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Global Governance, Local Rule: Counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan as territorial politics¹

Working Paper No.164

April 2010

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¹ The author would like to thank Kanishka Jayasuriya, Garry Rodan, Lee Jones, David Mickler, Barak Mendelsohn and Toby Carroll for their comments on earlier versions of this paper. The responsibility for the final output of course, rests with the author.



ABSTRACT

Exasperated with their inability to build functioning states, the world's major governments and international organizations have attempted to overcome security and development problems in so-called failed states by acting locally. In particular, US counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have involved efforts to harness local actors, such as tribal leaders, towards the struggle against extremists and as a way of pacifying these countries. Critics argue that though potentially advantageous in the short-term this strategy is antithetical to the longer term objective of state-building. Moving beyond such zero-sum analyses, I argue that these developments represent the emergence of complex forms of statehood in which several territorial and political arenas are tangled across space. While counterinsurgents have aimed to manage conflict by scaling it down to anti-competitive 'local' spaces that bypass the institutions of representative democracy, accompanying the emergence of such governance arrangements is a kind of territorial politics centred on conflicts over who is governing what and at which scale. Yet, the boundaries of 'national' and 'local' spaces are not pre-determined. Transnational actors have played a key role in constituting 'local' spaces and in managing the relationship between overlapping political arenas. In tandem, other forms of intervention continue at the national level to foster effective state institutions. Consequently, conflict increasingly takes the form of clashes between competing transnationalized regimes that draw on diverging political logics to promote particular social and political orders within a multi-level state. This study demonstrates that global governance, rather than representing the emergence of deterritorialized forms of rule, in reality manifests in territorial politics.

Keywords: global governance; territorial politics; state building; politics of scale, counterinsurgency

INTRODUCTION

We are often told that globalization is collapsing space and time, making our world smaller and more interconnected. In the wake of the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, in particular, a consensus has emerged from Washington to Brussels and beyond that the world's major states and international organizations cannot turn away from problems in the poorest and most marginal states since these could potentially become global security predicaments (e.g. White House, 2006; EU, 2003; UN, 2004). William Bain (2003: 5) has encapsulated the prevalent mood when arguing that in today's world 'the notion of 'local conflict' has been drained of much of its meaning; and seeing that much of what was once local is now unavoidably global, and often dangerously so, distant islands of anarchy are now ignored only at the risk of great peril'.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, then, rather than slowly fading into irrelevance, territoriality – defined as 'a spatial strategy to affect, influence, or control resources and people, by controlling area' (Sack, 1986: 1) – remains central to the governance of global issues. This paper seeks to do more than merely bring territory back to the study of global governance, however. It identifies and examines new forms of territoriality, generated through the contested territorialization of transnational political relationships. These forms of territoriality are distinguished by the way they link actors operating at different geographical scales, leading to the construction of new political agencies and power structures, as well as transforming the very nature of statehood.

The most ubiquitous, though perhaps not the most obvious, manifestation of such new territorializations is presented by the international 'state-building' agenda. Indeed, the state and its apparatus are at the core of current efforts to manage global or transnational problems, ranging from terrorism to climate change (Mendelsohn, 2009; Fukuyama, 2004; Rotberg, 2004). Ghani and Lockhart (2008: 4) have thus argued that a 'consensus is now emerging that only sovereign states—by which we mean states that actually perform the functions that make them sovereign—will allow human progress to continue.' The ubiquitous rhetoric of capacity- and institution-building masks, however, the extent to which state-building interventions have transformed the state. With interveners reluctant to assume direct responsibility for governing so-called failed or fragile states (Ignatieff, 2003; Chandler, 2006), state-building in practice involves

efforts to limit the political choices available to domestic leaders through direct and indirect transnational regulation of these countries' economic, political and social institutions; in other words, state-builders have been governing the way national governments govern (Hameiri, 2009a).

Rather than a critique of state building, however, this paper examines the significance and attributes of another territorial strategy for governing global or transnational issues that has emerged in response to state building's perceived limitations. Exasperated with the apparent failures of state-building the world's major governments and international organizations have more recently attempted to resolve intractable conflicts and developmental problems in failed or fragile states by intervening locally at the subnational level, in tandem with more conventional interventions at the national level. This new strategy of localization has involved the creation of 'local' spaces of governance within the state, directly linked to transnational/international agencies and organizations. The most notable example, and the case-study explored in these pages, is presented by US military-led counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. But localization is not restricted to military affairs, with other examples including the World Bank's Kecamatan Development Program in Indonesia and the British Department for International Development's 'drivers of change' approach, to name but a few (Carroll, 2009; Craig and Porter, 2006).

To the extent that the localization agenda has gained the attention of observers it has been typically understood as the antithesis of state-building. In the context of coalition operations in Iraq and Afghanistan in particular, critics have argued that empowering local politics and actors will ultimately lead to the creation of weak states or possibly even to state collapse (Simon, 2008; Phillips, 2009; Coll, 2008). Others have retorted that bottom-up pacification provides crucial political space for the creation of sustainable political arrangements at the national level, eventually leading to the legitimization of the state (Biddle, 2008a). Either way, the result has been a sterile debate whose parameters are limited by the ubiquitous presence of an ideal-typical, ahistorical and fixed notion of statehood, in which political authority is essentially equated with formal political borders.

Moving beyond such zero-sum juxtapositions, I argue that rather than creating weak states these developments represent the emergence of complex forms of statehood in which

several transnationally constituted and regulated political arenas are tangled across space. While counterinsurgents have aimed to manage conflict by scaling it down, accompanying the emergence of ‘local’ spaces is a kind of territorial politics centered on conflicts over who governs what and at which scale. Yet, the boundaries between ‘national’ and ‘local’ are not pre-existing or natural. Though ‘local’ spaces have been constructed around apparently traditional or organic categories, such as tribes and communities, transnational actors – military commanders, anthropologists and development consultants – have played a critical role in their constitution as political governance arenas within the state and in managing the relationship between overlapping political scales. This is not to say, to use one prominent example, that the Sunni tribes in Iraq engaged by US military commanders during the Surge of 2007 were ‘invented’ through these operations. Rather, it is argued that coalition counterinsurgency activities involved efforts to govern Iraq by reterritorializing governance functions to political spaces located outside the formal state apparatus. These spaces, in turn, were governed indirectly – or ‘meta-governed’ – by transnational actors affiliated with US forces. More specifically, such ‘local’ governance spaces were constructed through discourses of cultural and anthropological expertise. The aim has been to employ the insights and methodologies of the social sciences to rationalize the empowerment of particular forms of traditional, anti-pluralist authority and associated social hierarchies as a way of producing political outcomes that the apparently ineffectual political process at the national level has failed to provide.

This practice resembles the late-colonial policy of indirect rule (see Mamdani, 1996), in that both constitute attempts to govern populations through the creation of subnational spaces that preference conservative and anti-competitive forms of political agency. Yet, in the colonial era the ‘national’ level was part of an imperial order, while contemporarily forms of political rule are emerging within the borders of sovereign states, with foreign intervention seen as a temporary arrangement designed to build the capacity of governments to govern. Indeed, though local-level territorializations typically co-exist with national-level state-building interventions, neither form of intervention poses any intended challenge to the formal sovereignty of intervened states. Consequently, conflict increasingly takes the form of territorial politics fought out between competing transnationalized regimes. Clashes between these regimes generate political conflicts and accommodations that shape the actual form of political rule constituted by

contemporary attempts to govern fragile or failed states. What this paper makes clear, then, is that global governance is not a deterritorializing force, but in actual fact incorporates new territorial strategies that produce novel and dynamic forms of territorial politics and political rule.

The paper proceeds as follows. The first section expands on existing territorial politics and political geography scholarship to theorize the politics generated through transnational interventions at several levels of governance at once. The second section then examines the constitution of 'local' spaces in Iraq and Afghanistan, while the final section looks at territorial conflict in Iraq and its implications for political rule.

GLOBAL GOVERNANCE AND TERRITORIAL POLITICS

In a recent article, Michael Keating argues that for many years territorial politics suffered from relative neglect in political science because of the dominance of the modernization paradigm and associated theories of national integration and assimilation:

A strong normative element permeated many of these interpretations and this has by no means disappeared. The creation of the unified national state was identified with 'modernity' in a very broad sense and resistance to it thus logically qualified as anti-modern (Keating, 2008: 62).

It was thus commonly assumed in the course of much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – irrespective of the many inter-national and intra-national conflicts over boundaries that took place – that territorial politics would eventually disappear as historical momentum drove modernization and centralization further into the peripheries, replacing old social roles, norms and forms of community with functional identities based on the division of labor.

Regardless of the generally dismissive attitude to territoriality, territorial politics has been a constant reality in Europe as elsewhere. Charles Tilly (1990), for example, has demonstrated that the process of national consolidation in Western Europe was not teleological or inevitable, but built upon coercion – when central rulers were unable to coerce regions or cities, territorial compromises were negotiated. Meanwhile, Keating has shown that various forms of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' (subnational) regionalization have been common in European states in the post-World War II period (Keating, 2007). More recently the study of territorial politics has made a comeback of sorts, in part due to the ubiquitous neoliberal decentralization agenda (Snyder,

2001a). For example, the devolution of political authority to the newly autonomous Wales and Scotland has received considerable scholarly attention (Marinetto, 2001; McEwen, 2005), while others have written about territorial politics in neoliberalizing and democratizing Latin America and Africa (Snyder, 2001b; Gibson, 1997; Eaton, 2004; Boone, 2003).

The territorial politics literature has been very useful in challenging ‘whole of nation’ studies and comparisons, as well as the assumed fit between state and nation. Yet, as a sub-field of comparative politics, this literature has generally been constrained by the tendency to view territorial politics as an intra-state matter, pertaining primarily to conflicts between various scales of government (Gibson, 2005: 105; Rokkan and Urwin, 1983; Tarrow et al., 1978), leading to an emphasis on how much centralization is occurring within national borders. In this manner the territorial politics literature has ironically ended up reifying the very same state it had sought to problematize.

While the study of territorial politics has been disadvantaged by its confinement to the analysis of intra-state formations, territoriality has been almost entirely absent in international relations. As the name suggests, this vast literature is permeated by a methodological (and ontological) nationalism that takes the bordered state as its primary unit of analysis. This methodological nationalism (see Wimmer and Schiller, 2002; Hameiri, 2009b) is then translated into a focus on studying and theorizing inter-state interactions (Walker, 1993). But the research of territorial politics has also been marginalized in the study of globalization and global governance, despite the apparent rejection of the ‘black box’ view of the state. In fact, in the past three decades, many of modernization theory’s aforementioned assumptions have been recycled; this time in the context of the relationship between global governance and territoriality. Commentators have argued, often with the same normative undertones detected by Keating, that global governance is a deterritorializing force that increasingly renders (or should render) obsolete old territorial divisions, such as those between nation-states (Held, 2009; Archibugi, 2009). To the extent that counter-trends have been acknowledged, these have often been understood as conservative-traditional backlash to the destabilizing influence of economic and cultural globalization (Kilcullen, 2009: 7-12). From this perspective, territoriality is essentially seen as a problem that has to be ‘managed’ for the attainment of cosmopolitan objectives of a higher moral or ethical order (Held, 2009: 542-46).

This position is neatly summarized by Georg Sørensen (2009). Sørensen has argued that our world is divided into post-modern, modern and pre-modern states. The distinction between the three prototypes is based on the extent to which politics is territorialized. The open, peaceful and prosperous ‘post-modern’ states of Western Europe have mostly abandoned territoriality in favor of the supranational European Union. States like China and Russia are still ‘modern’, he argues, since their governments continue to emphasize sovereignty within national borders and insist on upholding the norm of non-interference by outsiders in domestic affairs. Finally, ‘pre-modern’ states, mostly weak post-colonial entities, have not even been able to consolidate a centralized national order and are beset by internal conflict between various ethnic and other factions, located either within or outside the state apparatus (also Zartman, 1995). In this regard, Kagan (2003) has argued that the US lives in a ‘Hobbesian’ world because, unlike the ‘Kantian’ Europeans, it is required to police a world of modern and pre-modern states. Hence, even the reaction against post-territoriality in international relations amounts to nothing much than the reassertion of territorially defined nation-states.

From a different perspective but arriving at similar conclusions, renowned German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1999, 2002, 2009) has argued that the forces of globalization are generating not only potentially calamitous and ‘de-bounded’ risks – risks that are not restricted by national borders or calculable timeframes – but also an increasing awareness of these risks’ existence. Beck further speculates that growing awareness of the global scope of risk – a phenomenon he famously dubbed the ‘world risk society’ – will eventually lead to the emergence of truly cosmopolitan politics displacing the old divisions of nation and class (Beck, 1999: 19).

As we can see, for students of international relations and global governance territoriality is viewed, as in the comparative politics literature, as an attribute of the state. In contrast, I argue that territorial strategies are fundamental to the way global issues are governed. Efforts to govern these problems lead to new kinds of territorializations, as well as to novel forms of political rule. To make sense of this territorial politics it is essential to step beyond the limitations of both comparative politics and international relations towards a framework that focuses on the contested constitution of regulatory spaces at various geographical scales within the institutional spaces of the state (Hameiri and Jayasuriya, forthcoming).

Political geographers have been arguing for several decades that space and social relations are mutually constitutive (Massey, 1992; Brenner, 1999). From this vantage, competing notions of spatial organization – local, national, regional, or global – are embedded in different sets of social and political power relations that in most cases transcend the physical, ‘absolute’ manifestation of space (see Harvey, 2006: Ch 3). Crucially, such contending territorializations could be found *simultaneously* within the same physical space. Drawing on these insights, Gough has argued that strategies of shifting scales of governance, from the subnational to the national, or from the national to the regional, for example, ‘can be understood as mediations of fundamental contradictions of spatial accumulation. Shifts in the scale of governance then appear as means for shifting the balance within these tensions by using scaled institutions and economic processes’ (Gough, 2004: 206). Though this paper is not concerned with the spatial contradictions of capitalism (see Harvey 2006 [1982]) but with political rule more broadly, it is clear that reterritorialization can often serve as a strategy for altering the balance of power on particular issues (Brenner, 1999). Therefore, controlling the geographical scope of conflict is in essence a way of establishing or securing particular, and typically asymmetrical, social and political relationships (see Schattschneider, 1960) – a point neatly encapsulated in Gibson’s (2005) notion of ‘boundary control’. Boundary control in his conception refers to efforts by actors operating at lower jurisdictions to dominate the linkage-points between various scales of government or governance so as to limit the interference of powerful actors operating at higher scales of government in local affairs. Similarly, though more explicitly couched in the geographers’ terminology of space, Kevin Cox (1998) distinguishes between ‘spaces of dependence’ and ‘spaces of engagement’. Spaces of dependence are constructed by immobile actors that seek to control a territorial space in which they physically exist and operate, while spaces of engagement comprise the various networks engaged by space-dependent actors to enhance and secure their territorialized power vis-à-vis local rivals. Cox’s main insight is to show that the scope of ‘local’ politics is not fixed but constructed and transformed through conflicts and accommodations between coalitions of space-dependent actors and their more mobile allies.

The problem with Gibson and Cox’s otherwise very useful ideas is that they view the construction of local space essentially as a bottom-up and organic process taking place within the

established political boundaries of the state (also Keating, 2007). From their perspective, the emphasis is on the agency of space-dependent actors at the subnational level, who seek to govern local spaces and to that end construct alliances through which their authority can be established and/or protected within particular territorial boundaries. Gibson, for example, focuses on strategies adopted by authoritarian local governments to fend off challenges from democratic national governments in Mexico and Argentina. Yet, the construction of 'local' political space can be, and often is, top-down, or a combination of both. Top-down in this context does not refer to what Keating calls 'old regionalism' – the establishment of subnational regions in Europe by central governments in the post-World War II period (Keating, 2007: 257-58). Rather, it refers to the constitution of 'local' political spaces through various forms of transnational meta-governance.

Meta-governance has been described as the 'governance of governance' or the 'governance of self-governance' (Pierre and Peters, 2005; Jayasuriya, 2004; Jessop, 1998). It refers to the provision of a broad set of rules, guidelines, principles and norms that shapes the emergence and characteristics of otherwise independent regulatory arrangements and jurisdictions and guides the way these operate (see Peters, 2007). The term has typically been used in the context of complex advanced capitalist societies to define the new role of the central state in an environment in which a great deal of the actual work of governing is performed by actors outside the formal public sector. Though usually not a form of direct rule, meta-governance is clearly political in that the choice of how particular issues are framed and governed, and by whom, acts to limit the political choices available to various actors and groups, while empowering others.

Understood in this manner, we can extend the concept of meta-governance to also describe the ways in which the world's major governments and international organizations have attempted to manage the supposed risks posed by state failure or fragility to global security. As already noted, state-building interventions in most cases do not constitute attempts to directly govern intervened states and societies, certainly not in the longer term, but rather aim to govern the way their governments govern by limiting the political choices available to domestic leaders (Hameiri, 2009a). In part this occurs through the rescaling of governance functions previously located within the central state upwards, downwards or sideways and into the hands of non-

elected experts. In this manner, events occurring within the same physical space, such as the state's formal borders, are reterritorialized so that they are governed at a different scale. But meta-governance involves not only the rescaling of governance, but also the provision of the parameters around which new spaces are established – for example around the notion of empowering traditional authority – as well as the regulation of the relationship between the overlapping political arenas generated through this process. Since such reterritorializations often occur simultaneously at several geographical scales the result is a complex form of transnationalized, multi-level statehood, in which there is disjuncture between political authority and official territorial boundaries, as well as persistent conflict over who governs what.¹

In the following two sections I proceed to examine coalition counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The perceived failure of conventional state-building has led military commanders to attempt a new strategy of linking up with local actors to pacify these countries from the bottom-up. Yet, while observers have tended to focus on the implications of this strategy for the emergence of a functioning centralized state, its real significance resides in the creation of authoritarian local spaces that exist beyond official democratic politics. The primary focus of the following is necessarily on the Iraqi experience, since counterinsurgency operations of this kind have been deployed in Afghanistan only subsequent to their implementation in Iraq. Also, the US government in particular has placed a far greater emphasis on the Iraqi campaign than on the Afghani one. For example, while Afghanistan's population is bigger than Iraq's, American troop numbers in Iraq have consistently been an approximate three-times that serving in Afghanistan. Consequently, the Iraqi campaign provides a better indication of the nature and implications of the localization agenda. Needless to say, there are differences between the Iraqi and Afghani contexts, which may lead to diverging outcomes.

COUNTERINSURGENCY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF 'LOCAL' SPACES IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

In the past five years or so, counterinsurgency has been resurrected from the dustbins of history to become the primary military strategy of the US and its allies in Iraq and Afghanistan (Ward, 2009). The apparent success of the 2007 Surge in bringing about substantial, though perhaps temporary, reduction in violent incidents in Iraq has cemented counterinsurgency's resurgence,

reverberating through the military and political establishments in Washington and other coalition capitals and leading to the adoption of the approach in Afghanistan as well, as indicated by the appointment of Lt. General Stanley McChrystal to commander of NATO forces in mid 2009 (Bruno, 2009; Lubin, 2009).

The focal-point for much of the recent scholarly and practitioner debate over counterinsurgency and its current usages has been the *US Army/Marine Corps Field Manual 3-24* (Department of the Army, 2006). The December 2006 document, which was later republished by the respected University of Chicago Press and downloaded more than two million times on the internet (Biddle, 2008b), was the first official US military counterinsurgency doctrine in over two decades. It was written by numerous researchers led by General James Amos of the US Marine Corps and the US Army's General David Petraeus, who subsequently commanded US forces in Iraq during the Surge and is now head of Central Command – an area of American military operations that also includes the US' other major campaign, Afghanistan.

Despite the publicity that surrounded the Manual, astute observers have noted that counterinsurgency operations on the ground in Iraq during the Surge and subsequently in Afghanistan have diverged from its prescriptions (Biddle, 2008b: 349). In fact, the Manual creates a misleading impression of continuity between the 'classical' counterinsurgency doctrines of the colonial and decolonization eras (e.g. Galula, 1964; Thompson, 1970) and the contemporary practices of US and allied forces by essentially reproducing the former's recommendations on paper (Kalyvas, 2008). The gap between the Manual and reality is so confusing that it led esteemed commentators to wrongly criticize contemporary Western counterinsurgency operations for approximating classical doctrines too closely, thereby neglecting the significance of what was actually happening on the ground (Roberts, 2009; Hoffman, 2007). In particular, critics have claimed that the Manual fails to recognize that in contrast with the colonial era, counterinsurgency operations currently tend to take place in failed or weak states. The implications, they argue, are that counterinsurgency efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan should not merely involve attempts to shift the population's allegiance from insurgents to the government – the main focus of classical counterinsurgency doctrine – but more fundamentally aim to build a functioning and effective state as a precondition for winning the 'hearts and minds' campaign.

This criticism of contemporary counterinsurgency is not backed by the evidence on the ground, however. Far from neglecting state-building, the shift to counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan has in fact been an *outcome* of the perceived failure of earlier efforts to quell violence in these countries by building the capacity of the central state and its institutions. Counterinsurgency has emerged, first in a piecemeal fashion and then more systematically, out of military commanders' attempts to resolve a difficult operational contradiction. On the one hand, they had to deal with the apparent failure of state-building efforts, which meant that domestic government agencies were not performing as interveners had hoped. On the other hand, military commanders had had to abide by the overarching insistence of their civilian masters on restoring the sovereignty of Iraq and Afghanistan, which effectively meant working with the governments and security forces of these countries, irrespective of the latter's perceived shortcomings. The result has been a new territorial agenda, implemented in tandem with pre-existing state-building programs. The new agenda has focused on the establishment of informal, local spaces of political rule through various forms of transnational intervention combining direct military enforcement with indirect regulation of both local governance arrangements and the relationship between the local and national scales. Since national politics is often seen as messy and ineffectual, yet an irremovable fixture of the governance equation, the aim of the localization approach has been to defeat the insurgency by giving a political role to local actors with transnationally constituted spaces of rule. These actors are typically not institutionally and legally constrained, but are nevertheless regulated by actors affiliated with coalition military forces.

The military rationale for operating 'locally' was clearly articulated by David Kilcullen, General Petraeus' senior counterinsurgency advisor in Iraq during the Surge and a prolific author on the theoretical and practical implications of counterinsurgency. Kilcullen has argued that winning the global war against radical Islamic terrorists – the pretext to both the Iraqi and Afghani campaigns – requires a more nuanced understanding of the enemy. In contrast with the assumptions of classical counterinsurgents and the Manual, Kilcullen observes that insurgents in most cases are no longer members of cohesive, anti-colonial national liberation movements attempting to wrest state power. He distinguishes between a very small minority of hard-line and

incurable *takfiri* (jihadi) extremists and a majority of what he calls ‘accidental guerrillas’. His definition of the accidental guerrilla is important:

[P]eople who fight us not because they hate the West and seek our overthrow but because *we* have invaded *their* space to deal with a small extremist element that has manipulated and exploited local grievances to gain power in their societies. They fight us not because they seek our destruction but because they believe we seek theirs, a belief in which they are encouraged by a cynical, manipulative clique of *takfiri* terrorists who, though tiny in number, have been catapulted to great political influence and prestige because of our reaction to 9/11 (Kilcullen, 2009: 263; see also Pape, 2005).

Kilcullen argues that al Qaeda leaders see themselves as ‘inciters-in-chief’. Their strategy is to provoke Western governments to undertake military misadventures, which can be used as propaganda for winning the sympathy of Muslims around the world, as well as for incorporating into the global jihad a variety of local actors in areas where Western forces operate – a cause with which many of these accidental guerrillas in reality have very little affinity (Kilcullen, 2005; Hoffman, 2006). Turning Mao’s famous dictum on its head, Kilcullen defines the task of counterinsurgents as transforming ‘an elephant into a mouse’. In other words, counterinsurgents must de-globalize and re-localize the conflict, thereby marginalizing extremist elements (Kilcullen, 2009: 263). This is easier said than done, he argues, since al-Qaeda’s *modus operandi* involves ‘infecting’ local communities by establishing business relations, forcing strategic marriages and, when necessary, using brutal forms of intimidation (also Phillips, 2009). Over time, this process makes it very tricky for outsiders to distinguish between hardcore extremists and accidental guerrillas. Hence, military operations focused on killing enemy combatants are counterproductive because they inevitably, though inadvertently, create more and more accidental guerrillas. Furthermore, because of the intricate social webs woven by al-Qaeda, it is only locals that can tell an extremist from an accidental guerrilla fighting to defend his community and only locals are capable of expelling hard-line insurgents from their midst. Kilcullen’s hypothesis is based on the assumption that though the *takfiri* enemy is fluid, the population is fixed, or space-dependent to use Cox’s terminology: ‘people are tied to their homes, businesses, farms, tribal areas relatives, and so on’ (Kilcullen, 2009: 146).

For Kilcullen and other planners of the Surge, the Iraqi government’s failure to stop sectarian violence in 2006 and early 2007 was predictable because ‘the killing was a mass social

phenomenon, driven from the bottom up rather than from the top down' (Kilcullen, 2009: 122). Much of this violence was perpetrated by accidental guerrillas on each other, civilians and coalition forces. From this perspective, the twin objectives of stabilizing Iraq and combating al-Qaeda both essentially hinge on reversing the accidental guerrilla phenomenon, which in effect requires limiting the geographical scope of conflict and conflict management – establishing boundary controls (Gibson, 2005). But setting up boundary controls in this context also requires defining the boundaries of the 'local' political space in question. In this respect, Kilcullen argues that while the enemy may not be identifiable, the *population* can be: counterinsurgents must carefully analyze the 'human terrain' and learn to use this knowledge for defeating the insurgency. It is this functional, military rationale and not the uncovering of any primordial realities about Iraqi or Afghani societies that has underpinned the reterritorialization strategies adopted by counterinsurgents in these countries. Indeed, far from an impartial scientific endeavor, the process of 'mapping' the 'human terrain' has been a key aspect of the meta-governance of Iraqi and Afghani societies.

Considerable emphasis in both the Manual and on the ground has been placed on incorporating anthropological socio-cultural expertise into the strategy and tactics of counterinsurgency operations. The use of such expertise is significant because it provides the political logic that runs through military objectives. This means that the relationship between anthropological expertise and military strategy is not unidirectional: though anthropology is incorporated into counterinsurgency in a functional manner to support military ends, the causes of, as well as solutions to, insurgency are framed through the language and concepts of the discipline. This, in turn, means that anthropologists play a key role in the meta-governance of Iraqi and Afghani societies.

A particularly important person in the interface between anthropology and contemporary American counterinsurgency is Yale-educated anthropologist Montgomery McFate. McFate authored chapter 3 of the Manual (González, 2007: 14), as well as numerous scholarly publications on anthropology and its military usages before and after the Manual's publication. More importantly, along with retired Special Operations Colonel Steve Fondacaro, she has been at the forefront of a controversial policy agenda for integrating anthropological knowledge and methods into counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan (Gezari, 2009).² The most

notorious manifestation of this agenda is the Human Terrain System (HTS), an experimental US Army program with a \$200 million budget that hires private sector contractors to recruit anthropologists and in some cases other social scientists, and embeds them within military units operating in Iraq and Afghanistan (González, 2009a: 34; also Rohde, 2007).

Embedded anthropologists are meant to provide military commanders with cultural knowledge to navigate the maze of local tribal and other pre-modern identities. And indeed, the greatest beneficiaries of American support in Iraq during the Surge and later in Afghanistan have been tribal and traditional leaders. In Iraq, the US military formed alliances with the so-called Sons of Iraq (SOI), which comprised the mostly Sunni tribal ‘Awakening’ movement (*Sahwat* in Arabic) and other groups of Concerned Local Citizens. By early 2008 there were 91,000 SOI fighters, which the US military supported with a monthly salary of \$300 per person, as well as by providing important supplies (Petraeus, 2008). During the Surge, US military commanders signed agreements with local tribal leaders that authorized the latter to provide security within agreed upon boundaries, typically related to tribal geography or a particular urban neighborhood. Local leaders were also made responsible for recruiting fighters, distributing salaries and organizing public works projects. In exchange for their decision to switch sides and fight al-Qaeda, US military commanders also agreed to protect SOI forces and associated populations from both the Islamist insurgency and from harassments by Iraqi Security Forces.

It is important to note that the Awakening was initially a homegrown movement that predated the coalition’s formal shift to counterinsurgency in Iraq. Simmering tensions between al-Qaeda and tribal leaders in the western province of Anbar erupted into open conflict in 2005 and 2006. Particularly controversial in Anbar were al-Qaeda’s austere form of Islam, which was forced upon host populations, as well as al-Qaeda operatives’ attempts to integrate into local communities by marriage and encroach on lucrative illegal activities to fund the insurgency (Phillips, 2009). Notwithstanding the homemade origins of the tribal uprising, US sponsorship has been fundamental to the emergence of tribal leadership as a potent political force in Iraq. The availability of American funds for salaries or reconstruction has enabled tribal leaders to establish local support-bases, while the pretext of fighting al-Qaeda enabled them to eliminate rivals (International Crisis Group, 2008a: 12). Furthermore, coalition military commanders

provided tribal leaders with necessary political space by managing the relationship between the SOI and the Iraqi Security Forces and national and subnational governments.

In fact, far from denoting the restoration of a pre-existing, traditional social order, the Awakening movement has been associated with the rise of a group of young tribal leaders, known in Iraq as the ‘chieftains of the 2000s’, a reference to the ‘chieftains of the 90s’ – a derogatory moniker used by Iraqis to describe the tribal leaders who benefited from Saddam Hussein’s patronage (International Crisis Group, 2008a: 10-11).³ This is not to say that the sheikhs cooperating with coalition forces had no claim to customary authority, but tribal authority is a very murky business in Iraq. There are approximately 350 tribes in the country, ‘with more than 162 leaders claiming sheikhly status in northern Babil Province alone’ (Kilcullen, 2009: 158). Therefore, it is far from obvious to outsiders, and in some cases even to insiders, what criteria permit someone to call himself a sheikh. In practice, David Kilcullen describes a method of trial-and-error, whereby coalition forces would approach various individuals, typically those with overlapping authorities (tribal, religious, official), eventually supporting those who were able to mobilize wider networks against the insurgency (Kilcullen, 2009: 158, 161). Considering this social and political complexity, it is not surprising that the sheikhs’ authority remains contested, including within the spaces of tribal rule, not only by other contenders to sheikhdom but also by nationalists and Islamists of various guises who resist this form of authority altogether (International Crisis Group, 2008a: 15).

In the literature on tribalism in modern Iraq it is often argued that it is impossible to understand the political role currently played by the tribes and tribal leadership in isolation from the historical project of state-making (Baram, 1997; Yaphe, 2000). Yet, in purportedly seeking to employ anthropological expertise to refine their interventions in Iraq, counterinsurgents have adopted a highly relativist definition of Iraqi culture, as evident in this quote from the Manual: ‘Cultural knowledge is essential to waging a successful counterinsurgency. American ideas of what is “normal” or “rational” are not universal’ (Department of the Army, 2006: 1-15; also McFate, 2005).

Ironically, the relativist definition of culture is itself far from universally accepted and has been challenged even from within the discipline of anthropology. For example, American

academic Roberto González, a staunch critic of anthropology's recent militarization, has argued that this is an outdated and static definition:

Entirely absent from this definition is the notion of culture as a product of historical processes – in spite of the fact that for at least the last quarter century anthropologists have stressed that culture has been profoundly shaped by capitalism, colonialism and other political and economic forces on a global scale. Instead chapter 3 [of the Manual] treats cultures as internally coherent, easily bounded and one-dimensional – in a manner reminiscent of the structural-functionalists of an earlier era (González, 2007: 15).

González and other anthropologist-critics of programs like HTS are mainly concerned about the ethical and moral dimensions of the militarization of anthropology. What is significant about the use of anthropology for counterinsurgency purposes, however, is not that the concept of culture used is inadequate, or even that the analysis of Iraqi and Afghani societies provided is 'inaccurate'; and inaccurate it must be, since the majority of anthropologists and social scientists embedded with US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan actually lack meaningful local experience or language skills (Gazeri, 2009; González, 2009b). Rather, anthropological expertise is useful for making complex situations governable for military commanders on the ground.

In a magazine article, HTS was praised by officers in Afghanistan for helping operational objectives. One officer said 'We're looking at this from a human perspective, from a social scientist's perspective.... We're not focused on the enemy. We're focused on bringing governance down to the people' (Rohde, 2007). Another is quoted as saying, 'Call it what you want, it works.... It works in helping you define the problems, not just the symptoms' (Rohde, 2007). Indeed, it is the latter that has made anthropological approaches of this kind attractive to rulers dating back to the colonial era. The cultural traits and social structures of Iraqis and Afghans are viewed as simultaneously fixed and detrimental to modern statehood and hence democracy, thereby justifying the cultivation of localized forms of authoritarian, 'traditional' rule, as 'natural' in these contexts. In this manner, anthropological expertise is used to rationalize local breakaways from the national political space, where liberal-democratic principles are supposed to prevail, which has ironically been facilitated by other coalition interventions. The 'local' spaces established in this process, though supposedly bringing governance closer to the people being governed, are not accompanied by the rescaling of political accountability typically associated with territorial forms of political rule.

There are strong parallels between the use of socio-cultural and anthropological knowledge in today's counterinsurgency operations and the late-colonial practice of indirect rule. Indirect rule has allowed relatively small colonial elites to govern vast territories and their peoples through the delegation of political authority to local powerbrokers, backed by imperial might and within broad guidelines set by colonial administrators, usually under the guise of empowering traditional social structures (Mamdani, 1996). The local leaders empowered by indirect rule, like the ones currently supported by counterinsurgents, were usually not entirely devoid of customary leadership credentials. Yet, under colonial rule 'custom' had been transformed into what Eric Hobsbawm called 'tradition'. Hobsbawm has argued that in pre-colonial or tribal societies, custom does not preclude change up to a point because it is a lived experience and has to contend with emerging challenges. The object of tradition, on the other hand, is precisely invariance: 'It is the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant' (Hobsbawm, 1983: 2). In the case of indirect rule, traditional authority was constituted as a kind of hierarchy that made colonial subjects governable and that turned culture into a political resource.

We see a similar process taking place in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, because these are sovereign states, today's indirect rulers face a problem not encountered by their colonial-era predecessors. Principally, the insistence on the continuing sovereignty of Iraq and Afghanistan means that interveners are forced to simultaneously employ 'local' territorial strategies while denying they are doing so, in order to maintain their relationship with the Iraqi and Afghani national governments that remain supposedly in charge of the entire territorial space of these states. In turn, the availability of authoritarian spaces within the state can be attractive to actors associated with the national government as a way of weakening or even eliminating political rivals.

THE TERRITORIAL POLITICS OF COUNTERINSURGENCY IN IRAQ

Despite the pervasive usage of territorial strategies by counterinsurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan the significance and implications of this phenomenon have mostly gone unnoticed. In general, localization has been viewed by practitioners and observers as a temporary measure to deal with

immediate security problems that hinder the formation of a functioning state. A functioning state, equated with effective centralized control over territory and people within internationally recognized national borders, is still seen as the ultimate objective of counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan (International Crisis Group, 2008a: ii; Sewall, 2007; Kilcullen, 2009). For this reason, interventions at the local level are typically understood as forms of population control that provide the necessary breathing-space for more substantive forms of state-building to take place at the top (Kalyvas, 2008: 351).

The Surge was therefore criticized by some observers precisely for its reliance on local, military-backed, agreements that were seen not to advance the ultimate objective of state-building. Toby Dodge, for example, has claimed that while the Surge helped reduce violence in Iraq, ‘that’s not bringing the state into people’s lives – that’s recognizing powerful actors on the ground and giving them autonomy.’ Others have argued that such local deals may exacerbate instability in the future by ‘midwifing the dissolution of the country’ (Coll, 2008). Deborah Avant said that the Awakening was ‘just one more way in which the U.S. is inhibiting the consolidation of a central state in Iraq... To the degree that the U.S. is trying to build a state – which it says it is trying to do – then these types of efforts are counterproductive’ (Brooks, 2007). In Afghanistan too, the recent implementation of the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF) program – a kind of ‘neighborhood watch’ supervised and mentored by NATO forces – has raised concerns that the Afghan National Police will be marginalized in some provinces, thereby entrenching localized controls over law enforcement (Wright, 2009).

Yet, by breaking free from the ‘methodological nationalism’ that informs such critiques it is possible to also move beyond their zero-sum assessments of counterinsurgency’s effects. Rather than focusing on whether counterinsurgency builds ‘more’ or ‘less’ state it is more fruitful to examine coalition operations in Iraq and Afghanistan as transforming the institutional spaces of the state, thus generating a new kind of territorial politics centered on conflicts over who governs what and at which scale. What is unique about this territorial politics is that transnational intervention and regulation is crucial for both the constitution of scaled political arenas, as we have seen in the previous section, and for managing the relationship between these spaces. In turn, rather than viewing the ‘local’ and the ‘national’ as dichotomous, or as separate spatial locations, it is more useful to understand these as competing forms of political rule that

are tangled across space (see Gibson, 2005: 105). These transnationalized and transnationally regulated territorial regimes may, in fact, be supported or resisted by the same actors in different circumstances, leading to a variety of territorialized political accommodations, as well as to persistent conflicts over the location of internal boundaries. From this perspective, the significance of the 'local' spaces established in Iraq and Afghanistan, which were examined in the previous section, is not that they undermine state-building in an absolute sense, but that they establish anti-competitive and authoritarian forms of political rule within these states.

This argument is demonstrated by the Iraqi experience during and after the Surge. As we have seen, counterinsurgents have attempted to pacify Iraq from the bottom up by empowering and supporting actors to provide security and governance within agreed subnational boundaries, thereby creating informal and transnationally meta-governed, 'local' political spaces in competition with the national political arena. Yet, with local-level interventions typically seen as a temporary fix, there have been contradictory efforts by interveners to extend the territorial reach of the Iraqi national space by supporting national institutions and the government.

It is important to emphasize at this point that there is nothing natural about the Iraqi 'national' space anymore than there is about the 'local' political spaces described earlier, as the former is also a social phenomenon and transnational actors have been instrumental to its constitution and form. Crucially, the Iraqi national space should not be equated with the Iraqi national government.⁴ The government is the main space-dependent actor around which the Iraqi national space has developed but the government's relationship with its spaces of engagement is complex and multidirectional. On one hand, the Iraqi government, as the internationally recognized sovereign power, can draw on resources from vast spaces of engagement, such as international loans, grants, technical assistance and weapons, that Iraqi actors operating at other territorial scales cannot access with the same ease if at all. In turn, powerful transnational actors have limited the range of political and institutional choices available to the Iraqi government to pursue its territorial strategies. In particular, the government has been constrained by the liberal-democratic institutions and processes established after the 2003 military intervention by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and later enshrined in the constitution. Furthermore, the national government is far from internally unified. The political and social coalitions supporting the government are highly unstable, as is evident by the considerable behind-the-scenes activity

and reshuffling in the lead-up to the 2010 national elections (Myers, 2009). Nevertheless, it is possible to identify the emergence in the past five years of a ‘national’, transnationally regulated, territorial regime in Iraq with a distinct institutional and public policy profile (for a definition of regime see Pempel, 1998). At the same time, actors and interests associated with the Iraqi national government have on occasion acted outside the national governance regime. Indeed, the Iraqi experience clearly shows that in some cases the same Iraqi actors have attempted to maximize their interests by operating simultaneously at different scales, switching between the ‘local’ and ‘national’ modes of political rule. For example, Awakening leaders have formed political parties to contest provincial and national elections (Dalli, 2008), while government-affiliated actors have in some cases formed coalitions with local actors that recognize the latter’s authority.

The development of competing territorial regimes in Iraq has been accompanied by persistent conflicts over what is to be governed at which level and by whom. In particular, conflicts have emerged over the provision of security, access to resources and resource management. For example, tribal fighters who agreed to collaborate with coalition forces had insisted that local forces must be the ones providing local security, often with the assistance of coalition forces but rarely involving the Iraqi security forces. During the Surge, local leaders were given extensive juridical powers in deciding who was to be detained or released. To the extent that these forces were willing to be integrated into the Iraqi security apparatus it was as a local security force, employed by the Iraqi government (Kilcullen, 2009: 161). Tribal leaders in Anbar province were also intent on protecting the lucrative income gained from smuggling and other illegal activities along Iraq’s western borders from national interference. Another ongoing and yet unresolved territorial conflict has erupted between the national government and the Kurdistan Regional Government for control of future revenue from the oil-rich areas around Kirkuk (International Crisis Group, 2008b: 26).

Coalition forces have played a key role in managing the relationship between the different governance scales. In particular, coalition military commanders have had to intervene regularly to manage conflict between local powerbrokers, which they helped become powerful, and the national government. As a result of a compromise negotiated by the CPA, reflected in the 2005 constitution, the national government is an alliance of political parties representing the

country's main religious sects – Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds. Because of a Sunni boycott of the 2005 elections the national government at the time of the Surge was formed largely by Shiite and Kurd parties and led by Shiite politician Nouri Kamal al-Maliki. Though the sectarianization of Iraqi politics is more of an outcome of American occupation than manifestation of long-standing social divisions (Dodge, 2005), Maliki and many in his government were highly suspicious of the mostly Sunni SOI movement they could not control. The SOI for their part were typically antagonistic towards and distrustful of the national government. Maliki's attitude was not entirely based on sectarian interests as he was also suspicious of Shiite SOIs and of other Shiite forces beyond his control, such as the Mahdi Army of anti-American cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, and later tried to force them into cooperating with his government.

During the Surge, coalition military commanders acted directly to prevent Iraqi security forces from targeting their SOI allies (Knights, 2008; Kilcullen, 2009: 161).

The [coalition] commanders have been given the flexibility to facilitate local reconciliation through encouraging the establishment of committees representing the leadership of different communities; designing projects which require different groups to work together; overseeing the return of displaced Iraqis to their homes; putting reconcilable militants of restricted-target lists; releasing certain detainees; [conducting] target raids against irreconcilables; hiring 'Sons of Iraq'; assisting the government to integrate 'Sons of Iraq' into the ISF [Iraqi Security Forces] and other jobs programs; and facilitating the government to deliver public services (International Crisis Group, 2008b: 22).

From November 2008 with the signing of the US-Iraq security agreement, the Iraqi government assumed official responsibility for paying SOI salaries and for demobilizing SOI fighters and providing them with jobs. The transition has sparked widespread fears of reprisals among the SOI. The agreements SOI groups signed earlier with coalition forces included a moratorium on crimes committed while participating in the insurgency and many were concerned that with coalition forces withdrawing the Iraqi government would seize on the opportunity to arrest former insurgents (Knights, 2009; Santora, 2009). These concerns were exacerbated by several high-profile arrests and by the Iraqi government's apparent lack of will for integrating former SOI into the security forces or other public service positions as initially promised.

But even after the Iraqi government took over responsibility for the SOI movement the US military continued to monitor and manage the relationship between the SOI and the national government. For example, the US military pledged to guarantee militias' pay should the

government default, while US officers assisted SOI fighters apply for jobs in the Iraqi security forces (Knights, 2008). Furthermore, coalition officers intervened on behalf of SOI harassed by government security forces. After the arrest of Raad Ali, a prominent Awakening council leader in the Ghazaliya neighborhood of Baghdad, US military commanders intervened to persuade a judge to release him (Rubin and Nordland, 2009). In Diyala, Maliki ordered the arrest of six candidates allied with the opposition Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party a week before the January 2009 provincial elections. His decision was overturned following a personal intervention by General Ray Odierno, the commander of US forces in Iraq (Shadid, 2009). When Adil al-Mashhadani, another powerful Awakening leader in Baghdad, was arrested in March 2009, General David Perkins – the US military’s chief spokesman in Iraq – was at pains to stress that the arrest was not about the SOI but about crimes committed since 2008 (Nordland, 2009). The fact that US forces did *not* intervene in Mashhadani’s case was painted in a *Jane’s* report as itself unusual:

MNF-I [Multinational Force in Iraq] planners told *Jane’s* that Mashhadani was an unpopular Mafioso-type figure within his own neighbourhood. Except for some token shows of solidarity by his local counterparts in other districts, no one has sought Mashhadani’s release or intervened on his behalf. Typically, US forces would seek the release of a Sons of Iraq leader if he was indicted on charges that were outweighed by his conduct since joining the Sons of Iraq. The lack of US military intervention suggests that local US commanders supported the arrest (Knights, 2009).

While the Iraqi government has generally sought to expand its territorial grip by dismantling the SOI movement and emphasizing the need to restore the ‘rule of law’ to Iraq, there have been a number of important exceptions. In Anbar and in Kirkuk the government and the Iraqi army have worked closely with local Awakening groups, providing them with considerable autonomy that in effect enshrines their rule over local populations and territories in exchange for loyalty to Maliki. In Anbar, for example, tribal autonomy was rationalized by the Iraqi government as justified due to the region’s cultural and sectarian homogeneity (Knights, 2009). What these compromises demonstrate is that rather than a temporary phenomenon associated with the state-building process, territorialized forms of anti-competitive and authoritarian political rule are becoming an enduring, though informal, aspect of territorial governance in Iraq. It is likely that similar arrangements will emerge in Afghanistan as well.

CONCLUSION

It is often assumed that globalization is shrinking our world, thereby making territoriality less important than in past eras. Yet, current efforts to govern global problems can be understood to be not necessarily *de*-territorializing but *re*-territorializing the planet in important ways. In this paper I have examined recent US military-led counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan as one element in a series of programs and policies that seek to create new spaces of territorial governance within a transnational context. What distinguishes such new territorializations from earlier forms is the establishment of new modes of territorialized political rule through transnational meta-governance and regulation. As the Iraqi and Afghani cases demonstrate, the phenomenon I identify has emerged out of frustration in the world's major capitals and international organizations' headquarters with the prospects of successfully managing global risks and security concerns through the institutions of the central state in the developing world. To secure desired political outcomes transnational actors have sought to empower local actors to govern locally. However, since interveners remain committed to a state-based world order, such local-level interventions have tended to co-exist with pre-existing programs to extend the power of the central state and to build the capacity of national governments. This has led to the development of competing transnationalized and transnationally regulated territorial regimes, which effectively denote competing forms of political rule. In the cases examine here, local political spaces have been constructed to promote anti-competitive and authoritarian governance, rationalized through the usage of anthropological expertise as empowering traditional and organic social structures. We have seen, however, that not only is this claim contentious in the case of the Awakening movement in Iraq, but also that territorial compromises are negotiated between actors operating at various geographical scales that enshrine authoritarian political spaces within the state.

To conclude, this paper has demonstrated that to understand the real political effects of current attempts to govern global issues it is essential to step beyond the methodological nationalism that informs much of the commentary towards an analysis of the territorial politics generated through interventions at several scales at once within the state.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Of course, Ruggie (1993) has been talking about the deterritorialization of the state for some time. While it is true that some governments, like the US', often exercise extra-territorial power, my analysis shows that this usually takes the form of meta-governance that is activated through various forms of reterritorialization.
- ² The American Anthropological Association, for example, has passed a resolution in November 2006 condemning the use of anthropological knowledge as an element of torture. Montgomery McFate (2005: 28) has dismissed such criticism by saying anthropology had become largely irrelevant since the 1960s precisely because anthropologists, by retreating into a postmodernist Ivory Tower, refused to find any practical use for their expertise.
- ³ Michael Bunton (2008) argues that the increasing currency of the notion of traditional leadership in Iraq from the 1980s is to a considerable extent related to Saddam Hussein's attempt to cultivate patronage networks as alternative support-bases to his dictatorial rule, in conjunction with the contraction of state spending and welfare in the same period.
- ⁴ This is a point captured by Nettl's (1968) notion of "stateness", which conceives of the state not as an entity but as a process whereby the relationship between public institutions, citizenship practices and international sovereignty is negotiated.

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