated into the system. In addition, MNF-I had no systematic means of recording violence against Iraqi civilians until January 2006, though this had not prevented the Pentagon from challenging independent casualty estimates. A major RAND report concluded that 'had there been a more robust effort to collect accurate information of Iraqi [civilian casualties], military strategists and political leaders might have acted more determinedly to secure the civilian population prior to the carnage of 2006' (Hall and Stahl, 2008: 38-40). Perhaps; but the data remained controversial. MNF-I claimed that civilian casualty figures provided by official Iraqi sources were inflated, whereas the RAND study found the opposite to be the case. From December 2007 the Pentagon agreed to include data on civilian deaths supplied by the Government of Iraq, but several senior American officers argued that these figures were inflected by sectarian rivalries. There were, in turn, serious questions about the methodology used by MNF-I to attribute

deaths to ethno-sectarian violence in its database. I raise these issues simply to emphasize that the battle space could never be fully transparent. All representations were, of necessity, mediated by cultural, conceptual and technical modalities and, crucially, all claims to 'know' the event-ful city were inescapably partial and situated.



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MNC-I SIGACTs Database :: IMO Copy

We check for new SIGACTs every hour. The most recent SIGACT was added or changed in Iraq 1 hour, 12 minutes ago.
All times are Zulu unless indicated otherwise (currently: **2007-03-29 11:29**).

Home | Advanced Search

Detail

Tracking Number: 2006-004-224022-0987

1 Result - Show Summary | List | **Detail** | [redacted] What is this?

***CACHE FOUND/CLERAED BY [redacted] IN BAGHDAD (ZONE 110): 0 INJ/DAMAGE 2006-01-04 08:16:00**

Details: AT 1116 [redacted] REPORTS A CACHE OF OF UNKNOWN ROUNDS. THE CACHE WAS FOUND BY MINE DETECTORS. THE ---------- NTINUING TO EXPLOIT. 1515: UNIT REPORTS 16X SA-13 (GOPHER) SAMS FOUND. ASSESSMENT IS THAT THE CACHE WAS EMPLACED IN THE LAST 2 WEEKS (SINCE THE LAST RAIN). UNIT CONTINUES TO EXPLOIT SITE. 1615: UPDATE TO CACHE COMPOSITION: 22X SA-13, 5000X 32MM CANNON AMMUNITION. UNIT STILL INVESTIGATING AREAS THAT ARE GIVING STRONG READINGS ON METAL DETECTORS SUMMARY: 1X CACHE FOUND 22X SA-13 SAMS 5000X 32MM CANNON AMMO MTF

Patrol -

MSC: MND-Baghdad | **Unit:** 3 ID | **Region:** MND-Baghdad | **Grid:** 38SMC1373907618

	Enemy	Coalition	Neutral	IZ Secfor
Deaths	0	0	0	0
Injured	0	0	0	0
Detained	0	N/A	N/A	N/A

Posted 2006-01-04 19:51:24

~~SECRET//REL TO USA and MCFI~~

Figure 5: SIGACT Report

To describe the problem in these terms is to invoke Haraway's (1991: 183-201) critique of the 'God-trick': the claim to see everything from nowhere in particular. This matters because the primary inscription of an event, its constitution as a SIGACT (Figure 5) with all its uncertainties and

limitations, was transmitted downstream to be digitized and visualized, correlated and 'cleansed', so that it could be aggregated to show trends or mapped to show distributions. All the systems for SIGACT recording and analysis interfaced with visualization and presentation software, which was used to generate 'storyboards' at every level in the chain. The importance attached to patrol leaders producing a storyboard (a slide with graphics and text to describe an event) triggered complaints that 'the one thing I spend more time on than anything else here in combat is PowerPoint. I have to make a storyboard complete with digital pictures, diagrams and text summaries on anything that happens' (Unsigned, 2009). The Command Post of the Future generated PowerPoint storyboards too, which were presented at the daily Battlefield Update Assessments to review operations over the previous 24 hours and to plan future actions. These were highly orchestrated affairs, in which MNF-I and MNC-I were linked by teleconference on giant plasma screens, and summary PowerPoint storyboards assumed a prominent role in the proceedings (Robinson, 2008: 90-1). Most of those remain classified, but some of them were displayed in regular Press Briefings where, as I now want to show, they were used to perform another version of the 'God-trick'.

SPACES OF CONSTRUCTED VISIBILITY

Its experience in Vietnam had made most of the American military averse to counterinsurgency and suspicious of the media, but the changing nature of the campaign in Iraq forced many officers to cast these reservations aside. When Smith (2006: 17) insisted that in these new wars 'we fight amongst the people' he emphasized that this was 'amplified literally and

figuratively by the central role of the media: we fight in every living room in the world as well as on the streets and fields of a conflict zone.' Insurgent groups and terrorist organizations knew this very well and it had long been a basic proposition of counterinsurgency too. But the world had turned. The classics of guerilla warfare and counterinsurgency might evoke 'a world of flickering projectors and rough propaganda sheets rolling off inky jungle presses,' as Payne (2008: 38) remarked, but 'the rapid evolution of irregular warfare and the modern media' had transformed the practice of late modern war. Audiences were now multiple and the global diffusion of digital media made the connection between events in Iraq and their reception around the world fast and often furious. In short, SIGACTS assumed an ever widening significance in the battle for the 'hearts and minds' of the local population and of global audiences. 'In the virtual dimension,' Betz (2008: 517, 527) argued, 'the distinction between combatants and non-combatants, participants and non-participants, observed and observer becomes blurred.' For the same reason, the firewall between what the US military calls 'Public Affairs' operations (briefing reporters and managing media access) and 'Information Operations' (psychological warfare and propaganda) was, if not breached then turned into a grey zone. Public Affairs operations are primarily directed at domestic American audiences, while the US Information and Educational Exchange Act (1948) (the Smith-Mundt Act) explicitly restricts Information Operations to foreign audiences. But the Pentagon knew that international reports would feed into domestic channels and that its adversaries monitored mainstream American media. The Pentagon also had a keen appreciation of the importance of maintaining domestic support; one of its senior briefers insisted that the first priority of strategic communications 'should be to keep Americans informed and

connected with their Armed Forces' (Caldwell and Stroud, 2009: 10). Contractors were hired to produce unsigned television, radio and newspaper features for a nominally Iraqi audience (Segell, 2009), and retired military officers were groomed to act as talking heads on American networks. Other activities were not outsourced, however, and the US military became adept at using digital media. MNF-I established its own website in Arabic and English, sanctioned military blogs, produced podcasts ('Baghdad 360') and launched its own channel on YouTube (MNFIRAQ) (Christensen, 2009). Yet, as Cioppa (2009: 34) notes, it was its regular Press Briefings that 'gave MNF-I the best opportunity to prepare and execute its messaging coordination and to frame events.'

From December 2005, and particularly during the first Baghdad Security Plan from June through October 2006, these Briefings were orchestrated by what Ricks (2009: 68) calls the 'razzle-dazzle of U.S. military PowerPoints'. The storyboards were initially exported as flipcharts but over time they were deployed as part of a digital presentation and made available online on the MNF-I website. The rise of the 'PowerPoint Ranger' has attracted substantial criticism. Colonel Thomas Hammes lambastes the system for its 'dumb-dumb bullets', which he insists are inimical to careful analysis, while Major-General Michael Flynn complains that 'commanders who think PowerPoint storyboards and color-coded spreadsheets are adequate for describing the Afghan conflict and its complexities' – the same applies to Iraq – 'have some soul searching to do' (Hammes, 2009; Flynn, Pottinger and Batchelor, 2009). Objections like these echo still sharper criticisms from outside the military, but most of them miss the point of PowerPoint in Press Briefings. The most general are about design and

layout, but these apply to visual strategies that are independent of and pre-date Microsoft's display technology, though they now circulate more widely because of it. The more specific objections focus on the use of pre-formed templates that, according to Tufte (2003), 'weaken spatial reasoning and always corrupt statistical analysis'. The presentations with which I am concerned did not use the deadly bullet form, however, and were directed at an explicitly spatial rendition of Baghdad. What is most significant about the military use of PowerPoint, I suggest, is that this 'morphology of demonstration', as Stark and Paravel (2008) call it, turns briefings into 'displays of virtuosity' that are a strategic means of asserting the *operational competence* that Dillon (2007: 19) identifies as the central principle of late modern security practices.

There are two elements here. First, PowerPoint's interface with highly sophisticated systems like CPOF allows storyboards to be exported to its display platform under the signs of Science (or techno-science) in general and cartographic reason in particular, which plays an important role in establishing the objectivity ('fidelity') of the military narrative. Second, if the PowerPoint deck 'turns everything into a sales pitch', as Tufte (2003) claims, this does not reside in the technology alone but in the performances that it entrains. This corporatization of communication – Tufte identifies the logic of PowerPoint's cognitive style with the logic of the software corporation – made it difficult to hold the line between the delivery of a 'command message', a proper function of Public Affairs, and what one officer criticized as 'sloganeering or marketing campaigns' (Darley, 2005). As a matter of fact a RAND report for the United States Joint Forces Command soon suggested 'enlisting Madison Avenue' to 'shape' the battle

space. Although the focus of the study was on the use of commercial marketing techniques to influence populations in war zones, the authors also recommended a review of legal barriers – including the Smith-Mundt Act – that they said limited the military use of new media in shaping activities (Helmus, Paul and Glenn, 2007). By the time it was published, however, the report had been overtaken by events. The US military was already using the new media, and when General David Petraeus assumed command in Iraq he needed no advice about marketing campaigns. He was a professional briefer who, 'with a PowerPoint slide before him, will slip into a salesman's rapid-fire patter' (Coll, 2008), and since he became commander of CENTCOM virtually none of his public presentations has opened without a joke about his reliance on PowerPoint.

In Baghdad Press Briefings were conducted at the Combined Press Information Center inside the Green Zone, which Chandrasekaran (2006) famously described as the 'Emerald City' – the reference is to the fantasy city in the *Wizard of Oz* – because it was semi-detached from life in the rest of Iraq: the Red Zone. By the end of 2003 the world of most reporters was narrowing, Ricks (2006: 359) wrote, and by spring 2004 the worsening security situation had reduced most 'reporting trips [to] dashes to the Green Zone or to the front gates of US military bases.' By late March 'parts of the city of Baghdad itself began to be crossed off as dangerous', he continued, and 'security became so bad that even the short drive across the city to the Green Zone carried risks that made reporters wonder whether it was worth it.' By 2005 'journalism under siege' had become 'journalism at its limits' (Ricks, 2006: 424). In September the *Guardian*'s veteran Maggie O'Kane claimed that 'we no longer know what is going on, but we are pretending we

do: any decent reporter knows that reporting from Baghdad does a disservice to the truth' (O'Kane, 2005). Similarly Engelhardt (2005) in November: 'Whole areas of Iraq remain beyond our view much, if not all, of the time.' Over the following months, even reporting events in Baghdad became next to impossible, as the 'Battle for Baghdad' intensified and the city was slowly closed to foreign reporters neighbourhood by neighbourhood (Gregory, 2008b; Schwartz, 2008: 251-269). Their news bureaus became fortified installations with secured perimeters patrolled by private security contractors, located in or near the handful of hotels that remained open (Axe, 2006). The *New York Times* bureau chief John Burns admitted that in many cases 'hotel journalism' had become the norm, though it was hardly a life of luxury, and according to another observer 'any kind of work outside these American fortified zones [had] become so dangerous for foreigners as to be virtually suicidal' (Schell, 2006). In fact, more journalists were killed during the Iraq conflict than in any since the Second World War. The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists has identified 140 journalists and media workers killed in Iraq between March 2003 and October 2009, 117 of them Iraqi; just over half the total (75) were killed in Baghdad, the vast majority by insurgents or other armed groups.

In these desperate circumstances a new ecology of reporting emerged, relying heavily on local stringers and characterized by what Ricchiardi (2006; 2007) called an 'obstructed view' from which much of the area of operation was frustratingly 'out of reach': Baghdad-based correspondents were 'hamstrung when it comes to independently verifying information from military press briefings or rhetoric from the Pentagon.' All of this gave the space of constructed visibility – the phrase is Rajchman's (1991) – provided

by MNF-I Press Briefings an extraordinary power. As Ricks (2006: 361) drily observed, 'the odd result of the deterioration in security was that the harder it became to collect information, the easier it was for the Bush administration [and its agents] to assert that steady progress was being made in Iraq, but that cowed reporters weren't seeing it.'

Baghdad as a map

The standard format for the Press Briefings was a prepared statement by a senior Public Affairs officer, sometimes followed by a statement from a specialist officer or civilian, and then the floor was open for a question and answer session. The journalists' questions could be remarkably probing, but I do not consider their reports here – the translation of these briefings – and instead use the transcripts to explore how the US military staged Baghdad for public consumption. Although CPOF and its attendant technologies produced Baghdad as 'messy, complex and ever-mutable', and the new counterinsurgency doctrine emphasized the fluidity and indeterminacy of the enemy, the public assertion of command – the public performance of that crucial operational competence – required the event-ful city to be staged as an ordered, coherent totality. These public displays worked to stabilize Baghdad visually, imaginatively and rhetorically.

Throughout 2006, and particularly during the first Baghdad Security Plan – Operation Together Forward, which started in early July and was abandoned in October [ii] – Press Briefings reinstated the transparency of the battle space through the assertion of two privileges.

First was *top sight:* briefers routinely claimed that the military alone could provide an overview that captured the city as a whole. A major punctuation point, though by no means the first, was the bombing of the Shia al-Askari mosque in the predominantly Sunni city of Samarra on 22 February 2006, which sparked reports of scores of Sunni mosques being attacked and set on fire in retaliation in Baghdad and other cities. The next day Major-General Rick Lynch tried to dampen speculation, (re)assuring journalists and their audiences that 'over time, the reports will come in [and] the exact situation on the ground will become clear.' He explained that there were 160,000 coalition troops deployed in Iraq, 'who report to their chain of command what they're seeing' and that this 'gives us great fidelity on operations around Iraq.' Iraqi security forces and government ministries had their own chains of command, and these different reporting chains, American and Iraqi, came together 'at the very top'. From this Archimedean summit, Lynch could see attacks on only seven not 70 mosques, and purely 'peaceful demonstrations', and he was confident that 'we're not seeing civil war … we're not seeing death in the streets' (Briefing, 23 February 2006). His confidence was tragically misplaced, and within months the military that once boasted it didn't 'do body counts' was busy mapping bodies dumped on the streets (Figure 6). [iii]

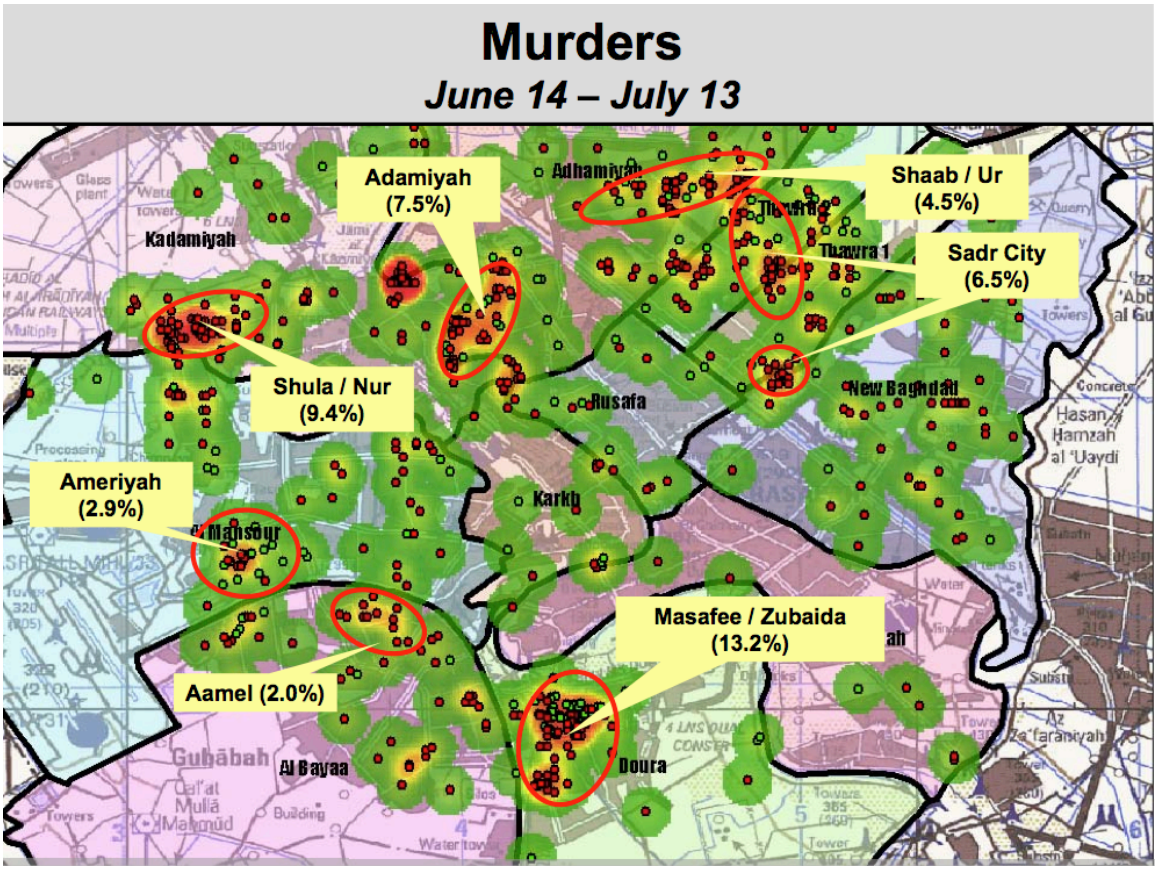

Figure 6: Murders in Baghdad, 14 June – 13 July 2006
(MNF-I Press Briefing, 20 July 2006)

Mapping is the quintessential performance of topsight. The event-ful city was produced through two sorts of plots: some, like this one, recorded traces of terrorist and insurgent activity while others recorded military operations against al-Qaeda in Iraq, insurgent cells and death squads.

The second privilege was the claim of *ground truth*. Briefers often invoked a special sort of ethnographic authority, trading on first-hand observations of 'progress' while all the time driving home the none too subtle point that 'many of you who haven't been out there find this hard to believe' (Briefing, 13 December 2006). Comments like these capitalized on

the fact that military patrols could go where few journalists could venture, and officers summoned the vastly greater resources of the military machine to secure their claims. 'We vector our tactical units – divisions, brigades and battalions – to confirm or deny reports,' Lynch explained: 'Let's fly this unmanned aerial vehicle over that mosque and determine whether or not there's a mosque on fire. Let's tell the Iraqi security forces to move to that mosque and determine whether or not there was an attack. And then you get fidelity on the situation' (Briefings, 25 February, 2 March 2006). These combined operations carried unequal weight, however, and as responsibility for security was transferred to Iraqi forces so Lynch's successor, Lieutenant-General William Caldwell, worried that 'the level of fidelity that we used to have as to what's going on on the ground becomes less.' Transition teams offered some compensation, but since the American military would not be in 'as many different places as we were before' then 'the information you have' would be limited 'because you just don't have as much *true visibility*' (Briefing, 14 December 2006; my emphasis).

The connection between top sight and ground truth was established most frequently through the metaphor of 'walking' reporters through the maps, a trope that became so commonplace that the distinction between the battle space and its representations was virtually erased. Soon after the start of Operation Together Forward, when a curfew had been imposed and checkpoints, patrols and targeted raids increased, Caldwell told reporters he would 'like to walk you through the statistics of the last 30 days' and showed them a map of attacks in Baghdad district by district. 'As you walk through this,' he continued, 'you'll see that all except two *beladiyas* [districts] were able to experience a slight decline' (Briefing, 20 July 2006).

In August, when the second phase of the operation was under way, implementing a strategy of 'clear, hold and build' neighbourhood by neighbourhood, Caldwell referred to another map sequence. He noted that 'this is the only area that's been specifically cleared' – coded green on the map (Figure 7) – but he predicted that 'you'll see those colors expanding out through the city of Baghdad eventually' (Briefing, 28 August 2006). In one, magical sentence, the colours bleed *from* the map *to* the city.

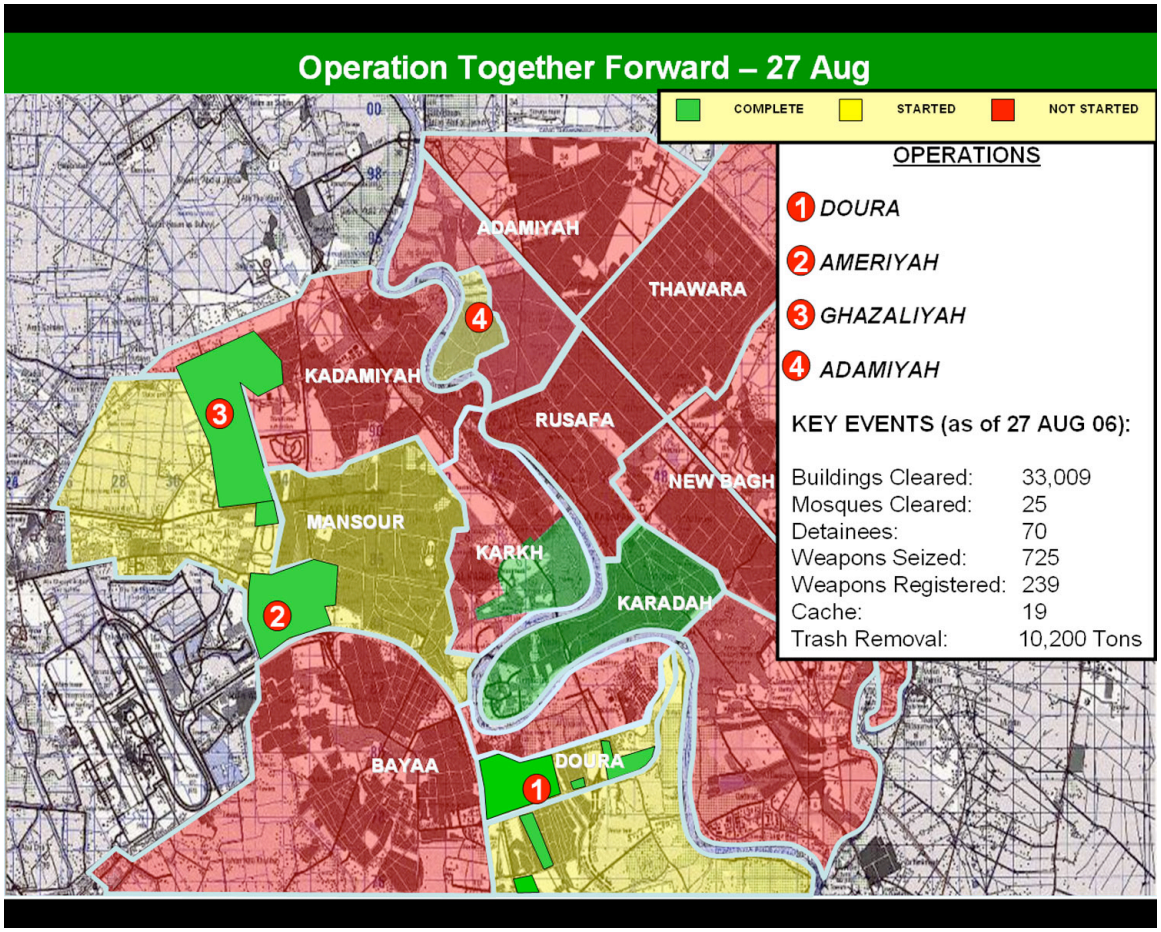

Figure 7: Operation Together Forward, 27 August 2006
(MNF-I Press Briefing, 28 August 2006)

In September Caldwell showed a density plot of ethno-sectarian murders and executions (Figure 8):

> 'This is what it was in density, with red being the most dense, the highest number of those who have been murdered executed being found in this location here…. And this is what it looked like in July. This is what it looked like in August…. And then up in the Kadhamiyah and the Mansour areas, you can see literally almost down to nothing here and then a little bit here… We're encouraged that with more time the density area that you see on the chart should continue to shrink further down in the Adhamiyah area' (Briefing, 6 September 2006).

What 'it' looked like: at once the map *and* the city.

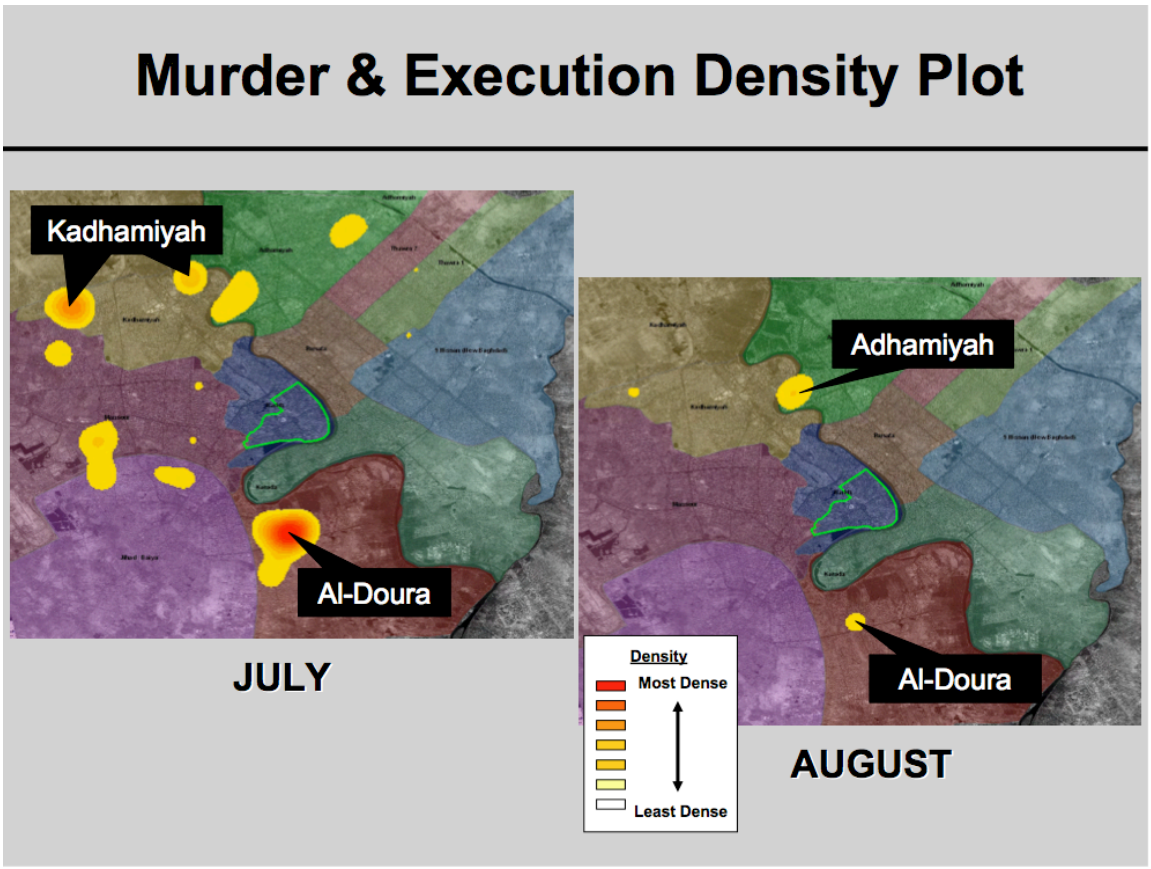

Figure 8:Murders and executions in Baghdad, July-August 2006 (MNF-I Press Briefing, 6 September 2006)

The conflation of map and city made it possible to walk through a virtual Baghdad while it was extraordinarily dangerous to walk through the physical city. But the reality-effect operated on another level too: the parade of maps suggested that the event-ful city was known by virtue of *being* mapped. The storyboards were carefully composed and the spaces in which events occurred were calibrated, coded and located within a hierarchically nested grid put in place through maps and surveillance imagery (Figure 9). As Amoore (2007: 226) notes, visualization strategies like this 'secure the presence of a rational observer' with the power – the conjunction of Reason and resources – to bring order to the disordered. The counter-view is put

most succinctly by a character in William Boyd's *Ice-Cream War* when he finds himself in a war-zone for the first time: 'Gabriel thought maps should be banned. They gave the world an order and a reasonableness which it didn't possess' (Boyd, 1983: 171). But that was precisely the point: the maps were offered as a visible sign of operational competence, confirming the military's capacity to be on top of what was going down. Within this cartographically secured space the significance of a SIGACT (an IED targeting an American patrol, a bomb in a market place) could be defused by directing attention to the geography of *non*-incidence, all the places where the event had *not* happened, as in Caldwell's 'walk' through Baghdad that revealed 'the extreme concentration of attacks in roughly five areas' in contrast to 'the swaths of Baghdad experiencing somewhat relative peace' (Briefing, 20 July 2006).

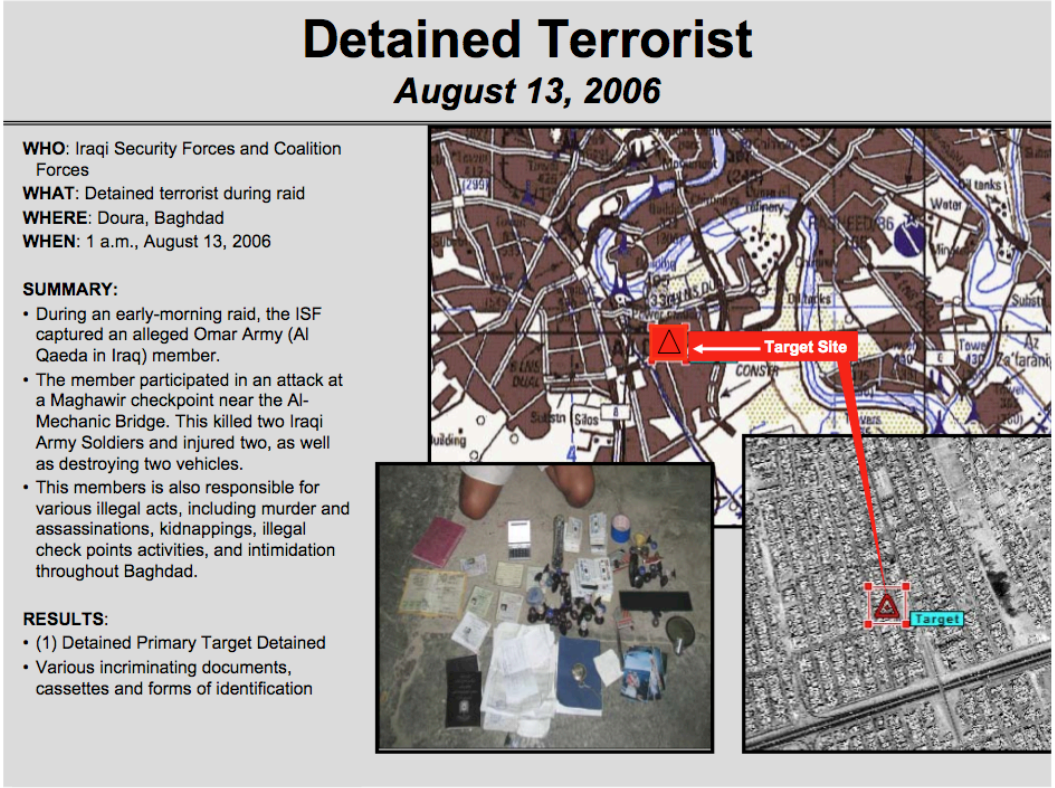

Figure 9: Detention of a terrorist suspect (MNF-I Press Briefing, 16 August 2006)

When General Petraeus assumed command of MNF-I in February 2007 to implement the second Baghdad Security Plan (Operation Imposing the Law, also known as 'the Surge'), he was even more insistent on the importance of strategic communication. [iv] Cioppa (2007: 33-4) reports that he took great pains to ensure daily 'message alignment and coordination' so that 'desired MNF-I themes and messages resonated in the media'; Petraeus's feedback 'was incorporated into the press conferences, both in the prepared remarks and for integration into the question and answers period.' Payne (2008: 49) calls this 'selling the Surge', which he says worked because senior commanders were invested in 'advocating its effects'. Many reputations were riding on the success of the new `plan, and Petraeus took a close interest in its media presentation. But the 'effects' that were being 'advocated' had a striking inflection. During this period the focus of the Press Briefings was resolutely on military operations. The statistics tumbled out: numbers of Joint Security Stations and combat outposts opened, numbers of patrols conducted, numbers of weapons caches cleared, numbers of enemy killed, numbers of suspects detained. There was an increased use of video clips, most of them showing air strikes in an unmistakable (though largely unremarked) reminder that counterinsurgency did not dispense with kinetic operations; in fact, air strikes accelerated dramatically during this phase of operations (Briefings, 9 May, 30 July, 4 November 2007). But the usual statistics of ethno-sectarian violence disappeared from public presentations altogether. It would be 'premature' to release them, journalists were told, yet by March Caldwell was claiming there was 'clearly a reduced level of violence in the city' and by April he reported a '26 per cent decline'

over the previous two months. Asked if he would provide a 'running count' each week 'so we can see for ourselves how things are progressing', he confessed that MNF-I was reluctant 'to start putting out weekly statistics in terms of casualty numbers'. Instead briefers suggested that the relevant gauge should be 'how secure do the Iraqi people feel in the city of Baghdad?' which licensed frequent appeals to 'atmospherics', some based on opinion surveys recorded in regular reports to Congress and others frankly impressionistic: 'signs of progress on the streets', 'a new wave of possibility in the air' (Briefings, 28 February, 15 March, 5 April 2007). By May one senior officer identified 'a real clash' between the two: 'The casualty statistics were godawful. But it began to feel like it was working. We could sense the progress before it was measurable – we could feel it' (Ricks 2009: 238).

In July, as briefers began to advertise MNF-I's 'tactical momentum', maps reappeared, but there were remarkably few of them and they maintained the focus on military operations. Throughout this phase MNF-I released none of its maps of ethno-sectarian violence, which were not put on public view until Petraeus displayed them in his PowerPoint presentations to Congress on 10-11 September 2007 (Figure 9) and again on 8-9 April 2008.

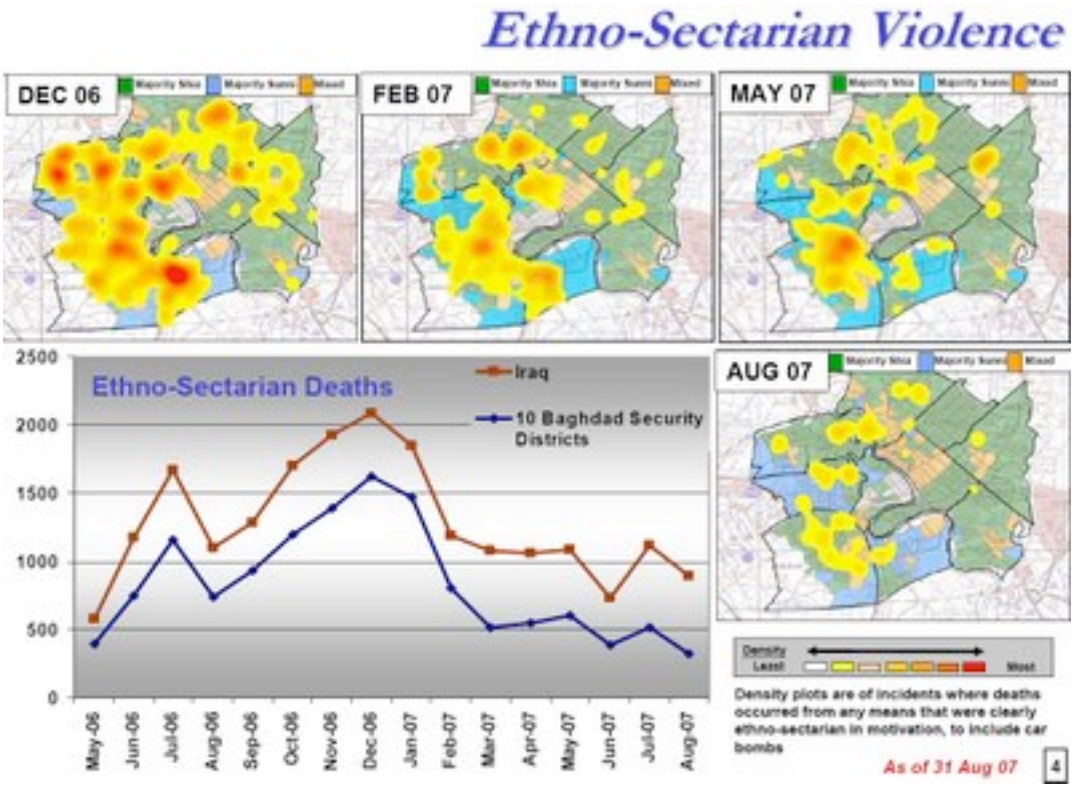

Figure 10: Ethno-sectarian violence in Baghdad December 2006-August 2007

Petraeus's slides were widely circulated across the web, and their critical reception shows how readily these digital decks can be enrolled in what Stark and Paravel (2008: 48-9) call 'counter-demonstrations'. Critics fastened on the statistical basis for Petraeus's charts and on the unchanging confessional composition of Baghdad shown on his first series of maps, which conspicuously failed to register the ethnic cleansing of the city that played a crucial role in reducing the levels of ethno-sectarian violence (Gregory, 2008b). But here I am more interested in their visual rhetoric.

Body counts and biopolitics

Density maps like those shown on Figures 8 and 10, which the US Army uses for other mappings too, are the product of a smoothing algorithm that converts point data into a continuous surface known as quadratic kernel density estimation (KDE). There are technical reasons for its use but also powerful rhetorical ones. The maps are known for their dramatic visual impact, and the desired message can be engineered into the production process. One of the most influential handbooks on KDE is published by the US National Institute of Justice and describes how to map crime 'hot spots'. Several commentators have proposed conceptual affinities between 'third-generation' street gangs, insurgent militias and terrorist groups and 'fourth-generation warfare' and their analysis has invited technical collaborations – not least in mapping. The authors of the NIJ handbook acknowledge that 'map production is an iterative process' and that 'the first map produced is very rarely the one presented to the target audience.' They continue: '*The intended message should also be seen as the driving force behind what the map should look like*' (US National Institute of Justice, 2005: 26, 33; my emphasis).

I believe that the same can be said of MNF-I's mappings, which were key media for 'advocating the effects' of the Surge. Petraeus's attention to a coherent command message is well documented, as I have said, and he is known to discuss the design of his storyboards in depth and detail with his staff. It is surely no accident that these military plots of deaths resemble medical scans of the body politic, where ethno-sectarian violence is visualized as a series of tumours. In his testimony to Congress in April 2008 Petraeus called ethno-sectarian violence 'a cancer that continues to spread if

left unchecked.' Here the visual and the verbal work in synch, and the maps become so many visual performances of an intrinsically biopolitical field (cf. Campbell, 2007).

Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero (2008: 278) suggest that the present version of the Revolution in Military Affairs is not simply a technical transformation 'but also a transformation in military strategic cognition throughout which biologised thinking, together with health and medical analogies, abound.' This disposition is manifest in the new counterinsurgency doctrine, which prescribes three operational phases: 'Stop the bleeding'; 'Inpatient care – recovery'; 'Outpatient care – movement to self-sufficiency' (US Army, 2006: §5.3-5.6). But counterinsurgency is more than emergency triage, and Petraeus's senior counterinsurgency adviser describes its stages as infection, contagion, intervention and rejection. 'I use a medical analogy advisedly here,' Kilcullen (2009: 35) explains, 'because just as a virus or bacterium is more easily able to affect a host whose immune system is compromised or to superinfect an existing wound, so *takfiri* groups opportunistically exploit existing breakdowns in the rule of law, poor governance or pre-existing conflict.' [v] The oncological metaphor raises the stakes still further: this too appears in the doctrine, where counterinsurgents are likened to 'surgeons cutting out cancerous tissue while keeping other vital organs intact' (US Army, 2006: §1.26).

These are simple models, though they can be elaborated in more sophisticated ways, and you might think that in these elementary forms nothing much turns on them. But they matter for at least two reasons. First, their translation into screens, maps and decks underscores the performative

role of what Foucault called the 'nomination of the visible'. In an arresting reversal of these biomedical metaphors, de Certeau (1984) suggested that modern society was characterized by 'a cancerous growth' of optical and panoptical procedures. In his nightmare city terror resided not in the shadows but in the technologies of illumination and transparency. In the event-ful city, however, within the military's space of constructed visibility, the capacity to produce a target – to detect a 'tumour' – by rational-scientific means becomes inseparable from a series of truth-claims about the danger posed by the target-tumour. The emphasis on danger, or on what Foucault called 'dangerousness', is vital to the development of a martial biopolitics. Kjellen (1916) was one of the first scholars to propose the term 'biopolitics', but his focus on the biological configuration of the state – on the anatomy and physiology of the body politic – remained, like his earlier proposals for a geopolitics, within the horizon of a cultural-historical science. When von Uexküll (1920) proposed a thoroughly naturalized biopolitical programme, however, he insisted that pathology was more important than either anatomy or physiology, and effectively licensed 'the right to strike at the tumours that grow in the tissues of the state' (Esposito, 2008: 17-18). The lexicon has mutated since then of course: danger into risk, prevention into pre-emption, and detection into destruction. But the aggressive propensity of biopolitics has been aggravated throughout these transformations – the second reason these tropes matter – because they make military violence appear to be intrinsically therapeutic. As the oncological metaphor depoliticizes and pathologizes insurgency so it turns counterinsurgency's offensive operations into a form of chemotherapy – killing insurgent cells to save the body politic. This becomes even more powerful as these tropes circulate through the public sphere; whatever the effects of the successive Baghdad Security

Plans on the people that lived (and died) in that city, these medicalized images helped to make the cultural turn and the operations carried out under its sign therapeutic for the American military and the American public (Gregory, 2008a, b).

CONCLUSION: TOXIC COMBINATIONS

During the first Gulf War the White House and the Pentagon sought to frame the conflict through various rhetorical strategies, and Matheson and Allan (2009: 30) suggest that this was about more than sustaining public support: it was also about 'changing public perceptions of the very nature of modern warfare itself.' This was even more insistently the case with the invasion of Iraq, from the opening claims about a 'new American way of war' to the fanfare surrounding the new counterinsurgency doctrine. I have tried to show that these rhetorical strategies are fought not only through a 'war of words' but through images and, behind them, a distinctive visual economy. A central objective of critical geopolitics is to challenge the naturalization of these visual registers by disclosing the exclusions that are their condition of possibility:

> 'Its visions ... are visions that seek to put vision into question; its seeing, a seeing that tries to reveal the unseen of seeing; its displays, dissident playings with the practices of displaying; its insight, the insight that comes from the investigation of the infrastructure of insight' (O'Tuathail, 1996: 72).

But if Dillon (2007) is right and late modern war and its security practices are distinguished by a 'toxic combination' of geopolitics and biopolitics, then we need to attend to the *interplay* of their visualities.

Geopolitics has long relied on an object-ontology – lines on maps, lines in the sand – and object-ontologies have played an important part in wars waged under its sign. They have been enlisted in both the conduct and the legitimation of modern military violence, whose objects are reduced to exactly that: strikes are directed at gun batteries, tanks and buildings, and the people who inhabit them are made to disappear from view. Late modern war has not dispensed with these object-ontologies, but uses them to secure new forms of optical detachment. The usual apparatus of the world-as-exhibition – the separation of observer and observed, eye and target (Mitchell, 1988) – is compromised by late modern war, where the video screen often *becomes* the battle space, but this digital transformation has enabled advanced militaries to make new epistemological claims (about 'truth') that are also always ethical claims (about 'targets'). Thus we are assured that intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance now provide such an accurate and detailed view of the battle space that precision-strike capacity can be directed ('surgically') against infrastructure – power stations, communications systems, bridges – and invited to draw a duplicitous distinction between targeting 'the means of life' and targeting the lives of those who depend on them. This mode of cartographic reason continues to yoke objectivity to what I call 'object-ness': 'Ground truth vanishes in the ultimate "God-trick", whose terrible vengeance depends on making its objects visible and its subjects invisible' (Gregory, 2004: 54).

The rise of an event-ontology puts this whole apparatus at risk, however, because it introduces a new, intrusive intimacy across the battle space of late modern war. Those who operate Predator drones in the United States, thousands of miles from their targets, claim that the high-resolution imagery of their 'kills' makes it impossible for them to screen out the bodies from the battle space: their elevated view telescopes down to the ground and they too claim to be vulnerable to post-traumatic stress disorder. Troops who have video access to these eyes in the sky are much more directly immersed in the space of violence, of course, and their enrollment in the biopolitical armatures of counterinsurgency requires a three-dimensional recognition of the lives (and deaths) of the local populations amongst whom they fight. They are engaged in more than the armed social work that Kilcullen (2009) advertises, and their multiple lines of operation cannot be reduced to the screens of CPOF or TIGR that capture only the fleeting traces of their encounters with those who inhabit the city. In short, optical detachment is threatened by a battle space that is visibly and viscerally alive with death; biopolitics bleeds into necropolitics. And yet the Press Briefings that are parasitic upon these visualizations move in a dialectical spiral, and their carefully orchestrated parade of maps, screens and decks reinstates optical detachment. For even as the distancing apparatus of the world-as-exhibition is dissolved and the map becomes the city, so the city becomes the map: and in that moment – in that movement – Baghdad is transformed into an abstract geometry of points and areas and returned to the field of geopolitics. And as those maps are animated, the body politic is scanned, and the tumours visibly shrink, so Baghdad is transformed into a biopolitical field whose 'death-producing activities [are hidden] under the rhetoric of making live' (Dauphinee and Masters 2007: xii). In this looking-glass world bodies

are counted but they do not count; they become the signs of a pathological condition and the vector of recovery. These processes of abstraction are, of course, profoundly embodied. This is not algorithmic war, and behind every mark on the map/city is a constellation of fear and terror, pain and grief (Hyndman, 2007). For that very reason our disclosure of the infrastructure of insight cannot be limited to the nomination of the visible.

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[i] All MNF-I Press Briefings and Operational Updates are cited in this form; they are archived at http://www.usf-iraq.com. MNC-I was established in Baghdad in May 2004 as the tactical unit responsible for command and control of operations throughout Iraq; it formed part of Multi-National Force – Iraq (MNF-I). On 1 January 2010 MNF-I was replaced by United States Forces – Iraq.

[ii] Operation Together Forward was a joint US-Iraqi operation that involved nightly curfews and the deployment of 12,000 additional American troops to step up patrols and checkpoints throughout the city. The troops worked from large bases remote from local populations, and in the second phase, when they adopted the COIN strategy of 'clear-hold-build' in selected (mainly Sunni) neighbourhoods, their continued dependence on the Forward Operating Bases ensured that 'clearing' would be far easier than 'holding' or

[iii] As the storyboard shown here implies, the only deaths recognized within this grid were those of civilians killed by insurgents; there was no space for civilians killed by the military. Liz Sly from the *Chicago Tribune* pressed Caldwell about this: 'All your predecessors have refused to tell us the number of civilians that have been shot dead by American forces over the years. They've told us that the figures aren't kept.' In the light of the Haditha incident, however, could he 'request to see if these figures are in fact kept and whether we could have them?' Caldwell was noncommittal; he had never seen any figures, yet he knew (somehow) that 'civilian deaths are in fact on the rise but not by military forces': Briefing, 1 June 2006.

[iv] Operation Imposing the Law was a joint US-Iraqi operation, which involved 21,000 additional American troops and a systematic dispersal from Forward Operating Bases into Joint Security Stations in the neighbourhoods. It was widely advertised as a successful application of the new counterinsurgency doctrine but the changing incidence of violence had a more complex causality (Gregory, 2008b).

[v] Kilcullen uses *takfiri* to identify Islamist groups that hold that Muslims with beliefs different to their own 'are infidels who must be killed' and which regard terrorism as a legitimate weapon against them (pp. xvii-xix).