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The Long War

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The Long War

CENTCOM, GRAND STRATEGY,
AND GLOBAL SECURITY

JOHN MORRISSEY

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For Darragh and Adrian

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JM
Galway
September 2016

ABBREVIATIONS

AFB	Air Force Base
AOR	Area of Responsibility
CDHQ	CENTCOM Deployable Headquarters
CENTCOM	United States Central Command
CINC	Commander in Chief
DoD	Department of Defense
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JAG	Judge Advocate General
RDF	Rapid Deployment Force
RDJTF	Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force
SOFA	Status of Forces Agreement
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

The Long War

CHAPTER ONE

“Shaping the Central Region for the 21st Century”

CENTCOM’s Long War

Of all the enemies to public liberty war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded [. . .]
No nation could preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare.

James Madison, “Political Observations,” 1795

The initiation of United States Central Command (CENTCOM) in January 1983 was a watershed moment for contemporary U.S. geopolitics. It signaled a new era of U.S. global ambition in the aftermath of military failure in Vietnam, solidified a refocused U.S. foreign policy on the most energy-rich region on earth, and set in motion a security mission whose legacies and ongoing wars we are still witnessing today. In no other region has the U.S. military established more bases, lost more troops, or spent more money in the last thirty years than the Middle East and Central Asia. From its inception, CENTCOM was tasked with its military-economic securitization, the safeguarding of commercial opportunities therein, and ultimately the policing of a pivotal yet precarious space in the broader global economy. CENTCOM calls this its ‘Long War’, a war underpinned by a range of entangled geopolitical and geoeconomic visions and involving the use of the most devastating Western interventionary violence of our time. This book tells the story of that long war.

In any ways the story of CENTCOM began with President Jimmy Carter’s State of the Union Address in January 1980, when he declared that an attempt by “any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force” (J. Carter 1980). Two months later, the initiation of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF) was the first formal commitment of U.S. forces to protect the region, and with CENTCOM’s succession in 1983 the U.S. government had fully committed to the Carter Doctrine. CENTCOM would become the most active command in U.S. military history. Its critique is vital to understanding the recent global ambition of the United States and its ongoing grand strategy to shape global security.

For the past thirty years, CENTCOM has been the foremost appendage of the U.S. national security state in implementing U.S. foreign policy in one of the most important spaces of global security, the Middle East. Yet there has been remarkably little critical examination of CENTCOM's security mission, nor has there been any sustained interrogation of its discursive production of inherent Middle Eastern volatility and threat—the reductive, strategic geographical knowledges that have been instrumental in unleashing interventionary violence in the region. There have been a small number of insider books on the command's ongoing wars in recent years, describing issues such as command structures, the use and extent of intelligence, and interpersonal rivalries.¹ Such accounts, however, have not considered CENTCOM's leading role in shaping and actioning U.S. foreign policy, nor have they located its story within existing scholarly debates on neoliberalism, imperialism, and geopolitics or addressed key questions of territory, the law, and what counts as war in our contemporary moment.²

Operating since 1983 from MacDill Air Force Base (AFB) in Tampa, Florida (figure 1.1), CENTCOM has played a pivotal role in international affairs over the last thirty years. In the book, I position the command centrally in the story of U.S. global ambition over this formative period by documenting its efforts to spearhead a global security grand strategy defined in military-economic terms and enabled via specific legal-territorial arrangements. In intersecting CENTCOM's evolving grand strategy with a range of recent debates in the broader academy addressing questions of ongoing Western interventionism, the book offers a focused



FIGURE 1.1. MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, Florida. Photo by the author.

critique of the interventionary logics and modalities of a crucial instrument of U.S. national security on the global stage. Through the course of the book, I draw on extensive archival sources, including CENTCOM’s declassified strategy papers, posture statements, mission reports, command histories, and press briefings, together with key Department of Defense (DoD) publications, namely *National Security Strategy* and *National Defense Strategy* documents, Unified Command Plans, Overseas Basing Commission reports, and relevant Congressional Research Service reports to the U.S. Congress. I also draw on a valuable interview conducted with the serving CENTCOM command historian, David Dawson, at CENTCOM Headquarters at MacDill AFB.³

In employing a wide range of materials,⁴ my aim is to deconstruct the core formulations of current U.S. grand strategy on the Middle East and Central Asia and to illustrate the focal import of CENTCOM’s securitization discourse, representationally and performatively, in prominent forums of geopolitical knowledge production in the United States. CENTCOM occupies a pivotal position in the U.S. national security state, enveloping both foreign policy making and foreign policy practice; its annual posture statements, for instance, are important speech acts at the very nexus of the military-political establishment in Washington. Although policy making and policy enactment become muddled in all sorts of ways, what becomes clear when reflecting upon the connections between ‘text’ and ‘practice’ in CENTCOM’s securitization discourse is how consistent it has been in its focus on military-economic security, deterrence, and policing—and moreover how that interventionary discourse has been operationally put into action repeatedly and largely successfully over the course of thirty years. CENTCOM’s interventionary rationale serves to underpin an enduring discursive mechanism of Western imperialism: the identification of threat and instability coupled with the scripting of necessary correction and security measures. Its mission brief appears not only necessary but indeed therapeutic to the liberal urge to improve. Documenting the liberal imperial hallmarks of contemporary Western geopolitical imaginaries is an essential part of a still necessary postcolonial critique, directed ultimately toward the “transformation of epistemologies” and the “establishment of new forms of discursive and political power” (Young 2001, 428). Part of that critique in geography is to counter abstracted geostrategic knowledges, such as those permeating CENTCOM’s securitization discourse, and to this end, denaturalizing the ‘essence’ of the region’s insecurity and insisting upon the region’s human geographies is vital.

‘Guardians of the Gulf’

CENTCOM’s ‘Area of Responsibility’ (commonly abbreviated to AOR) is seen in figure 1.2. It is one of six regional commands in the U.S. military’s Unified Command Plan in which the world is divided up into “Areas of Responsibility” with

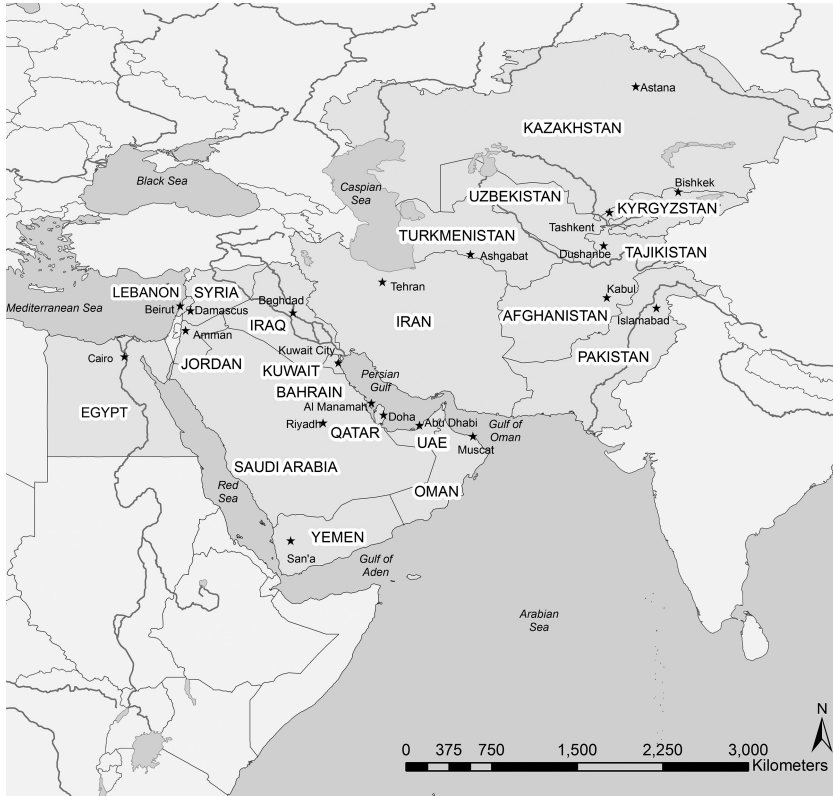


FIGURE 1.2. CENTCOM 'Area of Responsibility', 2016.

specifically assigned “missions and geographic responsibilities” (U.S. Department of Defense 2016a; see figure 3.3).⁵ Producing a map titled “The World with Commanders’ Areas of Responsibility” mirrors a deeply assumptive imperialism, of course, that naturalizes both the essence of regions (however arbitrarily constructed) and the assigning to the U.S. military of global responsibility to secure them. The bounded regions within the map are framed and known through a security lens, and such knowledge is reinforced in a wider discourse of securitization that includes Country Books, for instance, where the heads of commands such as CENTCOM are regularly furnished with “a single-source document” of “data on countries” (U.S. Central Command 1985, 143–144). Such abstracted mappings encapsulate the most dangerous geographical formulations of area studies (Gibson-Graham 2004; Szanton 2004); and it is this reductionism, present elsewhere in the U.S. global imaginary too, that is the prerequisite to drawing the world into ‘Areas of Responsibility’. Reprising the colonial tactic of renaming, CENTCOM calls the vast Area of Responsibility under its military watch the

‘Central Region.’⁶ It is ‘central’ for CENTCOM primarily in three ways: central to the global economy; central to global energy assets; and ultimately central to global security. In tracing the geopolitical and geoeconomic arc through which the region has been discursively produced in recent years, CENTCOM’s narrative and performative role at the nexus of military and political circles between the DoD and the U.S. Capitol stands out. In their annual posture statements to the U.S. Congress, CENTCOM commanders have perennially presented their armed forces as “Guardians of the Gulf,” authorized with the role of safeguarding the free-market global economy (Palmer 1992; Morrissey 2009). The command’s mission statements and strategy papers have been equally consistent in communicating a ‘neoliberal policing’ responsibility (U.S. Central Command 1985; U.S. Central Command 1999a). A 1992 CENTCOM-commissioned strategy report, for example, noted how the end of the Cold War and “the loss of the Soviet Union as a foe of the United States” had “not diminished” the remit of the command as “the guardian of the Persian Gulf”—it would continue its “main mission” of “guarding Gulf oil” (Pelletiere and Johnson 1992, v). ‘Guarding Gulf oil’ is undoubtedly a central element of the story of CENTCOM, but its interventions across the Middle East and Central Asia have not just been concerned with securing the regional spigots of energy assets (Harvey 2003; Vitalis 2006; Mitchell 2011; Bacevich 2016); rather, they form part of a wider U.S. regional grand strategy to facilitate a ‘controlled’ neoliberal global economy, which I draw out and explore through the course of the book. As the report above makes clear, the “name of the game” for CENTCOM is “control”: “we are trying to control what goes on in the Gulf in order to maintain the status quo” (Pelletiere and Johnson 1992, 17).

CENTCOM has long exhibited a particular consciousness of the need to communicate to the American people its vital, mandated security brief (Reveron and Gavin 2004; Wrage 2004).⁷ A core command concern outlined in its chief strategy document from 1999, *Shaping the Central Region for the 21st Century*, for instance, was to “[e]ducate key leaders and the American public on the mission of CENTCOM and the importance of the Central Region” (U.S. Central Command 1999a, 8). The command’s principal mission objective was also set out plainly:

Protect, promote and preserve U.S. interests in the Central Region to include the free flow of energy resources, access to regional states, freedom of navigation, and maintenance of regional stability. (U.S. Central Command 1999a, 7)

Ten years later, its 2009 mission statement laid out a more universalist agenda, presenting the notion of U.S.-led international “cooperation” and “development” and erasing explicit references to U.S. national interests:

U.S. Central Command, working with national and international partners, promotes development and cooperation among nations, responds to crises, and deters

or defeats state and transnational aggression in order to establish regional security and stability. (U.S. Central Command 2009a)

The discursive shift here mirrors what Mark Duffield and others have shown as the blurring of war and development in our contemporary moment via a broadened vernacular of security, peacekeeping, and market creation (Duffield 2001; Essex 2013). It reflects too an effort to garner renewed international support for the ongoing U.S.-led war on terror under the auspices of the Obama administration in early 2009. It also masks U.S. national ambition in declarations of a universalist 'special mission' (N. Smith 2003a, 2005), and it reveals once more a familiar contradiction in both historical and contemporary scriptings of U.S. interventionism, what Mona Domosh calls the "borderless world of commercial mobility vs. the territorial prerogatives of national interests" (Domosh 2013, 963). Yet in all of this CENTCOM's Long War rationale remains constant, and it necessitates long-term posturing of military force.

Military posturing for a long war requires an identified threat, and the Middle East has, of course, been habitually represented in the West as a space of insecurity afflicted with a 'barbarism' that requires a 'civilized' Western response (Said 1978, 1993; Gregory 2004). The Middle East's barbarism today is personified by ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) fighters. Shocking descriptions of their abhorrent disregard for human life echo familiar accounts of the violent cruelty of their predecessors, al-Qaeda and the Taliban. As CENTCOM's interventionary violence has become more and more 'unseen' as a result of careful military media management, we have increasingly 'seen' the violence of ISIS as the representation of radical Islam (Gregory 2005, 2011).⁸ This discursive differentiation of violence reinforces a dominant geopolitical rationale for an enduring U.S. presence in the Middle East, spearheaded by CENTCOM. In addition to a geopolitical interventionary imperative, a distinct geoeconomic interventionary imperative has featured even more prominently in U.S. regional grand strategy since the initiation of CENTCOM. Over the last thirty years, both at CENTCOM and in wider defense circles in Washington, strategizing for intervention in the region has identified the prime ambition of neoliberal securitization for 'the good of the global economy'. The late Jack Kemp, a former Republican congressman, captured this ambition well:

My friends tell me I sound like a broken record pleading for a 21st-century Marshall Plan for Arab and Muslim countries in the Middle East and Central Asia. That's because I am passionate about doing everything we can to bring the Muslim nations of the regions into the 21st-century global economy. Not only does the health and welfare of the Muslim people depend on it, the security of the free world depends on it. (Kemp 2004)

Kemp's vision mirrors a now prevailing U.S. national security discourse on the Middle East and Central Asia, a discourse that conflates U.S. military and eco-

nomic interests in a region with wider global security implications. For CENTCOM, military-economic securitization has always been the mission and successive commanders have repeatedly convinced the U.S. Congress of the necessity of ‘forward presence’ in the name of U.S.-global economic security.

The Long War to Shape the Middle East

In January 2006, President George W. Bush used the phrase ‘long war’ for the first time in his State of the Union Address. “Our own generation is in a long war against a determined enemy,” Bush declared, “a war that will be fought by presidents of both parties who will need steady bipartisan support from the Congress” (Bush 2006). The phrase had been used before, of course; in the early seventeenth century, it was the name given to the Ottoman Empire’s fifteen-year campaign to extend its territorial sovereignty in the Balkans. A few days after President Bush’s address in the Capitol, the *Washington Post* reported that his administration had formally embraced the phrase and in so doing “turned a simple descriptive phrase into an official name for the war on terrorism, and possibly catapulted it into the ranks of such other names as ‘Cold War’ and ‘World War’” (Graham and White 2006). The phrase ‘Long War’ had already been adopted by CENTCOM as a descriptor for its mission several years earlier. After taking over at CENTCOM in July 2003, its new commander, General John Abizaid, quickly departed from the operational focus of his predecessor, General Tommy Franks, on specific military interventions in largely disconnected conflicts. Abizaid was convinced that CENTCOM “did not face a series of local conflicts” across its AOR but rather faced a regional “pan-insurgency,” which could be defeated only by “strategic thinking” and a “sustained, integrated effort” (Dawson 2010, 21). Marking a new direction in policy, Abizaid set up a Commander’s Advisory Group at CENTCOM Headquarters (figure 1.3), charged with formulating a long-haul strategy to counter this regional insurgency. The group’s meetings became known as the ‘Long War Briefs.’ CENTCOM command historian David Dawson was a member of Abizaid’s advisory team, and he recounts that the group primarily addressed how not enough “strategic thinking” had been invested in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (Dawson 2014).⁹ In formulating a new strategic-level approach, the advisory group came up with a mission plan with the working title ‘The Long War,’ and although the group “disliked” the phrase because it “implied long-term major combat” and “reinforced the idea that the United States was at war with Islam,” it was nevertheless adopted as they were “unable to come up with a better short term” (Dawson 2010, 33). The reluctance of Abizaid’s advisory team to adopt the phrase mirrors no doubt the pressure on successive U.S. governments to be seen to end specific military operations, despite their seemingly always imminent reignition across the Middle East and Central Asia (as recent



FIGURE 1.3. CENTCOM Headquarters, MacDill Air Force Base. Source: Bobbie O'Brien, WUSF Public Media.

years have shown). CENTCOM's embracing of a 'long war' grand strategy reflects, however, the extent to which the 'new wars' thesis of unending nonconventional war has been understood in recent years (Kaldor 1999)—new wars for conflated military, developmental, and humanitarian security (Duffield 2001). Signaling temporal concerns is important here too: a long war to secure a future of uncertainty and volatility possesses a compelling interventionary rationale.

In all of this, language is crucial. As Terry Jones (2001) quickly observed soon after the 'war on terrorism' was declared, "how do you wage war on an abstract noun?"—and, of course, how can there ever be an endgame (Chomsky 2003)? It is a war that is, in fact, unwinnable and thus a "forever war" (Filkins 2009; cf. Bacevich 2007). In this sense, CENTCOM's embracing of the phrase 'The Long War' is at least linguistically a more appropriate descriptor. Since 2004, the phrase has been increasingly used to signify both the long-term temporality of CENTCOM's project in the Middle East and Central Asia and its wider strategic approach—comprising also "political and economic measures," as emphasized by General Richard Myers in his last press conference as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in September 2005 (Graham and White 2006). The designation has also been popularly embraced by a range of strategic studies experts; Bill Roggio at the defense think tank Foundation for the Defense of Democracies even set up *The Long War* journal in September 2007 (Roggio 2014; *The Long War Journal* 2014; see also Carafano 2003). The larger point on nomenclature, however, is that CENTCOM's

Long War began much earlier than its formal adoption of the phrase in 2004. As Dawson notes, the command has been on a “continuous war footing” since the Gulf War (Dawson 2014). From 1992 until the invasion of Iraq in 2003, it implemented Operation Southern Watch, the regulation of the Iraqi no-fly zone south of the Thirty-Second Parallel. Ground deterrence was a constant feature of operations, with military maneuvers such as Operation Vigilant Warrior, Operation Desert Spring, and Internal Look entailing regular mobilizations of CENTCOM’s forward-deployed ground troops and military arsenal. And since CENTCOM’s first major intervention in the Persian Gulf during the Tanker War in the mid-1980s, it has maintained a continuous forward naval presence in the region.

In April 2007, Brigadier General Al Riggle from the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center gave a presentation at a leading defense industry association conference in Miami, Florida. In an instructive address titled “The Global War on Terrorism: The Long War,” Riggle outlined how the United States had been “a nation at war” in the Middle East and Central Asia since the late 1970s (Riggle 2007). Among key identified events in a protracted timeline, Riggle listed the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979 as the first instance of the Long War, which ever since has comprised various attacks on U.S. embassies, facilities, troops, and citizens in the region. He cited Lebanon in 1983, 1984, and 1988, Saudi Arabia in 1995 and 1996, Palestine in 1995, 1996, and 1997, Yemen in 2000, and the 9/11 attacks in the United States in 2001 as part of an ongoing conflict against “a transnational movement of extremist organizations, networks, and individuals—and their state and non-state sponsors—which have in common that they exploit Islam and use terrorism for ideological ends” (Riggle 2007). It may be persuasive of Riggle and others to foreground terrorist threat and geopolitical instability in summations of U.S. commitment to a long-haul strategy in the Middle East and Central Asia, but what is absent in this reasoning is acknowledgment of what has in fact been the most dominant discourse of intervention since CENTCOM’s inception: ‘geoeconomic securitization.’ Through the course of this book, I show geoeconomic securitization to be both an active interventionary discourse and an apt descriptor of the security operations of CENTCOM in practice. In interrogating the command’s geoeconomic rationale in ‘shaping’ the Middle East and Central Asia, I focus in particular on the tactic of deterrence. My aim is to tease out the dimensions of geoeconomic shaping being anticipated, the kind of capitalism envisaged, and if this altered over a period marked by the advent of globalization and a less-bounded global economic system.

Geoeconomic Securitization

CENTCOM’s geoeconomic interventionary logic has always been especially nebulous, perhaps not by accident. The absence of precisely formulated contours

has in fact further enabled an anticipative message of interventionary intent being successfully declared. The command's discourse of 'necessary' intervention for the 'global common good' possesses the attributes of universalist rhetoric that render its message both promissory and persuasive. In deconstructing the 'kind of capitalism' the U.S. military seeks to practically facilitate and safeguard, I am disinclined to theorize it as one of 'neo-mercantilism', akin to imperial Britain's efforts to facilitate capitalist enterprise (cf. Sassen 2010; McMichael 2013). Like others, I am also reluctant to ascribe it as *simply* 'neoliberalism', largely because I think this term and its associated economic determinisms need to be broken down more frequently to explicate the intricate workings of late modern capitalism (Peck 2013). What I present as CENTCOM's geoeconomic grand strategy is more ambitious in terms of global economic shaping than localized forms of mercantilism, but the endgame is ultimately loosely formulated around concepts such as 'free trade' and 'freedom of movement'. It is a strategy in which a neoliberal universalist rhetoric is deployed, yet the outcome is always one of 'messy capitalism' (Morrissey 2017). I explore this concept in an effort to think through the relationship between military force and late modern capitalism, or more specifically the import of military force in the contemporary global economy's spaces of insecurity.

CENTCOM has consistently articulated universalist economic objectives for its military ground presence across the Middle East and Central Asia. David Dawson, for instance, is keen to recount its efforts to foster regional economic growth and cites the Northern Distribution Network and New Silk Road initiatives in Central Asia in recent years as substantial developments toward that end:

CENTCOM supports anything that strengthens regional economies, and believes that free trade strengthens economies and fosters economic growth. Since about 2004 CENTCOM has been all about regional partnerships. We see regional cooperation as one of the best ways to foster stability. (Dawson 2014)

The grand narrative here is one loosely reflecting a belief in free trade, infrastructure, and economic stimulus to initiate development and "foster stability." When asked about the specific challenges of uneven economic development, the extractive nature of transnational capitalism, and common absence of local leadership and participation, Dawson responded thus: "very few [military officers] have well developed theories of economics; I think most military officers maintain a contradictory view of economics—they combine a general belief in free markets with a healthy skepticism of the profit motive" (Dawson 2014). Dawson's reply mirrors CENTCOM's long-standing if nebulous accounting of its military-economic remit. There is undoubtedly a 'general belief in free markets' at CENTCOM—this belief comes through annually in commanders' posture statements to the U.S. Congress—and what becomes clear when reading the command's conception of its mission is that it sees its primary assigned responsibility as militarily securing

the vital nodes of a globally pivotal regional economy, to enable economic liberalization and incorporation for all.

In considering CENTCOM’s envisioning of its mission responsibility, I orient a particular critique of the geoeconomic contours of its interventionary logic and grand strategy. Such a focus on geoeconomic discourse owes much to ‘critical geopolitics,’ whose emergence marked a significant moment in political geography in the early 1990s, not only in countering classical geopolitics but also in opening up a wide range of accounts of geopolitical statecraft and the role of geographical knowledges therein (Dalby 1991; Ó Tuathail 1996; Kearns 2009).¹⁰ Earlier work in political geography, influenced by Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-systems theory and Antonio Gramsci’s writings on hegemony, is an important forebear too (Agnew and Corbridge 1995; Flint and Taylor 2011).¹¹ Much work in geoeconomics attends to questioning the forms of imperialism and spatial organization we are witnessing today in a globalized economy dominated by transnational capitalist accumulation (Cowen and Smith 2009; Sparke 2013). Among other things, this has served to illuminate the impact of both geopolitical *and* geoeconomic calculation in the ongoing shaping of uneven development, and the perpetuation of international conflict (cf. Dalby 2007; N. Smith 2008). In CENTCOM’s interventionary rationale, both geopolitical and geoeconomic registers have been interchangeably deployed as “geostrategic discourses” (Sparke 2007, 345)—they have coalesced seamlessly in the successful articulation of the command’s mission.

In interrogating CENTCOM’s security mission, I am drawing on the security studies conception of the term ‘securitization’—employed particularly by the constructivist Copenhagen School of International Relations—in which potential security risks become discursively mobilized to legitimize actions to counter national security threats (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1997; Buzan and Wæver 2003; Williams 2007). I am also drawing on broader work on risk, preemption, and governmentality that has variously critiqued the interventionary discourses and strategies that increasingly seek to manage danger and insecurity in our contemporary world (Beck 1992; Dean 1999; O’Malley 2004; Mythen and Walklate 2006). As I show later, CENTCOM commanders have consistently relied on a risk-flagged securitization discourse to argue for, and legitimize, their interventionary mission of managing threat and insecurity. The meaning of securitization in actuarial science also resonates with my use of the term, particularly how risk-laden financial interests become bundled into securities in the market that can be insured against (Bougen 2003; Lin and Cox 2008). In a similar fashion, CENTCOM’s grand strategy posits the assets and liabilities of the political economy of the Gulf region as “insurable risks,” and moreover deserving of “continued future insurance-risk securitization activity” (Cox, Fairchild, and Pedersen 2000, 157). Its security project intricately conflates political and economic interests. As Randy Martin (2007, 17) notes, pressing on the “political meaning of

security” always “brings its economic double to the surface.” I am mindful too of other overlapping regulatory and disciplinary logics underpinning visions of security at CENTCOM, particularly in the realm of biopolitics, which I explore by focusing on the use of the law to enable the biopolitical capacities of the command’s armed forces in its various ‘fields of intervention’ (Foucault 2007; cf. De Larringa and Doucet 2008; Mason and Zeitoun 2013).

Ultimately, I hope to expound how CENTCOM’s mission in the Middle East and Central Asia is predicated on a global security vision in which the region is seen as pivotal for a functioning global economy yet unpredictable as a geopolitical dynamic, and therefore necessitating a regulatory military presence. I detail how CENTCOM’s grand strategy has been discursively underpinned by a geoeconomic imagination replete with universalist claims about guarding the free-market global economy. But I want to highlight too how CENTCOM’s project of security seeks to facilitate geoeconomics in practice on the ground in the form of commercial markets. Here, I emphasize the command’s territorial tactics and, in particular, the legal armatures that enable the critical operational mechanism of deterrence.

Territory and Access

In his oft-cited 1990 commentary in *The National Interest*, Edward Luttwak anticipated the emergence of a style of international relations in the post-Cold War era in which geopolitical and military statecraft would be replaced by a form of geoeconomic statecraft wherein “competitively, or cooperatively, the actions on all sides would always unfold without regards to frontiers” (Luttwak 1990, 17). Deb Cowen and Neil Smith (2009) lay bare the essentialism of Luttwak’s argument, underlining instead the dialectics and contradictions wrought by contemporary capitalism’s uneven development. On the question of territory and security, Cowen and Smith see “territorial borders” as historically representing “a solution to security projects” whereas today posing “a key problem” for them (2009, 30). I wonder, however, if this is overstating the historical dichotomy somewhat. Lauren Benton, in her analysis of early modern European empires, is particularly instructive on this point:

Territorial control was, in many places, an incidental aim of imperial expansion. While an iconic association with empire is the pink shading of British imperial possessions in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century maps, that image, and others like it, obscures the many variations of imperial territories [. . .] Even in the most paradigmatic cases, an empire’s spaces were politically fragmented; legally differentiated; and encased in irregular, porous, and sometimes undefined borders. (Benton 2010, 2)

Borders, in other words, have always posed security problems and were perhaps historically more permeable and perpetually problematic than our imaginary of the colonial worlds of the past allows (no doubt static cartographic representations have much to do with this, as Benton suggests).¹²

The other important question here is whether the “control of territory” is just a “tactical option” rather than a “strategic necessity” for contemporary Western interventionism, as Cowen and Smith (2009, 42) contend. They draw a key distinction between ‘geopolitics and territory’ and ‘geo-economics and territory’:

Where geopolitics can be understood as a means of acquiring territory towards a goal of accumulating wealth, geo-economics reverses the procedure, aiming directly at the accumulation of wealth through market control. The acquisition or control of territory is not at all irrelevant but is a tactical option rather than a strategic necessity. (Cowen and Smith 2009, 42)

As I argue through the course of this book, CENTCOM’s operations in the Middle East and Central Asia have consistently required what the U.S. military calls ‘forward presence’—to secure ‘land nodes’ and ‘choke points’. Territory for CENTCOM is not about acquisition or administrative control in terms of traditional understandings of historical colonialism; rather, it is about ‘strategic control’. Its primary operational mechanism of deterrence is dependent on territorial access, and this access is sanctioned and facilitated via specific legal-territorial constellations confirming access rights, operational limits, and rules of engagement. CENTCOM’s strategy to territorially ‘open up’ markets, resources, and commercial and transportation networks via deterrence comprises on the one hand a promissory neoliberal vision about ‘free markets’ yet on the other a military mechanism that seeks to ‘control’ and ‘regulate’. Neoliberal capitalism has never equated to *laissez-faire* economics; rather, it has always involved intervening to “further the game of enterprise” (Gordon 1991, 42). As David Harvey reasoned some thirty years ago, the corollary of Marx’s observation that capitalism requires spatial expansion is that it must also require spatial production, comprising “spatial organisation” and “regulatory institutions” (Harvey 1985, 145). Capitalist production entails inherent contradictions, of course, entwining conflicting territorial logics and occurring at multiple scales (Hardt and Negri 2000; Harvey 2005; Donzelot 2008). As Jamey Essex (2013, 5) usefully puts it, “a deterritorializing logic of economic connection exists alongside and, at turns, intertwines with and contradicts a territorializing logic of political control and closure.” My hope is that addressing the question of territory will aid in further documenting the modalities of imperial interventionism we are witnessing in late modern capitalism. One of the ways in which to do that, I think, is to pay greater attention to the law and the legal specificities enabling territorial access. In highlighting CENTCOM’s grand strategy of deterrence, my aim is to attend not only to the binding of military and economic logics in practices of intervention but also to their crucial governing legal requirements.

War, Law, and Geography

CENTCOM's Long War involves an intricate deployment of the law. As Walter Benjamin (1978, 283) observed nearly a century ago, there is a "lawmaking character" at the heart of war—in its battlespaces, in its territorial, naval, and aerial occupations, in its extraterritoriality, and in its adapted usage of a multitude of legal armatures (Morrissey 2015). For the U.S. military today, its JAGs (Judge Advocate General's Corps military lawyers) play a central role in the juridification of its military operations, from legally conditioning the battlefield to regulating the circulation of troops, optimizing their operational capacities, and sanctioning the privilege to kill (and to kill with impunity, of course—war being the ultimate 'state of exception'; Agamben 2005). They also play a vital, often overlooked communicative role, and this role is important in considering how the law is used *strategically*—in other words, how it is selectively used in "identifying openings that can be made to seem persuasive," as legal scholar David Kennedy (2006, 121) explains. The law's power to persuade is precisely why harnessing it and defining it is key to communicating 'legitimacy'. As outlined on the first page of the U.S. military's *Operational Law Handbook*, the law's function in communicating missions and structuring "public statements" is made crystal clear for military lawyers:

the success of any military mission abroad will likely depend upon the degree of domestic support demonstrated during the initial deployment and sustained operation of U.S. forces. A clear, well-conceived, effective, and timely articulation of the legal basis for a particular mission is essential to sustaining support at home and gaining acceptance abroad. (U.S. Army Judge Advocate General's Legal Center 2016, 1)

Craig Jones (2016, 221) notes that "processes of juridification are a defining feature of late modern war," yet geographic accounts of war have "generally not considered the role that law plays in its conduct." Addressing this shortfall of critical engagements with "the weaponisation of law," Jones shows how the recently coined concept of 'lawfare' "provides geography with a series of entry points" into urgent debates surrounding "the legal geographies of war" (C. Jones 2016, 223; cf. Kennedy 2006; Weizman 2009; Gregory 2010; Braverman et al. 2014). In my account of CENTCOM's framing and mobilization of the law, I reverse the conservative definition of lawfare, in which it is understood to mean "the use of law as a weapon of war" by 'illegitimate terrorists' or an 'occupied population' attempting to impose "reputational costs on the belligerent" by "alleging violations" (Dill 2014). On the contrary, I am concerned with 'state lawfare', in which the law is selectively adapted and employed in a wide range of military operations and occupations by the 'state belligerent'. Lawfare in this sense, as Janina Dill remarks, is partially the use of law to "circumvent legal obligations in order to be able to continue to claim compliance" (Dill 2014; cf. Halper 2014). It is a tactic too of le-

gally protecting forward-deployed troops, or “offensive lawfare,” as I have outlined elsewhere (Morrissey 2011b, 280).

My concern for the legal geographies of CENTCOM’s interventions and operations centers on teasing out the entanglements of what, following Blomley (1989) and Jones and Smith (2015), can be usefully described as the ‘war-law-space nexus’ of late modern war.¹³ I want to divulge why the law and its specificities matter for CENTCOM, particularly respecting territorial access, occupation, and the regulation of military conduct. I wish to signal too how the law is indispensable to the recent broadening of what counts as ‘war’ (Kennedy 2006; Gregory 2011; Taw 2012). My engagement draws especially on Michel Foucault’s lectures on security, territory, and biopolitics at the Collège de France in the late 1970s (Foucault 2007, 2008). It also draws on a range of critical work on colonial governmentality and the historical legal conditioning of political, social, and cultural relations (Scott 1995; Kalpagam 2000; Duncan, 2007; Legg 2007; Howell 2009; Nally 2011; Morrissey 2012; Wickramasinghe 2015). From at least the early modern period, as Lauren Benton (2010, 3) has documented, imperial administration has depended on “the exercise of delegated legal authority” in which “a fluid legal politics” produced multiple “territorial variations.” Today as much as ever, as Jamey Essex (2013, 6) argues, there is an “incompleteness and contingency” to forms of “territorial control,” and this perhaps prompts the kinds of legal-territorial ambiguities we are witnessing in the biopolitical management practices of our contemporary moment (Mountz 2011, 2012). Territory, as Stuart Elden (2013, 10) reasons, is ultimately a mode of “spatial organization” that is “dependent on a number of techniques and on the law,” which are “historically and geographically specific.” In the case of CENTCOM, its extensive military presence in the Middle East and Central Asia is dependent on an amalgam of specific bilateral legal agreements with nation-states across its Area of Responsibility. They are crucial in enabling CENTCOM’s Long War for regional and global security.

Interrogating CENTCOM’s Long War

Over the next five chapters, I interrogate key elements of CENTCOM’s Long War. Chapter 2 explores CENTCOM’s origins and focuses on the discursive production of both ‘military’ and ‘economic’ security logics at the heart of U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East and Central Asia from the late 1970s. I outline the Cold War anxieties and imperial rivalry with the Soviet Union, along with the various regional geopolitical and geoeconomic crises, that formed the backdrop for envisioning a need for U.S. interventionary force. I pay particular attention to the concept of ‘rapid deployability,’ a concept that has become strategized anew in recent years as a core tactic of U.S. global military posturing.

Chapter 3 deconstructs CENTCOM’s discursive representation of the Middle

East and Central Asia. The chapter considers the command's reductive scripting of its Area of Responsibility as essentially a space of insecurity requiring continual intervention. In seeking to denaturalize CENTCOM's abstracted formulations of security and insecurity, I reflect upon a still-functioning Orientalist discourse of Middle Eastern volatility that is ahistorical in denying the effects of prior U.S. interventionary violence yet profoundly powerful in advancing the notion of a corrective U.S. special mission. The chapter also charts the broader U.S. geopolitical envisioning of the Middle East from the early 1980s, and the concomitant burgeoning of strategic studies institutes that have persistently championed U.S. military interventionism.

Chapter 4 examines the legal-territorial dimensions of CENTCOM's security project by detailing the legal and biopolitical modalities of power that facilitate the command's posturing across its Area of Responsibility. My aim is to illuminate what Foucault calls the 'mechanisms of security', including Status of Forces Agreements, the now standard form of asymmetric bilateral security agreements of CENTCOM, which enable the command's interventions and battlespaces. I outline the operation of what I call 'full spectrum law' and dissect the practices of lawfare that legally condition and protect CENTCOM personnel in forward-deployed areas.

From the first deployment of CENTCOM forces in the Persian Gulf in 1987, the command has convincingly fashioned itself in its annual posture statements as the 'Guardian of the Gulf', tasked with militarily patrolling, policing, and protecting a region that is pivotal for the global economy. Chapter 5 interrogates CENTCOM's deployment of this universalist register of neoliberalism at the heart of its military-economic securitization discourse, a discourse that has consistently acquired U.S. congressional support. I focus especially on the strategizing of deterrence, which the DoD appositely describes as "shaping activities" (U.S. Department of Defense 2001a, 32).

CENTCOM's key grand strategy document in the late 1990s, *Shaping the Central Region for the 21st Century*, sets out the command's long-term mission in the Middle East and Central Asia of safeguarding against future military threat and shaping the global economy. In spearheading the U.S. military's war on terror, the command continued its discursive practice of binding senses of future uncertainty to necessary practices of securitization in the present. The concluding chapter focuses on this interventionary rationale of 'future insecurity', increasingly oriented by CENTCOM and the wider U.S. military in recent years—a rationale that enables the securitization of the most broadly understood 'instability' and sanctions the ongoing use of forward-deployed forces in an era of persistent conflict. The barbarism that ISIS now represents forms part of a longer Orientalist narrative of Middle Eastern volatility and threat that Edward Said chronicled a generation ago (Said 1978).¹⁴ That narrative continues to be drawn upon geopolitically, morally, and otherwise in new strategies of violent interventionism today—however expe-

dient, historically forgetful, or counterproductive they may be (Cockburn 2014).¹⁵ Such grand strategizing habitually works to occlude history and geography and to conceal context. By critically deconstructing the imperial gaze and grand strategy of CENTCOM, the spearhead of U.S. interventions in the Middle East and Central Asia for the last thirty years, my hope is to provide a different narrative that insists on history and geography—their contexts and ongoing consequences.