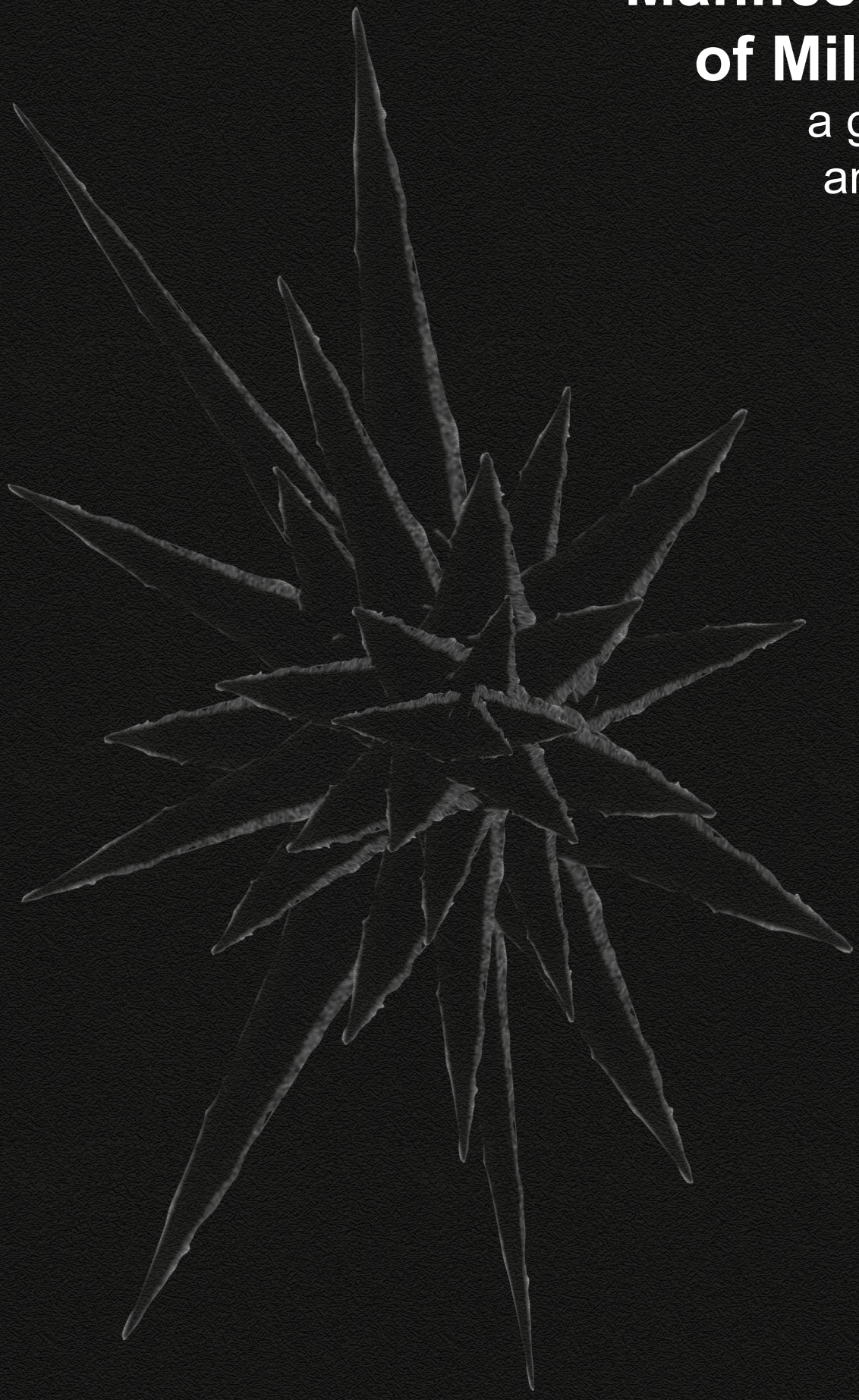
Spatial Manifestations of Militarism

a genealogy and military forms in Sardinia



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Abstract

This thesis investigates military manifestations and their influences on space in a genealogy of the various shapes and sizes of military forms. Starting by stripping down military practices to variables of time, space, technique and control, the intersections of these variables represent substantial turning points in the ways the military personifies in space. The first part of the research gives these intersections temporal and geographical coordinates, identifying actual material instances of such manifestations at different scales and instants. Realizing the reoccurring and replicative nature of spatial practices across space and time, the case studies are organised in thematic categories like the panopticon cities, dromological infrastructures, and so on. This is done as a way to highlight patterns and connections in order to blur boundaries between Global North-South binarism and imperial-colonial trends, that along with terror and security discourse are very much the basis for today's justification of military presence in cities. The following chapter applies the same categories to military presence in Sardinia as an example of greatly affected territories on national and European level, analyzing the ways in which the island has been and continues to be used as a key node within the military machine. In the last pages of the thesis, I try to imagine possible outcomes aimed at de-militarisation, mainly applied to the Sardinian territory, ending everything with a provocative design proposal. At its core, this thesis wants to represent nothing more than a peek behind the veil of Maya, somewhat helping recognize the links of the complex system of military power and its occupation of social and built spaces.

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Introduction

It's been clear to me for a long time that warfare is the opposite of welfare. Despite not having any direct experience with contexts of war and conflict, my grandmother was (and still is) a militant feminist from the South of Italy that always disclosed with me her fights and struggles; in school I was lucky enough to befriend kids whose parents came to Italy to flee persecution and conflict in their home countries; and in university I've seen the concern and fear of my Ukrainian, Lebanese and Iranian friends witnessing the breakout of war in their homes from afar. In 2019 I was seventeen, I attended my first protest in Turin for climate action, and was astonished by the amount of armed personnel present not to march with us, but to manage us, control the flows, and repress the few altercations between police and older-and-more-militant-than-me protesters that were mad for reasons it would take me attending a couple more protests to understand, like risking multiple times being beaten by police for protesting as a student, while seeing on Saturday walks in the city center of Turin the same policemen giving themselves a free day of rest while fascism-sympathysing demonstrations were happening in the streets. If everything before that was enough to make me understand the futility of war, now I had inside me a perpetual reflex to question the parts of a system that seemed to be doing the interest of someone else, hiding behind a supposed need of security from something or someone.

"Military geographies are everywhere. But often you have to know where to look" [001]. I wanted to start from this quote by Rachel Woodward which perfectly encapsulates what this thesis is all about. The current geopolitical climate is marked by a never-before seen military presence in everyday lives, both in conflict and at peace scenarios. The forms of military power vary in shape and dimension, and despite the already present literature on critical military geography and urban geopolitics, the influences of military presence on spatial conditions and the genealogy of military forms is still understudied. If we consider the initial statement "Military geographies are everywhere" to be true, the fact that the topic is also academically understudied holds in itself a concerning consideration: probably a lot of people can't identify military presence and consequently don't realize how much their everyday lives are affected and conditioned by it. Of course this affirmation holds value for a certain slice of world population that lives in supposedly peaceful contexts, mainly in the global North and West, that are (in majority) not subject to the more devastating and impactful effects of militarism. The victims of colonialism, imperialism, regimes of terror and warfare are reminded everyday through systematic manifestations of authoritarianism, violence and power (both abstract and physical) the effects of militias and militarism on everyday life, yet my personal interest in critically investigating this topic comes at a moment in which even the most privileged individual can't deny the infiltration of military forms in contexts where one wouldn't dare to think of finding them. The main question of this thesis comes from the second part of the initial quote: "[...] often you have to know where to look". This begs the subsequent question: do people actually know where to look?

This very last question was the ignition for the entirety of this thesis and the three parts that make it up. This introduction is followed by a brief state of the art where through the existing literature, the nature of the military is categorized by its different connotations and the spheres in which it operates, joining the different disciplines that study the topic from different perspectives, from economics and politics, to colonial and social studies. What will come out if it is that the ways in which the military manifests itself don't really have defined boundaries, and thus a unanimous definition is pretty much impossible to find. Rather than taking this as an obstacle or as a welcoming to try to find a definition for myself, I would take this indefinite nature of this identity as an opportunity to look for it wherever I can, in order to shine a light on all the different spatial manifestations across geographies.

The first part of the thesis wants to be a genealogy of the different manifestations of the military through the lens of four identified variables that constitute manifestations of military presence: these being space, time, technique and control. The identification of these variables and their reciprocal relationship as the foundation of the ways in which the military is able to thrive and proliferate within society, shows how when these weave and intersect, that's when relevant spatial transformations happen. I tried to identify these transformations in a series of case studies at different scales that ended up encompassing mainly European and Mediterranean geographies, for a matter of both narrative continuity and the available literature. For a matter of intelligibility, the case studies are grouped in thematic families and subfamilies (named Mx.x), rather than a chronological timeline, as a way to showcase the replicative trends of the military across different historical frames and locations, also as an attempt to bypass certain false binaries like the one between Global North and South to highlight the continuity between narratives of coloniality and securitization. Breaking down these ideological walls results in having case studies that span across scales, locations and moments, which is why sometimes is necessary a historical recount of the specific case study I'm dealing with, but it should be treated as a matter of contextualization rather than proper historical analysis. What will be deduced in the end is that the complexity of the phenomena encompassing the military cannot be organized by finite categories, or rather that all the case studies are in some way or another infected by multiple ways of the military to manifest itself, making of the thematic families only a formality.[002] Because of the origins of cartography as a military practice aimed at controlling a determined territory, a graphical support to the case studies is presented in the form of maps and diagrams at different scales, as a way to demilitarize the practice and use it to unveil the existence of these military geographies. Ultimately this series of case studies will result incomplete, as the presence of the military could be found practically in every place and period and not always have a hierarchical organization of importance, reason as to why some choices are made out of personal deliberate interest or because prominently present in the literature I consumed.

After establishing the spatial conditions affected by military presence, as a direct response, the second part of the thesis transposes these categories and applies them to understand the role of military presence in Sardinia, as a way to delimit the research of the first part to a smaller scale within Italian administration, of an area that at the same time holds the reputation of most militarized region in Europe. Here, the case studies of the most militarized areas of the island are presented, along with a photo reportage in the base of Capo Teulada.

The two parts will converge in the final part, dealing with the topic of demilitarization and the different ways in which it can be applied to space and architecture, stressing how the complexity of the nature of the military should imply a liberation of the workings of many material and dialectical spaces of society. Concluding wondering about the role of architecture in the panorama of (de)militarization, the thesis ends with a provocative design proposal in Capo Teulada that aims at bringing attention through the language of architecture to the more ecological and sanitarian damage the military endured in the area for weaponry testing as an eternal consequence of immoral unsupervised activity from the military.

001
Woodward, 2005, p. 719

002
Deleuze, 2015, p. 7
"a group subjectivity, which does not allow itself to be enclsed in a whole bent on reconstituting a self, [...] but which spreads itself out over several groups at once."

State of the art: what is the "military"

Militarism is a controversial word. Defining what falls under the "military" is the tedious task that many scholars tried to give an answer to, often to be later criticized for a portrayal that neglected multiscalarity, or for being exclusionary, reductive, or even incomplete. Much like urban studies scholars seem to have renounced to find a unanimous answer to the question of "what is a city?", critical military geography scholars seem be in an adjacent situation when trying to trace the outlines of what constitutes the military itself. As I said before, I would consider this inability to delimit a clear definition both a strength and at the same time concerning side of the practice: the positive aspect is the fact that there aren't really any guidelines to follow when dealing with the topic, allowing to wander through scales and disciplines that display military-like traits; the other side of the coin is that this also implies the decadiment of the construct of many false binaries, since the lines are getting blurrier between military and civil, global, national and local, between police, military deployment and intelligence, war and peace. This makes it harder to analyze the phenomena since while there is an ontology of the institutions of the military like the army and police, we can't find any clear division between military and non-military in spatial analysis.[003]
Within the academic field there's already a rich literature concerning specific and comparative analysis of case-studies, while an additional subdivision of the discipline of military geographies birthed additional branches like urban militarism and critical geopolitics.
Since it would be pointless to try to make a definition for myself, I would still take the opportunity to make a state of the art and organize by thematic tropes the different definitions given by academic scholars, in order to find the various parts that constitute military presence and influence. It's important to note however, that given the multifaceted nature of the different ways in which the military operates and exists, these thematic tropes can only loosely be considered as self-sufficient, often weaving or having cause-effect relations.

Violence
A key component of the ways in which the military manifests itself is through violence. Academic discussions with this interpretation of militarization don't really implicate the presence of a formal institution of the military, but rather can be broadened to incorporate multiple forms of state and nonstate violence.[004] This opens the conversation to more types of military geographies: ones that rather than being military, are militarized. These include scenarios where force is utilized both in physical and intellectual forms, either through armed forces of control and suppression, or through policies and domestication practices; additionally, it broadens the topic to include violence expressed through forms of terrorism, anarchism, resistance, or of encampment and dispossession, hunger and poverty, even though they are often responses or direct consequences to highly militarized or oppressed contexts.
As the lines between combatants and civilians get blurrier and weapons become more destructive, the violence becomes more indiscriminate, especially in warfare scenarios where the receiving end can be someone that voluntarily takes part in the conflict, compared to someone who happens to inhabit the space used as battlefield. The stark difference between casualties of military and civilian population tell us about a concerning trend of how contemporary wars are fought: if in WWI the casualties were 90% military and 10% civilians, in contemporaneity these percentages have swapped,[005] showing both how the military is always less effected by direct consequences of war, and how much the level of destruction and death has increased in little more than a century.

003
Bernazzoli & Flint, 2009, p. 394

004
Loyd, 2009, p. 864
Springer, 2016, 1-2

005
Costa, 1996

Patriarchal
This definition of militarism over the years has shifted from one that individuated a distinct, isolated military ethos to one that today emphasizes the intertwining of a militaristic mentality with civil society. The patriarchal connotation of militarism is part of a branch of military geography that deals with more social aspects of the discipline, arguing that our societies are run just like how military institutions are organized, replicating and projecting similar models on individuals and their interpersonal relations. It also argues that in a militarized society, the ones who are most militarized are the citizens through indoctrination and social constructs, rather than the formal institutions themselves. When military institutions are organized through authoritarian values and ideologies like male-centric hierarchy, obedience and relying on the use of force, the way this reflects on our society is evident. Despite being criticized for failing to connect the different scales of national and individual,[006] Enloe, supported by Woodward, tries to define the military modus operandi in seven points that underline the violent patriarchal nature of a militarized society.[007] These points make important considerations, also with the use of terminology, regarding the existing highly-gendered duality of militarism, highlighting how masculine-related traits, like protection and violence, are depicted as knightly, narcissistic values in direct contrast to traits socially associated with femininity, like naivety, submission and weakness, either depicted as the ones that need protection, or as diminishing and coercive to indoctrinate through blackmailing into taking part in the system.[008] It's a common trope that men are often pressured into joining the military or reproducing its dynamics to be considered valuable members of society. Much like the patriarchal system, military organizations have found ways to seem progressive and inclusive, yet new legal changes that came into effect especially in the U.S. Army show a regression trend that penalizes women, LGBTQ+ and black soldiers, once again proving the strong racialized, misogynistic and discriminating hierarchy signature of the system, like the recent U.S. Army Directive 2025-13 on stricter facial shaving regulations among soldiers, resulting in ultimate complications for a number of black personnel due to the issues razors cause to afro hair: an example of subtle racial policing masked with narratives of decorum.
Paternalistic arguments also appear in the ways in which the military initiates conversations with the general public. Backed up by political interests and matters of secrecy for security, the military tends to be condescending especially when questioned about its excessive physically-built presence in both domestic and foreign spaces; this attitude is based on an assertion that the military not only has the expertise to make a judgement about its use of land, but also that it is the sole body with the authority to do so. This paternalism in land management is surely a mechanism for reinforcing and expanding military control.[009]

Security
Much like "military", also security is a controversial word. Already through Enloe's points we can extract another feature of a highly militarized society, it being the exhaustion of the binary them-us. To reinforce this duality, a lot of pressure is put on borders and circulation, fueling narratives of territorial control, illegal migration, and citizenship. Although security tends to be outward-looking, dealing with the threat of external forces, it doesn't just concern itself with the defense of borders from incoming threats, but also deals with antagonizing and marginalizing designed scapegoats residing withing the borders, like forms of gang violence and minor crimes. The process Enloe describes implicates a vast range of institutions that are active agents in the processes of securitization: the military and police, but also churches, civil organizations, corporations, and institutions of the state which manage education, conscription and recruitment

006
Bernazzoli & Flint, 2009

007
Enloe, 2004, p. 219
a. that armed force is the ultimate resolver of tensions;
b. that human nature is prone to conflict;
c. that having enemies is a natural condition;
d. that hierarchical relations produce effective action;
e. that a state without a military is naı ̈ve, scarcely modern, and
barely legitimate;
f. that in times of crisis those who are feminine need armed
protection;
g. that in times of crisis any man who refuses to engage in armed
violent action is jeopardizing his own status as a manly man.

008
Theweleit, 1993, p. 285

009
Woodward, 2004, p. 31

processes, drawing a parallelism with the agents Foucault identifies that help reproduce a military society.[010] The identification of many agents which are not explicitly “military”, underscores how well the need for securising space has been sold to society. This list of actors underscores once more the concept mentioned before about the militarized society: that militarism is not only imposed upon the civil sphere by the security apparatus, but to the contrary, this process is largely one of civil society organizing itself around the (re)production of violence.[011]

Through propagandas of fear, specific enemies are outlined through the politisation of bodies, posing them as threats to national/regional/civic/personal entities that are required to be protected. A typically used strategy to do this is by upsclaing local/urban crimes to regional and national level through news outlets and informational channels, while obscuring actual large-scale threats like nuclear war and imperial campaigns.

The collective desire of security makes it so that militarization can slowly colonize physical and intellectual spaces. Its infiltration in everyday life passes also through a change of terminology which is worth noting, since the need for security is so widely socially embedded, that “militarism” and “militarization” are replaced with “securitism” and “securitization” respectively, in order to denote the fact that despite in the end security being operationalized through military power,[012] the two seem to have a sort of ontological divergence. In a sense they do, since one of the main interests of urban militarism scholars is related to the dangers of control and surveillance being on a constant rising curve, representing a threat to individual and collective freedoms. On top of this, cities are not the only spaces that are “securitized”, since the excuse of terrorist attacks and illegal immigrations allowed to highly militarize infrastructural domains like ports, airports, highways and border control.

Because of the capitalist system in which we live, capitalizing off of fear is extremely profitable. The ambiguity lies in the fact that while the nation is seen as the place of security, it’s also being the very creator of insecurity in the form of fear for its own citizens and war in other countries, the advertising of security itself becomes a matter of mass deterrence. On top of feeling like you are in the only secure location, and thus not able to go safely anywhere else, the collective paranoid constant need for security allows for being co-opted by the market in order to sell you your own security. The very definition of citizen in a capitalist country changes from the one that enriches the nation by consuming, to the one that directly contributes in investing in security, manages his own protection, and pays more to consume less.[013]

Another instance in which “security” is used is when it comes to giving clear information about their operational activities in military bases within the borders of their respective countries. The discourses of national security and secrecy which get backed up by many governmental statements on the defense estate lose their value once it is recognized how readily they are applied to all eventualities. Yes, these are military places and require a level of security. But that security is applied in physical form on all sites, in any case. Making public the extent and locations of the defense estate as a whole does not alter that requirement.[014] The ‘security’ arguments are themselves insecure, but they constitute a powerful discourse which operates against public interest concerns about the accountability of the management of military lands.

Capitalist

The economic discourse surrounding warfare and military is probably the one to which the Global North-West is most accustomed to: the expenses for war and defense are the ones that majorly weigh on the wallets of citizens, and the recent geopolitical turns are showing an increasing pressure from governments and military powers to invest in weaponry, bearing strong similarities to the arms races typical of high tensions historical periods, making the military one of the main influences in the economy of capitalist countries.

The military is not treated as a neutral instrument of state security, but as a deeply intrinsic component of capitalist political economy, both shaped by and producer of uneven spatial relations, pushing a new idea of violence that doesn’t come from direct confrontation and bloodshed (or not only at least), but rather from unequal property of bodies. From this perspective, militarization is closely tied to processes of capital accumulation, in which military institutions, infrastructures, and technologies function as sites of investment, innovation, and profit extraction. [015] The entanglement between state power and private industry, conceptualized as the military industrial complex, illustrates how defense spending sustains corporate actors while simultaneously normalizing the expansion of militarized logics into civilian domains. Drawing on critical traditions associated with authors such as David Harvey, this relationship can be understood through the lens of spatial fixes and accumulation by dispossession, where military activities facilitate the opening of new markets, the extraction of resources, and the reconfiguration of territories in ways that benefit the capital.[016] The drive for the need to go to war (or export conflict) is to not make the economy collapse; to do so, you always want perpetual conflict that can be controlled so that economy works and brings benefits on the Western end. Eventually that’s what establishes the value of capital, meaning that differential quality of the currency that is established by supply and demand, and by its relation to the number of people that have it at any given time.

Moreover, militarized spaces ranging from bases and logistics hubs, to border zones, operate as strategic nodes within global economic networks, reinforcing geopolitical hierarchies and enabling the circulation of goods, labor, and power under conditions shaped by security impositions. As scholars including Derek Gregory have argued, these dynamics are not confined to moments of war, but extend into the infrastructures and everyday practices that sustain both military operations and capitalist expansion.[017] In this sense, the military can be read as both a product and a driver of capitalist relations, embedding economic rationalities within spatial strategies of control, mobility, and governance.

Colonial

The previous point already hints at the military expansionistic campaigns to enrich domestic economy, but consequently a long history of colonial extractivism has to be acknowledged. The military is understood as a central actor in the production and maintenance of colonial spatial orders, both historically and in their contemporary reconfigurations. Ontologically, colonial practices operate based on two conceptions of bodies: one strong and one weak; the weak one indecisive and vulnerable because of being dependent on their environment, the other strong because able to delocalize itself for economic progress. This differential in power is operationalized by the settlers through the employment of suppressive technologies and techniques that cannot be replicated by the occupied end. It’s the gap between sides that allows for the authority to maintain its hegemony on the territories and conduct its extraction of physical and intellectual resources.

Rather than viewing colonialism as a defined historical phase, critical scholars emphasize its ongoing and everpresent manifestation through military practices that organize, control, and differentiate space along racialized and hierarchical attitudes. This is reasonable because despite living in a so-called “postcolonial” time, the scars of the old colonies are still very much visible, while there’s also new ways in which colonialism can operate in terms of military control.[018] Colonial military strategies include territorial occupation, mapping, surveillance, and the establishment of fortified infrastructures; all of these have played a foundational role in shaping modern geopolitical boundaries and regimes of mobility

010
Foucault, 1982, p. 792-793

011
Geyer, 1989, p. 79

012
Bernazzoli & Flint, 2009, p. 250

013
Virilio, 2006, p. 139

014
Woodward, 2004, p. 17

015
Klare, 1974, p.13
Cohen, 1973, p. 24

016
Harvey, 2001, p. 24

017
Gregory, 2004, p. 180

018
Harvey, 2020, p.29-36

both in the Global North and South. These practices are not merely historical residues, but continue to contribute to present-day forms of governance, particularly in border securitization, counter-insurgency operations, and overseas basing networks.

Drawing on postcolonial theory and the work of scholars like Frantz Fanon and Derek Gregory, the military can be seen as a key instrument through which colonial power is enacted and reproduced, both materially and psychologically. For Fanon, the colonial world is fundamentally divided into segregated zones enforced through military power, where the presence of armed force structures everyday life and subjectivity.[019] These insights on segregation and violence illuminate how militarized force structures not only dominate territory but also produce subjectivities shaped by fear, control, and resistance. Gregory extends these notions, demonstrating how contemporary military interventions often draw upon colonial imaginaries, reactivating distinctions between “civilized” and “uncivilized” spaces[020] to justify ongoing forms of intervention and occupation. From this perspective, colonial military practices are embedded in a broader assemblage of power that includes legal frameworks, technological systems, and discursive representations, all of which contribute to the normalization of unequal spatial relations. Consequently, the military is not only a tool of territorial control but also a mechanism through which colonial logics are continually updated, shaping how space is governed, contested, and experienced in the present.

One of the most common ways in which military powers spread and expand far from homeland is by strategically placing bases in zones of interest. The control over sovereign territory exerted by foreign military powers is a significant issue that mirrors tropes of occupation of territories even in locations with no conflict,[021] with one of the main perpetrators of this actions being the United States. The U.S. foreign policy had targeted new enemies to justify the continued forward deployment of U.S. military forces in order to maintain global economic and political dominance. All of these practices are much material as they are discursive, sustained through narratives that frame certain populations and territories as threats requiring management or containment. As a result, militarization becomes a key mechanism through which colonial relations are continuously reproduced, even in supposedly postcolonial contexts.

Indoctrinating

In order for military forms to exist and proliferate in space, society needs to be disciplined and accustomed to the idea of its presence through a huge effort in controlling and make its narratives palatable. Indoctrination within contemporary societies can be understood not as an overt or centrally orchestrated imposition of ideology, but as a diffuse and often imperceptible process through which military logics become normalized and reproduced across everyday spaces. The result is a form of governance in which militarization becomes both normalized and self-perpetuating, embedded within the very fabric of social organization.

Putting together the previous points, realizing that we live in a highly militarized patriarchal capitalistic system, reveals how societies are run in analogue ways to military institutions. The questions that rise are clear: how do people come to desire their own oppression? How do they come to mirror systems they did not decide?

The programming of bodies to reproduce military dynamics is best conceptualized as a spatial and cultural process in which military values like hierarchy, discipline, obedience, and securitization are embedded within civilian institutions and practices. Schools, media outlets, urban infrastructures, and public commemorative rituals function as key sites through which these norms are circulated and sedimented, contributing to what can be described as the banalization of militarism. In this sense, indoctrination operates less through explicit coercion and more through routines of exposure, repetition, and the gradual alignment of everyday life with militarized frameworks of understanding.

An important role is played also by frictions between (neo)liberal approaches and the question of autonomy of bodies, considering liberal power plays on the (un)capability of some to reason (levering on the absence of reason at all, rather than only non-reason). In this sense, the production of desired bodies without will,[022] and thus easily malleable is a prerogative of both liberal and military techniques.

The extension and inclusion of the military sphere within society implies that when the moment comes, everyone is called to do their part. In this sense, the military is capable of being extremely inclusive towards all types of bodies, making it very much a biopolitical issue: while the young man goes to war, the married men, women and children are forced to work in manufacturing, whether of arms or clothing; but also disabled bodies can contribute to the making of warfare. During nazi Germany, through the aid of technology and machinery, disabilities were balanced through the use of vehicles to make them productive members of the army. During the same period, narratives surrounding work and labor that still echo today were very much aligned with crushing workers’ rights for the conservation of authority, like how mine workers at the time with little to no rights were being promised by liberal propaganda that work would have made them free, showcasing how the system applied the same logics of concentration camps onto society and thus thinning the line between the two.

In the West a change occurred also within the education system, since the shift away from child labor was made so that children could be educated to become efficient workers. The ways in which schools are organized is being openly criticized for being extremely reminiscent of obedience training, making the school institution look more like a barrack for military service, rather than a place of education and conviviality. As the privatization and precarization of the educational system, we are witnessing a process of militarization affecting and suffocating both educational institutions and their cultural and pedagogical content. As was the case during the fascist period in Italy, schools are slowly becoming barracks, while barracks are being converted into classrooms aimed at producing the student-soldier committed to unquestioned obedience.[023] The object of discipline shifted from the body to the soul, meaning that now being optimal man passes through reason, intrinsically carrying an obligation (rather than repression) to show up and make yourself known to have an identity, fueling hierarchies of superiority and inferiority. In certain economies, the obligation to contribute to society and the hopes of living on a decent wage coincide with joining the army as the only way out from poverty and starving.

The indoctrination takes also the form of indifference, not only to the less perceptible military practices in our proximity, but also to the larger military conflicts happening far from our borders. As of now we have internalized that warfare is a perpetual phenomenon happening all around the globe, yet we perceive these wars as the struggles of others, even when fought by our governments and thus funded with the citizens’ money.[024]

Acknowledging the multifaceted nature of the military, in the next part I will try to find the common base to all these different definitions in order to stipulate a genealogy of spatial manifestations of military presence.

019
Fanon, 2004, p. 69-70

020
Gregory, 1994, p. 168-174

021
Woodward, 2004, p. 19

022
Virilio, 2006, p. 61
Armitage, 1997, p. 200

023
Mazzeo, 2024, p. 53

024
Kirby, 1994, p. 301

Components of militarism

When trying to dissect the ways in which military presence influences spaces and places, it might be useful to dimensionalize the phenomenon (in the sense of giving it units of measure) to understand its nature, thus the extraction of variables that constitute the most essential aspects of the phenomenon was the preliminary step that allowed for the selection of the case studies of the following pages.
Based on the existing literature that deals with the analysis of military presence and adjacent topics, I was able to identify four primal variables, these being time, space, technique and control; they became the general indicators for the first part of this research, that allowed for the identification and categorization of case studies. The first two, time and space, are essential to determine geographical and temporal coordinates to the manifestations of military in space. We can find a suitable origin for these variables in the study of *dromology* [025], a term coined by Paul Virilio, meaning the "science of speed", that he himself has attributed as a core driving mechanism in the ways in which military presence operates.[026] When we think about speed or of one of the more mathematical ways to represent it, like m/s (meters over seconds, or rather space over time), Virilio already gives us the two dimensions to work with: one spatial and one temporal. The spatial one is the most obvious one: in all the possible interpretations and typologies of reproduction of space, something has to happen somewhere, either in a given place or also in a certain direction giving it a vectorial character. The temporal dimension clearly alludes that the event is happening in a certain moment, but it also suggests historical connotation, implying a causative correlation between an event happening before and one after. These two variables help us give coordinates to the events of interest, but don't explain how they happen. Although not always explicitly, multiple authors and scholars were able to understand that these military geographies are able to exist and settle themselves in societal spaces through two distinct entities that feed off of each other, and that's where the two other variables come into play. The first regards the materiality of the military, meaning the technology and tangible bodies developed overtime, whereas the second regards the abstract consensus obtained through policies and manipulation that is the backbone for the evolution and feasibility of military's infiltration in space.
It becomes apparent that spatial stresses and variations are dictated by two main variables: technique and control that fuel off each other, one mostly material and operational, the other abstract and facilitating. After analyzing in detail the ontology and dialectical aspects of these variable, a very simple graphic scheme of how they interact with each other is proposed to visualize the topics and criteria of decision of such that will be dealt with in the next chapters. The intersection of sets

Time

Although time might be the simplest of the variables to explain as it mainly serves me as a timeline to establish the historical coordinates and duration of determined events, it nonetheless serves as an important theoretical component to understand societal and power dynamics especially when paired with spatial ideas. Henri Lefebvre's work is particularly useful for understanding this relationship between time and social organization, arguing that social life consists of multiple overlapping rhythms: biological rhythms, daily routines, urban movements, economic cycles, industrial schedules, and political temporalities that are not necessarily synchronized.[027] For example, the rhythms of a worker, a transport system, a factory, a city, or a financial market may intersect while operating at very different speeds. Time can therefore become a medium through which social relations are coordinated and controlled.
Previously, similarly to Lefebvre, Edward Palmer Thompson dealt with how modern capitalism transformed people's relationship to time, describing the transition from task-oriented forms of work toward clock-regulated industrial labor.[028] This way, the clock becomes more than an instrument for measuring time: it becomes a mechanism for organizing labor, productivity, punctuality, and discipline. In a dynamic which has been employed for centuries by different forms of power, time is transformed into something that can be measured, divided, valued, and exchanged, producing proper temporal regimes.[029]

Space

For the longest time, space was often treated as a neutral background against which social, political, and economic processes take place. Cities, territories, streets, buildings, infrastructures, and landscapes appear, in this view, as relatively stable containers within which social life unfolds. However, a substantial intervention in twentieth-century social theory and human geography has been to reject this understanding of space as passive or pre-given, conceptualizing space as not simply where social relations happen; bur is itself produced through social relations, material practices, institutional arrangements, representations, technologies, and struggles over access and use. This way, space can be understood as an active dimension of social life, simultaneously material and symbolic, planned and improvised, regulated and contested.
Here Lefebvre provides one of the most influential foundations for this approach,

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Virilio, 2006

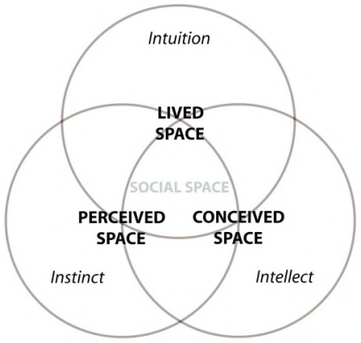
026
Ibid, p. 50-60

027
Lefebvre, 2010, p. 8-16

028
Thompson, 1967, p. 60-61

029
Torres, 2021, p. 35

pushing against the idea that space can be understood as an empty geometric container, identifying three separated ways in which space is produced: social space is thus produced through the interaction of material practices, representations, and lived experience;[030] a street, a neighborhood, a housing estate, or a metropolitan region cannot be understood solely through its physical characteristics. Such spaces are also constituted by the practices that take place within them, by the ways planners and administrators conceptualize them, and by the meanings and experiences through which inhabitants live them.



The main contribution lies in the conceptual alternation between mental and material space and between abstract spatial systems and the everyday experience of the home and city, but also in unveiling the inseparable connection between space production and power. Modern urban space is increasingly organized through forms of abstraction: maps, plans, property regimes, zoning systems, statistical categories, transport networks, architectural standards, and administrative divisions. These devices make space measurable and governable, and consequently causing a constant state of friction between abstract space and lived space being continually encountered, appropriated, modified, and sometimes resisted by those who inhabit it, transforming a same place in concepts like home, community, memory, exclusion, or displacement.[031] Spatial production therefore involves a continual negotiation between planned and lived realities.

Later authors like David Harvey developed a related argument through a Marxist political economy of urbanization, this time examining the relationship between social processes and spatial form, asking how urban planning, land use, housing, transportation, income distribution, and poverty are spatially organized. On top of mere physical territory, land is also a commodity, an investment, a source of rent, and a means through which social inequalities become geographically concentrated.[031] Urban form consequently receives a double connotation, becoming both a product of capital accumulation and an arena through which accumulation takes place; a space that reflects struggles over the distribution and appropriation of resources. Housing markets and the distribution of people across urban areas, for example, are strongly dependent from processes of investment, speculation, zoning, infrastructure development, and disinvestment that actively produce differentiated urban spaces.

This political-economic approach makes it possible to understand phenomena such as segregation, gentrification, suburbanization, and uneven development spatially rather than simply demographically, and the concentration of wealth in one part of a city and poverty in another as something that can be produced through decisions concerning land, infrastructure, investment, taxation, planning, and property can help connecting the production of urban space to the broader dynamics of capitalism.

Another branch of theory regarding space is one that pushes against understanding space as static, closed, or simply synonymous with geographical distance. Instead, space is relational and constituted through interactions and trajectories and thus is inseparable from time, movement, and multiplicity. A city, in this framework, is not a bounded object with a single identity, but rather a temporary and continually changing constellation of relations: flows of people, capital, information, materials, infrastructures, memories, and political struggles. This adds to space the connotation of it being always under construction.[032]

Authors like Massey's relational approach is important because it prevents the production of space from being reduced to the actions of a single institution or dominant actor, making multiplicity a key component in a city's transformations. A city is produced simultaneously by planners, developers, governments, infrastructure systems, workers, residents, commuters, tourists, technologies, and countless everyday interactions. Different groups occupy different positions within these relations and therefore possess unequal capacities to shape space, making spatial relations consequently also relations of power.[033] The question is not only who occupies a particular location, but who has the ability to define what that location is, what it should become, who may enter it, and whose practices are considered legitimate.

This question of everyday practice is particularly relevant in order to distinguish between the strategic production of space by institutions and the tactical practices through which ordinary users navigate and appropriate the environments produced for them. The planned city may appear coherent when represented on a map, but the city experienced from the ground is composed of routes, detours, encounters, memories, habits, shortcuts, interruptions, and improvisations. De Certeau thus introduces an important distinction between space as designed and space as practiced: urban authorities can construct streets, establish regulations, determine circulation patterns, and assign functions to buildings and districts, but these arrangements do not completely determine how people use them,[034] because people appropriate, reinterpret, and sometimes circumvent spatial arrangements. The everyday use of space can therefore produce forms of agency that are difficult to capture through official maps or planning documents. This distinction also connects spatial theory to questions of technique and control: modern institutions govern partly by organizing spatial relations, by determining where activities can occur, how bodies can move, what can be seen, which areas are accessible, and how populations are classified. Planning, architecture, mapping, zoning, surveillance, transportation infrastructure, and property systems can therefore be understood as techniques through which space becomes ordered and governable.[035]

At the same time, space should not be understood as something that power simply controls from above. The concept of Thirdspace by Edward Soja emphasizes the coexistence of material, imagined, and lived dimensions of spatiality and in a way complicates the opposition between physical space and subjective experience.[036] For example, a neighborhood is simultaneously a material environment, a representation circulated by planners and media, and a lived world of memories, identities, practices, and expectations (this example in especially relevant for the later mention of urbicide and its implications in urban warfare). These dimensions interact rather than existing independently, emerging through the relationships between material objects, social structures, bodies, and actions.[037] Space is therefore constituted through processes of social ordering and relational arrangement, an idea that allows buildings, infrastructures, people, institutions, and symbolic meanings to be analyzed together.

Taken together, these approaches suggest that space should be understood neither as purely material nor as purely symbolic, but as produced through the interaction of material arrangements, social relations, representations, institutions, technologies, economic processes, and everyday practices, while also expressing, reproducing and/or transforming existing relations of power. The production of space is therefore fundamentally political: to ask how a space is produced is also to ask who produces it, through which techniques, according to whose representations, for whose benefit, and with what possibilities for appropriation or resistance.

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Graphical representation associated with the three means of production of sbace by Lefebvre;

030
Lefebvre, 1992, p. 33, 38-42

031
Harvey, 1979, p. 22-29

032
Massey, 2012, p. 9

033
Ibid., p. 9-12

034
de Certeau, 2013, 91-93

035
Foucault, 2009, p. 19-20

036
Soja, 2014, p. 11

037
Löw & Goodwin, 2016, p. 76

Technique

Technique is a word that is extremely complex ontologically. In terms of military geographies, it expresses not only the material instruments utilized for warfare like weapons and vehicles (that would be technology), but also what we could call the “way of doing war”,[038] meaning the strategies and procedures used to carry out and justify military action and presence. Put simply, technique is the ensemble of material and immaterial practices (technological, organizational, economic, and spatial) through which military power is operationalized and reproduced, mediating between strategic intention and spatial reality, translating abstract objectives into tangible application.

Carlo Galli approaches technique genealogically, beginning from the relationship between technique and human nature. For him, technique should not be understood as an external addition to an otherwise complete human nature; rather, it is constitutive of human nature. Human existence is, from the beginning, mediated and made possible by sets of techniques that exist within the sphere of utility (variety of options, actions, and interactions) that aims to the pursuit of economic profit and political power, both at the individual and collective level. As innately connected to human nature, technique therefore cannot be separated from society, and thus the technical object becomes a condensation of the power relations existing within a society.[039]

Philosophy is probably the discipline the majorly dealt with an ontology of technique, but philosophical thought has often treated technique as secondary or subordinate to other dimensions of human nature, such as reason, morality, politics, or spirituality. Yet the history of modernity demonstrates that technique gradually became one of the central forces shaping human existence, especially during the industrial revolutions, where there’s an explosive acceleration of technical innovation. New techniques emerge with increasing speed, contributing to the growing power of political formations (first principalities and later modern states) which seek to organize and control territory. Dialectic techniques of administration and bureaucracy develop alongside material hydraulic engineering, construction, military technologies, fortifications, and other forms of territorial organization.[040] Technique thus becomes an instrument through which political power can expand its capacity to organize space and populations.

At the same time, technical development contributes to the growing power of the bourgeoisie as the class increasingly responsible for organizing and controlling production, since machines can increase the amount of labor available to production, but they can also increase productivity by allowing fewer workers to produce more.

During this period of innovation technique increasingly penetrates social life, and it is precisely this growing presence that generates a corresponding critique of technique expressed initially in the 19th century by authors like Novalis and Leopardi expressing concerns about the consequences of technical rationalization as potential destroyer the harmony of the world, that responds primarily to humanity’s most basic and instrumental desires: production, utility, and economic gain. Technique thus should not be seen only as a means of liberation, but also as a mechanism for regulating and controlling society. This concern is also present in early positivism from Comte and Fourier, who recognize the relationship between technical organization, social order, and the possibility of regulating collective life.[041]

Later Marx provides a different and particularly important interpretation. For Marx, the fundamental problem is not technique or the machine as such, but the capitalist social relations within which machines are deployed. The machine acquires a dominant position within the capitalist system of production because it increases productivity and can consequently become an instrument for the exploitation of labor. The technical development of machinery therefore has contradictory consequences. Under capitalism, it can intensify the exploitation of the worker by increasing the productivity demanded from labor; but under a post-capitalist or socialist organization of society, the same machine could potentially be used to reduce the burden of necessary labor and liberate human beings from work.[042] The problem is therefore not the machine itself, but the social and economic system that determines its use.

Nietzsche, however, takes an almost opposite direction to Marx and positivism in regards to technique, becoming an expression of the modern destiny of the human being: the desire of power embodied in the figure of the modern Prometheus. Human beings attempt to use technique to seize control of the world, but in doing so they risk becoming subjected to the technical systems and logics they themselves have created. The Promethean desire for mastery can therefore turn into its opposite. Technique becomes associated with the hardening of society and with the loss of vitality, becoming opposite to life itself.[043]

This transition can be seen in the movement from a critique of political economy toward a critique of technique, particularly in the work of Ernst Jünger and later Martin Heidegger. Jünger examines the emergence of a technical and organizational world in which human beings themselves become integrated into systems of production, mobilization, and power. Heidegger’s The Question Concerning Technology takes this problem further by asking what is at stake in the essence of modern technology. For Heidegger, modern technology is not simply a collection of machines or practical instruments. It expresses a particular way of revealing and ordering the world, rooted in a metaphysical desire for control and mastery. The technological worldview does not simply destroy a previously non-technical society; rather, the desire to order, control, and make the world available for human purposes is already rooted in the history of Western metaphysics. Consequently, what is at stake in technology is ultimately not the machine, but the human condition through which we encounter and understand the world.[044]

Probably the most impactful characteristic of military technique is its evolutionary connotation. On this topic, Galli argues that technique should not be understood as simply “evolving” according to an autonomous logic, rather it’s technique that makes human beings evolve. Human evolution is therefore artificial rather than natural: human beings transform themselves through the techniques they create and incorporate into their existence. Technique is intrinsic to human nature in the sense that it is universal and enduring, but it is not autonomous and does not possess an independent life of its own, as it can’t develop outside human subjects.

Techniques (understood as objects, paradigms, and systems)are introduced into society on the basis of human decisions, and particularly decisions made by those who possess power. Technique is therefore never entirely autonomous; it is directed, selected, and shaped by political, economic, and social forces. This does not mean, however, that technical systems always remain under the complete control of those who create or impose them. At certain moments in history, techniques imposed by powerful actors have also turned against their creators, producing effects that escape their original intentions.[045]

The constant need to reinforce hierarchies of authority through the reproduction of violence has driven technique to continuously develop, becoming more lethal and influential at progressively larger scales across human history, which to some scholars coincides with the history of violence itself. Probably the most iconic representation in cinema of this is the opening scene of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, where the apes are shown in a full display of violence, smashing objects around them with the use of a tool: a bone in their hands symbolizing the eternal link of technology as instrument for the production of violence. While this image risks naturalizing violence as an innate human drive (a propagandistic move that has historically been deployed multiple times to allow for the propagation of technology of control and violence in space, seeing the engine



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2001: A Space Odyssey’s opening scene

038
Elden, 2007a, p. 565

039
Galli, 2025, p. 24

040
Ibid., p. 71

041
Ibid., p. 52

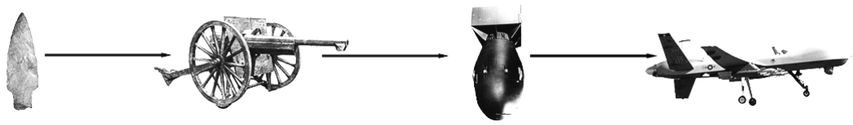
042
Marx, 1857-61, p. 389, 789, 819

043
Heidegger, 1953, p. 3-5

044
Galli, 2025, p. 64
Heidegger, 1953, p. 27-29

045
Galli, 2025, p. 13

of innovation in being fueled by supposed innate feelings territoriality and possession[046]) it nonetheless captures something structurally accurate about the relationship between technical innovation and the exercise of power.
The natural mechanisms through which technique evolves are very much affiliated with practices of conquest and authority, which could be one of the reasons why in a relatively short time (circa 300.000-400.000 years) humankind passed from simple prehistoric hunting tools like flint lances, to weapons of mass destruction like the atomic bomb; the law of the strongest helped to fuel a sort of competition between sides to have the best tools in order to exercise control over the other.



But how does technique evolve today? The channels through which technique evolves are rarely transparent. Military research has historically advanced by routing itself through civilian institutions like universities, research laboratories, and technology firms in an extremely invasive way by masking itself as opportunity, misleading and feeding off of the young underpaid labor of the researchers to endure the economy of war and weapon development: journalist Luca Rondi carried out an inquiry in November 2025 regarding the increasingly close relationships between companies in the military sector and Italian universities,[47] where fundings are given in the shape of PhD scholarships, research contracts, and paid partnerships to take part in the development of the military industry from logistics to weaponry. 23 out of 31 universities taken into consideration have ties with Leonardo Spa (74%), 20 with Thales Alenia Space Spa (65%), and eight with Mbda Italia Spa (26%), all industries related to the military industry, and the latter involved in the partial production of bombs deployed in the killing of civilians in 24 different instances in Gaza.[048] Despite the universities not wanting to renounce to these collaborations, what emerges is a poisoning of the democratic health of universities,[049] since in the Italian system "third-party contracts" with private entities allow the scientific lead to use the name and facilities of the university while directly managing part of the funds to pay individual researchers, thus being able to create political power and influence consensus in an environment of poor state funding. Development and innovation in general often passed through an initial interest from the military; the genealogy of technologies now considered part of everyday civilian infrastructure reveals the depth of this entanglement: cartography was systematically developed as an instrument of colonial conquest before becoming a science; the internet emerged from the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET), a military communications network; the touchscreen, the airplane, and the integrated circuits of Silicon Valley all passed through military intentions before entering common use.[050]
With all this multiplication of properties, another relevant aspect of technique emerges. It is the fact that through its evolution it doesn't constitute a substitutive correspondence between the novelty and dated, but rather cumulative (i.e. the invention of the atomic bomb some time after the invention of the gun didn't pose an end to the gun's existence, but rather they are two separate tools both simultaneously utilized in the same timeframe). This supposes a multiplication and constant reproduction of the amount of military techniques and forms of violence as time goes on, or to put it in virilian terms, technology (and technique) is the variable that accelerates speed, intensifies war, and creates totalitarian modes of domination. In this sense technique is a sort of metronome of war:[051] as time goes on, because of constant innovation and accumulation of techniques, the rhythm accelerates and the beats (reproductions of conflict and violence) become closer and more frequent. Spatial violence through technology has the distinctive trait of manifesting itself in at multiple scales and in differing modalities, varying from techniques of destruction and death to strategies of consent and indoctrination; from colonial and blockading control, to terrorism, to forms of resistance. Regarding this last one, this fact makes it so that spatial military techniques are extremely hard to contrast through channels of democratic dissent and diplomacy, often requiring the use of additional reproductions of violence in order to lead to liberation.[056]
Yet technique alone is not enough to build the complex system of spatial violence and military influence so present today, but rather is put to action from the decisions of a likewise complex nexus of propaganda and consenses. Carlo Galli in an interview said "[...] Technique is the fundamental instrument through which power is excercised, but it isn't the one ruling. Capital and the State are the ones that rule, using techique at their service".[057] This is where the role of control becomes fundamental.

Control

Control is definitely as complex to talk about as vast is its range of action across disciplines. It could be defined as a diffuse and multifaceted set of practices that operate across space, scale, and everyday life. Rather than conceiving military power solely in terms of battlefield strategy or state sovereignty, critical approaches foreground how control is spatially produced, normalized, and contested through a wide range of material and discursive mechanisms. In this sense, control is not confined to moments of war or formal military engagement, but is extended to infrastructures, representations, and routines far beyond conventional sites of conflict. Furthermore control is not to be conceived as absolute in its applications, but holds a deeply adapting qualities, always being dependent on ongoing interactions between structures of power and the subjects they seek to govern. For the sake of fully encompassing the complex ontology of military control, Rachel Woodward divides control in four key aspects[058] that constitute it; although she focuses solely on the issue of land use by the military in at peace contexts, I will use these as cardinal points to expand its definition to a more general employment of control.

- The first feature is the fact of physical presence. Control can vary a lot in its physical shapes, but compared to economies, social structure, environments and landscapes, its influence is emanated by the very fact of just being tangible. A first instance can be in land ownership and occupation via military bases or border control, substantially subtracting territory to communities or nature and bringing with it all the tensions and frictions that military presence carries.[059] Alternatively, it can be through barriers, whether temporary or permanent; rather than protecting, these tend to be exclusionary or suppressive ways of fortifying a territory, varying in scale from small neighborhoods to entire countries. There's also physical presences that don't pass through the architectural language, one being military personnel or vehicles deployed in the civil or natural spaces, being able to exercise control and influence the common perception of a determined place, often perceiving it as dangerous rather than secure. With all of this in mind, it's still safe to say that the most prominent form of control in contemporary cities and infrastructures is through surveillance and tracking;[060] within the urban fabric, surveillance cameras are an everincreasing presence advertised as security and instruments to contrast adverse forces, yet this doesn't exclude the fact that tracking devices like phones and GPS are constantly collecting private information and profiling individuals and can be used as deterrence on the base of political ideologies.

<< visual of technological instruments used to reproduce violence during human evolution

046 Newman, 1978, p. 9, 51

047 Rondi, 2025, p. 20-23

048 The Guardian, 2025

049 Giroux, 2015, p. 13

050 Ruttan, 2006, p. 33

051 Virilio, 2006, p. 90
Kellner, 1999, p. 106

056 Meeks, 2006, p. 35

057 Carlo Galli on Dissipatio, 2018

058 Woodward, 2004, p. 35-37

059 Graham, 2011, p. 60

060 Graham, 2009, p. 47

- The second feature of control is information. Military control over space is reliant in part on controlling and administrating their own data and information, being able to choose how discrete they can be towards the general public about their actions in the territories they occupy, both domestic and foreign. If the majority of informations published with regards to military presence is filtered and published by few selected entities affiliated with the military, able to manipulate or obscure data, the desire to avoid public scrutiny becomes evident. Aside from being able to dose the amounts of information disclosed about their activities within the formal walls of military institutions, control on information is also exercised by imposing influence on the ways in which information is published and formalized by media outlets like social media, news channels and newspapers, determining what can be seen, known, and said about military operations through the use of apparatus that intertwine knowledge and power,[061] meaning that the organization of information is itself a way of structuring reality and shaping public perception.

- The third feature consists in the practices of governance in the management of armed forces and the management of civil-military relationships. For the military to be able to occupy space and carry out its intended activities of control, a formal allowance has to be conceded from official political and organizational authorities like the government, the Defense Department, or Homeland Security that produce a series of practices of governance through which military power is organized, legitimized and sustained, like administrating policies and shaping ideologies. These governance practices are never neutral, but reflect and reproduce broader power asymmetries embedded within state institutions, rendering certain forms of violence legitimate while marginalizing dissenting voices within and beyond the armed forces. Scholars have drawn attention to how military governance operates through normative frameworks that discipline not only soldiers' bodies and conduct but also the civilian populations that fall within the military's spatial and administrative range of action[062] through paternalist tendencies that aim at restricting the freedom of individuals to better serve their interests.[063]

- The fourth and final feature of the military control of space is that it is a discursive as well as a material practice. That is to say, military dominance over space is not solely achieved through physical occupation, infrastructure, or the deployment of armed personnel, but is equally constituted through language, representation, and meaning-making. The ways in which military spaces are named, classified and narrated as "secure" zones or "national security corridors" are themselves demonstrations of power that shape how those spaces are perceived, contested, or rendered invisible to civilian publics. Ultimately discourse isn't used simply to describe military spatial control, but is the actual producer of it[064] by determining what can be said, seen, and done within militarized environments. It is the very discursive dimension itself that allows for the material production of spaces like physical barriers, checkpoints, and military installations, through the support of legal frameworks, media narratives, and official rhetoric that normalize their presence, like the need of defense security, and suppress alternative spatial imaginaries.

After having assessed what control and technique constitute in their independent definitions, the next pages will deal with the ways in which they mix and communicate with one another, through the identification of case studies across history and geographies. These will be grouped in categories and subcategories that highlight the thematic links between one another.

061
Foucault, 1991, p. 262
Sferrazza Papa, 2020, p. 39

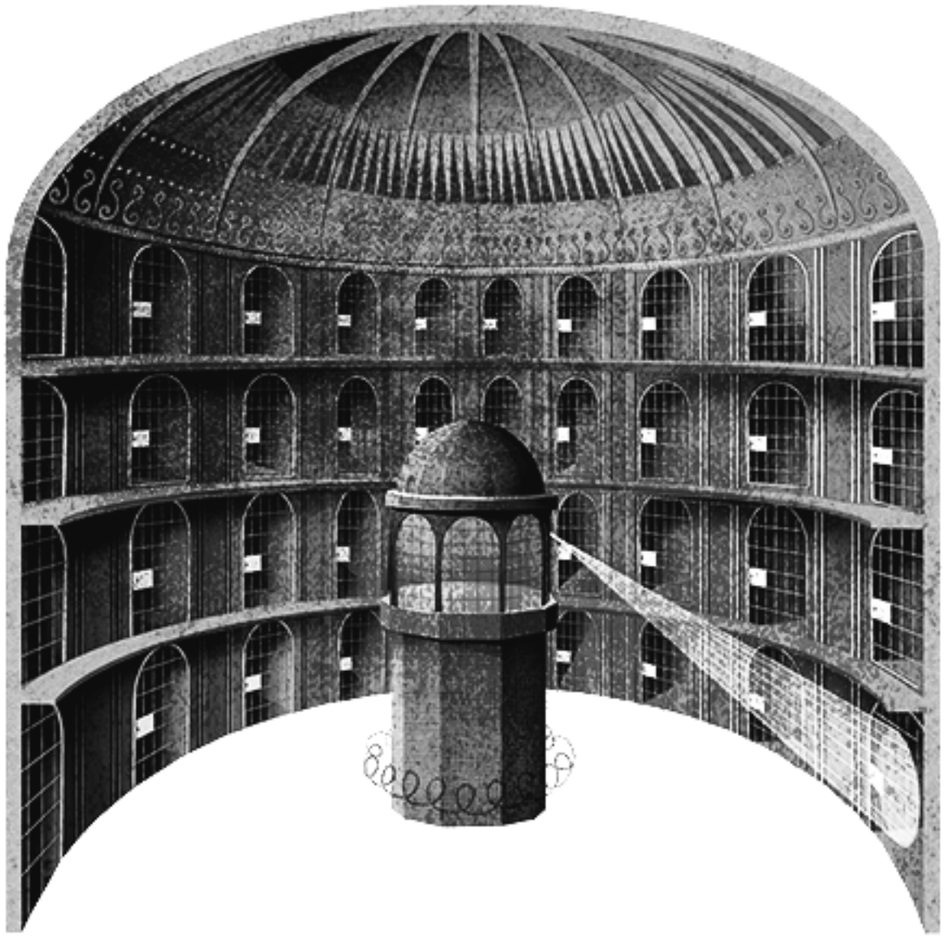
062
Basham, 2016, p. 885

063
Woodward 2004, p. 37

064
Foucault, 1991, p. 135-169



M1. Panopticon cities



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Drawing of the panopticon, by Adam Simpson

065
Foucault, 1991, p. 205

Demonstrations and impositions of power and control through constant monitoring and spatial alienation are concepts architecturally displayed in Foucault's Panopticon (literally the eye that sees everything): a circular prison structure with a guard tower in the center where each individual cell is occupied by a prisoner that despite not being able to see whether there's actually any guard that's watching them, because of the spatial organization of the structure, they internalize the perception of always being watched, thus disciplining themselves to follow orders and remain in their current state, playing on the ambiguity between seeing and being seen. A concept originally designed by Jeremy Bentham in 1791 as an actual proposal for penitentiary facility at the intersection of paranoia and security, Foucault himself wrote about the structure: "it is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use".[065]

The structure is used as a metaphor to illustrate the procedures and processes of power and surveillance within a capitalist system where individuals come to behave, repress and discipline themselves in order to best fit in society. Despite its first conception, the idea of controlling and disciplining individuals and masses through spatial influences has been a prerogative of regimes and institutions of power throughout history, coming to life in different forms especially in the built environment. In a time in which public executions disappeared and skepticism about the efficacy of corporal punishment rose, the circular prison as philosophical concept came as a direct consequence at a time in which the state was changing the way it exercised power: not anymore in ostentatious correction through violence, but through observation.[064] This system doesn't typically concern situations in which there's a formal war between different statal or governmental entities, but rather is a series of practices that employ military power or strategies from "above to below" that impact everyday lives and help maintain the status quo inside the borders of a single neighborhood, city, and/or state. This scalar dimension calls for a specific agent that falls under the spectrum of military/security, which is the police, functioning as a spatially deployed apparatus whose presence, patrol routes, and jurisdictional authority actively produce and reinforce the boundaries of permissible social behavior.[065]

Foucault looks at societies and how discipline creates our ways of being in the world: not only through repression, but also through overtly accepted institutions of learning and correction like schools and churches embedding behaviors of discipline in society; yet it is Lefebvre who deals with the topic of how space is socially produced and how power operates through spatial organization. From his perspective, one could interpret the panopticon not simply as an architectural form, but as part of a broader process in which space is designed to regulate behavior, vehicle social relations, and reproduce power.[066] He diverges from Foucault in the sense that while Foucault emphasizes visibility, surveillance, and the internalization of control, Lefebvre shifts attention to how space itself becomes a medium of domination and resistance and how everyday life is effected by these practices.

Within the urban fabric, there's a dual interpretation of the panopticon: one concerns the use of urban planning as a tool to manage the city layout to suppress possible insurrections from the masses and to organize infrastructure for easier visibility/circulation/control, whereas the other is interested in the complex nexus of surveillance and tracking devices that keep increasing in contemporary cities. In both cases, the intersection between technique and control is evident: colonial and authoritarian interests push the actualization of military practices in the urban as a way to replicate in society behavioral hierarchies that are typically associated with the way of conduct expected in the army. The type of technology employed to achieve these results is nothing but a mere reflection of the historical moment in which the act is being performed, it being optimal city planning or CCTV monitoring, but always following the trope of centering control in palm of police forces. In this way, cities can't be simply places of communal life and exchange, but become **places discipline**[067] to favor a smooth functioning of the interests of propaganda, market and police (or in foucaltian terms produce "docile bodies"). The functioning of this scheme is also facilitated by the capability of control to manifest itself in a semi-invisible way: much like in the foucaltian prison, citizens are now accustomed to the idea of constantly being watched and scanned, and the reasons and decision of urban design are something the average inhabitant hardly ever questions. Extending the panopticon metaphor to the city, implies that while police has authority within the walls of penitentiary structure and often produces acts of violence towards inmates, it can also (re) produce the same violence within the urban fabric (and it does) without repercussion.

The intrinsic implication of a panopticon model whether applied in

064
Fontana-Giusti, 2013, p. 137
Foucault, 1991, p. 213

065
Steidley & Ramey, 2019, p. 5
Meeks, 2006, p. 35
Davis, 2006a, p. 272
Elden, 2007a, p. 562

066
Lefebvre, 1992, p. 26-27

067
Koskela, 2002, p. 298
Fontana-Giusti, 2013, p.93

penitentiary context or to urban and territorial landscapes, is always that there has to be a differential relationship of power between the “guard” and the “prisoner”. That’s exactly why in critical military geography the similitude between governed territory and panopticon is almost given for granted: when an entity of power is able to design the tangible and immaterial realities that constitute the lived space (both able to build the urban fabric and establish the net of control over it), it’s implied that it’s to have full ability over of containing individuals and reducing the possibility of insurrection. Because surveillance depends on an unequal distribution of visibility, information, and capacity to act, surveillance systems (such as CCTV, access controls, policing infrastructures, or data-based monitoring) allow institutions to observe and classify populations while those being observed often have limited knowledge of how, when, or why they are monitored. In military geography, this asymmetry becomes even more pronounced: technologies such as drones, satellites, sensors, and intelligence systems enable one actor to observe and potentially target a territory from a position of relative distance and invisibility, while those on the ground are rendered increasingly visible and exposed. The panoptic principle therefore operates spatially: power is concentrated in the capacity to see, map, classify, and act upon space, while visibility and vulnerability are unevenly distributed among those who inhabit it.

It’s a common reaction among people to think of the panopticon as an immoral and cruel practice, yet often without realizing that the space we inhabit works in analogue way, and often not acknowledging the actually built examples of the structure; we fail to acknowledge the theorisation of this space as a project that was put in motion, still seeing it as a metaphorical philosophical concept, once again confirming a bias of blindness towards the Global South. In fact, Mitchell reminds us of a crucial aspect of wartime innovations in political geography, that being its colonial connotations.[068] Imperialist powers have used the conquered territories of the global South, far away where the moral of the motherland couldn’t reach them, as testing grounds for politics of subjugations and urban configurations of control. Demonstration is the fact that panopticons were built for the most part in colonial India. This colonial genealogy demands that we resist reading the panopticon as a purely Northern philosophical abstraction. Rather, its material history is one of racial capitalism and imperial administration, in which the bodies most subjected to spatial discipline were, and continue to be, those of colonized, racialized, and dispossessed individuals and communities. Contemporary urban militarism, from the policing of migrant neighborhoods to the securitization of protest spaces, must therefore be understood not as a departure from this history but as its ongoing continuation.[069]

The case studies that follow don’t talk about actual panopticons as architectural structures, but rather want to showcase how production of space changes when shaped by dialogues and impositions of the military onto the urban fabric.

068
Mitchell, 1988, p. 26

069
Davis, 2005, p. 272
Gilmore, 2007, p, 5-9, 128

M1.1 Riot-control Urban Planning

This section wants to talk about the application of the panopticon’s mechanisms upon the design of the urban fabric in order to facilitate the containment of specific groups of people and suppress their actions, focusing on the production of violence through architectural registers of construction, destruction, design, use, and history, coming to the conclusion that violence is not only something inflicted upon architecture during warfare or revolts, but something that through architecture can be produced and replicated.[070] With the urban population on a constant rise, cities become smaller representations of the political, ideological, social and economic dynamics of the globe, and along with that become the place where global conflicts are fought on a smaller scale. This scalar compression of global conflict into urban space has been theorized through the concept of the “urbanization of warfare:”[071] as the majority of the world’s population now lives in cities, so too do the majority of the world’s conflicts play out within them, transforming the built environment itself into both a target and a weapon.

The idea of the city as battleground is nothing new to the field of urban military geography: cities become the place in which multiple conflicts happen simultaneously, and militarization is merely the formalization of the process by which violence reveals itself in an explicit manner in space. Conflicts can happen both between citizens as a result of struggles of economic, ideological, and/or racial nature, or can also manifest as revolts aimed at subverting the power of the dominant class; but the common ground of frictions happening within cities is that they happen in a space conceptualized to drive military ways of being. The act of designing and planning resembles the function of the army in the way that both fundamentally anticipate and encourage specific behaviors, ultimately overlapping the urban planner’s and the military strategist’s epistemology: both operate through the projection of future scenarios, the management of movement and congregation,[072] and the preemptive organization of space to produce desired outcomes and foreclose undesired ones.

If architecture can produce and replicate violence, then its modifications must be understood as a political act with spatial logic. This begs the question about whether the concept of *urbicide* can be extended to panopticon-like approaches to urban planning; despite the initial academic definition of the word being used only for instances of large-scale violence against the city fabric (especially after the WWII carpet bombings or the siege of Sarajevo), contemporary applications render the urbicide as the destruction (literal or figurative) of the built environment not to defeat an enemy militarily, but to destroy the conditions of possibility for a particular form of collective life. Where urbanism produces community by constructing shared space, urbicide operates by eliminating precisely that heterogeneous congregational quality of urban existence.[073] Within the panoptic interpretation, the urbicide wouldn’t need to happen by physically destroying any part of the urban nexus, but would exist through a calculated organization of space that chooses whose life is made possible, and whose is foreclosed.

In their practice, the following case studies concern cities that follow the general theme of suppression and control of the masses through architectural design choices applied to the urban space, demonstrating how the panoptic logics of surveillance, containment, and spatial organization have been deployed across different geographies and historical contexts, but always with the common theme of authority preservation.

070
Herscher, 2017, p. 5

071
Graham, 2011, p. 28
Sassen, 2010, p. 34

072
Virilio, 2006, p. 45

073
Coward, 2009, p. 1

"Haussmannisation"

As the most emblematic example of European cities that later scholars attributed to the application of the panopticon system on the layoff of the urban fabric, the haussmannian transformation of Paris is the watershed between a modus operandi that before was applied to colonies and later started to be implemented in motherland and continues to evolve to this day.

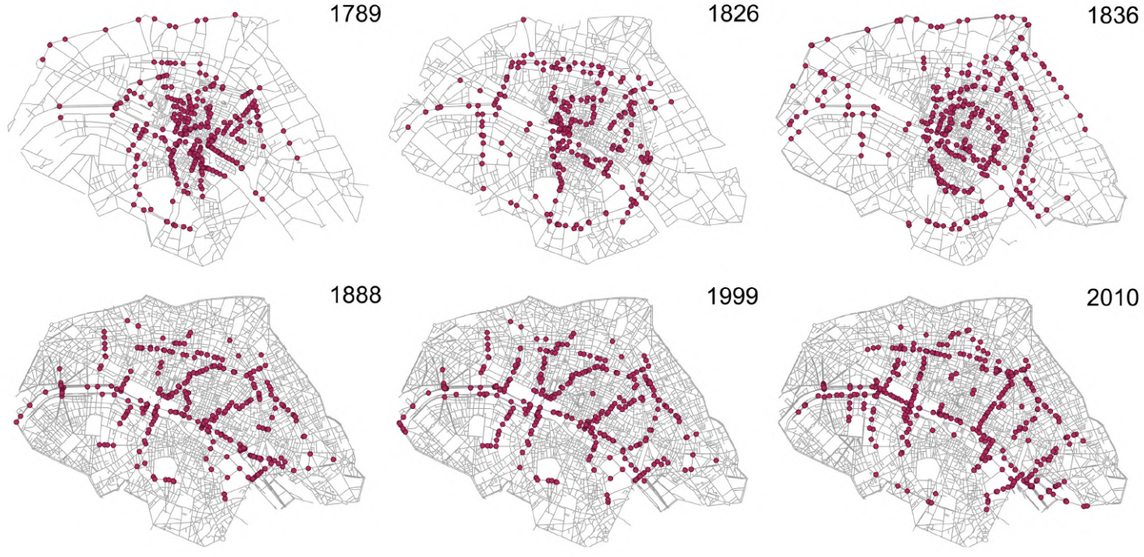
During the Second French Empire, Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann was commissioned by Napoleon III to radically redesign Paris as part of a broader project of urban modernization. In less than two decades, the city was transformed through extensive public works, including the construction of wide boulevards, parks, squares, and new infrastructural networks. This transformation profoundly altered the existing urban fabric, at the expenses of demolishing majority of the old medieval neighborhoods[074]. Although Haussmann is nevertheless also associated with significant improvements in public health and sanitation, including the expansion of sewer systems, water-supply networks, and gas lighting, at the same time, the redevelopment contributed to the displacement of working-class populations from central areas as property values and living costs increased due to the severe gentrification. Despite being attributed the merit of significant public health and sanitation improvements (to be fair the renovations included meaningful enhancements like new sewer systems, water supply networks and integration of gas lightting), critics rose regarding the undisclosed military interests in the city's remodeling.[075]

One of the most persistent interpretations of Haussmannisation concerns the relationship between urban planning and the control of political unrest. The memory of the revolutionary uprisings of 1789, 1830, and 1848 remained central to the political imagination of nineteenth-century France, particularly among ruling elites concerned with the possibility of renewed insurrection. The restructuring of Paris consequently produced a city in which circulation could be organized on a much larger scale. Wide and relatively straight boulevards facilitated the movement of troops and weaponry (like demonstrated in the most recent celebration of the anniversary of the Storming of the Bastille on the 14th of July 2025) while making it more difficult for insurgents to reproduce the narrow, fragmented urban spaces that had historically enabled the construction of barricades. Urban form thus acquired a strategic dimension: the organization of streets, buildings, and circulation routes could influence the capacity of different groups to occupy, defend, or contest the city.

The events of the Paris Commune in 1871 provide an important historical episode through which these dynamics can be examined. Following the Franco-Prussian War, the collapse of the Second Empire, and the political crisis surrounding the provisional government established in Versailles, the socialist self-government rose to power after revolting towards the General Assembly amidst the risk of a return to monarchy, establishing the Paris Commune in March 1871. The power of the Commune was the perfect representation of the ability of bourgeois power to turmoil and create movement that destabilized control, and was able to govern Paris for approximately less than three months after having to deal with the Prussian "occupation"[076] outside of Paris and before being violently suppressed during the Semaine Sanglante (Bloody Week) in May against military troops sent from the Assembly that relocated in Versailles. The conflict demonstrated that the physical organization of the city could become an instrument in the struggle between competing forms of political power. Barricades, streets, public buildings, communication networks, and access to resources all became strategically



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Paris plan with Haussmann's renovations



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Spatial distribution of the most central nodes;

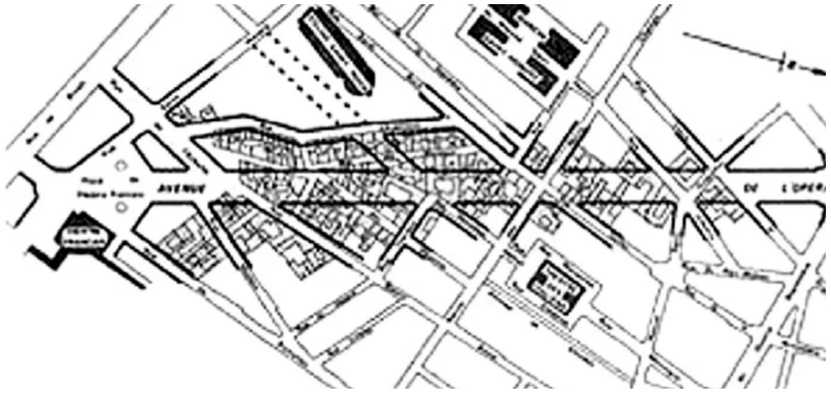
074
de Moncan, 2019, p. 14

075
Lewis Mumford, 1961, p. 365-387

076
Gentile, 2026, p.3

significant. The spatial transformations undertaken during the Haussmann period did not by themselves determine the outcome of the conflict, but the reconfigured urban environment provided military and administrative advantages to forces attempting to regain control of the capital. The Haussmannian transformation also changed the tactical relationship between the military and the urban population. The new boulevards created a city that was more open, legible, and accessible to state forces than the dense and irregular medieval fabric that preceded it. During the suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871, this altered morphology could be used to the advantage of the Versailles troops: broad avenues facilitated the movement and deployment of soldiers and artillery, while the increased visibility along major thoroughfares reduced the capacity of insurgents to use narrow streets and dense urban fabric as defensive spaces. The transformation of the city therefore affected not only circulation but also the possibilities of resistance. The barricade, which depended upon the ability to obstruct and fragment urban circulation, became more difficult to construct and sustain within a city increasingly organized around wide, continuous axes. Architecture and infrastructure consequently became part of the military environment through which the Commune was confronted. The so-idealised innovations were used against La Commune limiting their access to resources, cutting gas supplies, and preventing the construction of barricades. This lead to the end of La Commune and the birth of the Third Empire. Despite Haussmann negating the military implications his oeuvre was contested of,[077] the historical evidence shows how Paris not the first instance in which urban planning was utilized as a military technique, employed by colonizers away from France and the chance of scrutiny. Regardless of the previous knowledge of the promoter of the renovations about its strategic implications, these changes were used in the end to the advantage of suppressive powers. As Karl Marx pointed out, many things could have given the Commune higher chances to survive, but ultimately the thing that the Commune has lacked the most is likely to be time itself, in an effort to transform and subvert the capitalist, imperialist and militarized logics that contextualized the urban fabric in which it was attempting to exist.[078]

The case of Paris therefore illustrates a broader relationship between urban planning, infrastructure, and military power. The significance of Haussmannisation lies not necessarily in proving that every element of the renovation was consciously designed as a military instrument, but in demonstrating that urban transformations can acquire military and political functions regardless of their stated purposes. A boulevard designed simultaneously for sanitation, circulation, commerce, and urban modernization can also become a space that facilitates surveillance, troop movement, and the suppression of collective resistance. Infrastructure can consequently possess multiple and sometimes contradictory political functions.



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Juxtaposition of medieval road network and Haussmanian urban plan

077
Patrice de Moncan, 2002, p. 70

78
Marx & Engels, 2014, p. 70-71

This ambiguity is important when considering urban planning as a technique of power. Aside from making Paris more efficient and hygienic, the Haussmannian city reorganized the possibilities of movement, visibility, access, and occupation. It redistributed populations, transformed property relations, altered patterns of circulation, and changed the spatial conditions under which political action could occur. This is the moment in which urban space became part of the apparatus through which political authority could be exercised.[079] The military function of the city emerged from the configuration of the urban system as a whole, rather than it being contained in a single object or building.

The Haussmannian transformation is significant precisely because it makes visible the possibility that the production of urban space can redistribute power without appearing explicitly coercive. Streets, infrastructures, and buildings are material arrangements, but they also structure what different actors can see, where they can move, how quickly they can mobilize, and which spaces they can occupy. Urban planning can therefore function as a military technique even when its immediate justification is modernization, sanitation, circulation, or economic development.[080] The history of Haussmannisation demonstrates how the organization of space can move power away from the immediate site of confrontation and embed it within the material structure of the city itself. In this sense, the transformation of Paris provides an important historical precedent for understanding urban planning not merely as the design of physical environments, but as a technique through which political, economic, and military relations are materially organized.

This illustrates a broader dimension of Haussmannisation: the military suppression of the Commune did not require the army to construct an entirely new battlefield within Paris. The city itself had already been materially reorganized in ways that altered the balance between mobility, visibility, and concealment. The boulevard could simultaneously function as a space of commerce, circulation, sanitation, and modernization, while also providing the state with greater capacity to move forces through the city and expose concentrations of resistance. Urban architecture thus became a form of indirect military power. Rather than controlling resistance solely through direct force, the state could shape the spatial conditions under which resistance became possible. In this sense, the suppression of the Commune demonstrates how the political effects of urban planning may emerge through the interaction between built form and military practice: the architecture does not determine the outcome of conflict, but it redistributes the tactical possibilities available to the different actors occupying the city.

Haussmannisation can therefore be situated within a much longer history in which urban and territorial organization has been employed as a technique of military and political control. Colonial urbanism provides particularly important examples, as colonial authorities repeatedly reorganized cities through segregation, zoning, road construction, surveillance, and the spatial separation of populations. In these contexts, planning could operate simultaneously as an administrative technology, an economic instrument, and a means of maintaining political and military control.[081] The relationship between urban planning and power consequently extends beyond the specific historical circumstances of nineteenth-century Paris.

Talking about Paris' Haussmannisation allows for a broadening on the topic of urban planning as a military tool and the dislocation of power outside of a "danger-zone", both in its predecessors and its future replicas.

079
Paccoud, 2016, p.349

080
Harvey, 2006, p. 84-87, 107-110

081
Graham, 2009, p. 37

Colonial panopticon

As mentioned before, the perpetration of violence to modify space was a prerogative during processes of colonization, but there are two different conceptions of the application of panopticon to colonies: the first is the one of the actually built prisons that follow the Bentham model, a practice endured mainly by the English colonizers, as most panopticons were built in England, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand;[082] the second application however, is the reproduction of panoptical connotations in the built environment to create open air prisons for colonies within their own settlements, developing a western urban fabric around it as commodity for the colonizers.

This is the case for colonial urban planning in North Africa, a spatial technique through which populations were made increasingly segregated, classifiable, and governable. In French Morocco, the Protectorate did not replace the existing city with a European one; rather, planners such as Henri Prost and administrators such as Hubert Lyautey reorganized the relationship between the existing medina and the ville nouvelle. French colonial policy produced a dual urban structure in which European and Moroccan populations were spatially differentiated.[83] Architecture and urban planning became places where political intentions, cultural representations, and modernization projects converged: the preservation and containment of the medina produced a segregated indigenous space, while the colonial city provided the colonial administration with a more legible and controllable urban environment. In Rabat, for example, the colonial administration maintained the distinction between the old city and the modern city while regulating the medina through specific administrative institutions and urban regulations.[084]

This spatial separation can be read through Foucault's concept of panopticism, although with some caution. More than a literal circular prison, power governs population through the organization of visibility, spatial distribution, observation, classification, and circulation. Colonial planning translated these principles onto the urban scale. The medina was contained within a spatial and administrative framework that rendered its population increasingly identifiable and manageable from outside. In cities such as Marrakech, French planners created a separation between the medina and the European city, including a cordon sanitaire and non-building zones around the old city; similar principles of separation were central to Prost's planning elsewhere in Morocco. Thus, instead of the colonial state needing to see every individual continuously, it could organize the city so that populations, movements, and territories were divided into differentiated spatial categories. The resulting urban form produced an uneven distribution of mobility and visibility:[085] the colonial administration could move, map, regulate, and intervene across the city, while the colonized population was increasingly confined to designated spaces and subjected to regulations governing their movement and built environment.

The medina, therefore, with time turned out to be perfectly insertable within the touristic machine, and became treated as something to be protected from modernization, while simultaneously being prevented from determining the development of the modern city. Its walls, streets, and boundaries became instruments of spatial differentiation. Colonial power did not necessarily need to destroy the old city; it could instead freeze, surround, classify, and contain it.[086] This distinction is important because it reveals a form of colonial power that operates through the production of difference rather than through direct destruction.

In Morocco, the result was a dual city in which the spatial distinction between indigenous and parasitic materialized a political distinction between

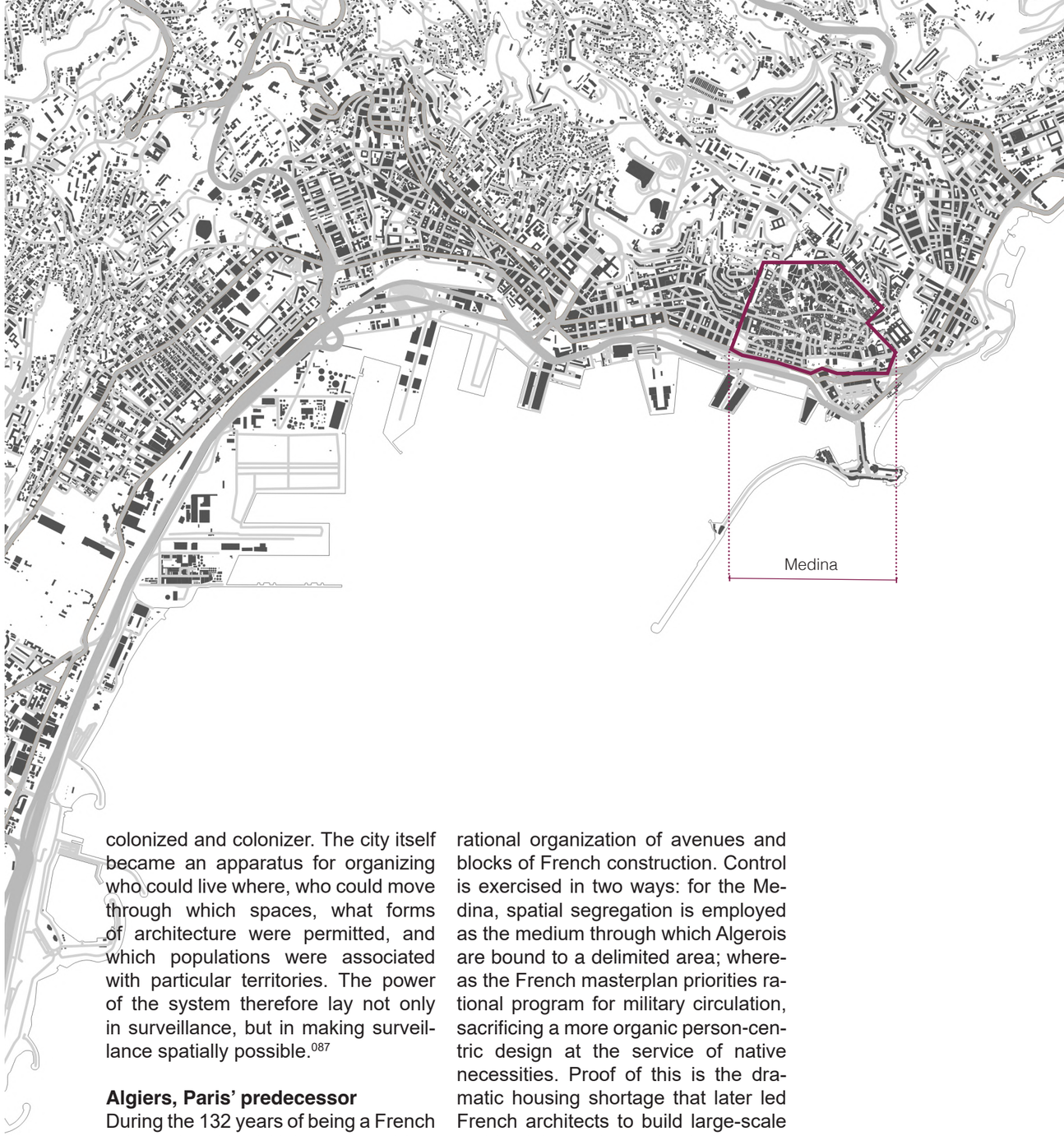
082
Kaplan, 1995, p. 87

083
Abu-Lughod, 2014, p. 3

084
Wright, 1991, p. 74-80

085
Vacher, 2010, p. 88

086
Wagner & Minca, 2014, p. 3014-3016



colonized and colonizer. The city itself became an apparatus for organizing who could live where, who could move through which spaces, what forms of architecture were permitted, and which populations were associated with particular territories. The power of the system therefore lay not only in surveillance, but in making surveillance spatially possible.[087]

Algiers, Paris' predecessor

During the 132 years of being a French colony, the city of Algiers was subject to major spatial modifications of colonial imprint that radically changed its urban fabric and sparked social tensions and conflicts. Since the French infiltration in the city in 1830, Algiers could be seen in a way as a predecessor of the Haussmannian practices applied in Paris. What is evident from the masterplan, is the clearcut division between the native urban settlements (or Medina) and the more rigorous and rational organization of avenues and blocks of French construction. Control is exercised in two ways: for the Medina, spatial segregation is employed as the medium through which Algerois are bound to a delimited area; whereas the French masterplan priorities rational program for military circulation, sacrificing a more organic person-centric design at the service of native necessities. Proof of this is the dramatic housing shortage that later led French architects to build large-scale residential complexes that led to even more spatial conflicts due to the clashing between colonized and the rising number of colonizers. The colonial city is a world cut in two; not metaphorically, but literally through architectural layout,[88] becoming itself an authority commending the native on what they can and can't do.

These frictions were cristallyzed through architecture and urban forms,

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Algiers masterplan

087
Gregory, 2004, p.3

088
Çelik, 1997, p. 36



The Battle of Algiers, 1996
Director Gillo Pontecorvo

and culminated in a revolutionary war for liberation that ended the French hegemony in 1962. Algiers represents one of many examples of colonial cities being used as testing grounds for spatial practices that could be considered trial-and-error as a way to exercise power and control[089] on citizens. These strategies were later to be replicated in cities of the motherland through practices like zoning and racial-economic segregation that represent an ongoing struggle of today's urban life.

Megacities and fleeting authotities

The future of urbanization is increasingly imagined through the figure of the megacity: vast metropolitan formations in which population, infrastructure, capital, information, and political authority become concentrated at unprecedented scales. Large part of the literature on urban studies seems to agree on a common sense of preoccupation over this specific mode of developing the built environment, emphasizing the uneven and often precarious character of urbanization, particularly in the Global South.[090] Generally, rapid urban growth has frequently occurred without corresponding industrialization, employment, housing, or infrastructure, resulting in chunks of populations living in informal settlements and peripheral urban areas. The idea is that the future city, would not necessarily be a more rational or efficiently planned city, but still one characterized by extreme inequalities between highly serviced and highly surveilled central areas and precarious, informal, or marginalized peripheries.

This concern becomes particularly significant when urban planning increasingly incorporates digital infrastructures, surveillance technologies, and data-driven governance, and the emergence of a "programmable city" in which software and data become embedded within the management of urban systems. Information about citizens, movements, infrastructure, and urban environments can be continuously captured, processed, and used to influence how the city operates. It's inevitable the concern that algorithmic governance can shift urban governamentality from conventional forms of surveillance and discipline toward forms of capture and control, in which populations and environments are continuously monitored and their behavior potentially modulated.[091]

The critical question, raised by critical military urbanism scholars, is not whether surveillance technologies can make cities safer or more efficient, but who controls the resulting informational infrastructure and under what political conditions it operates.[092] The "new military urbanism" is a declination of understanding the city born from this issue of constant monitoring, concerned that contemporary security practices increasingly treat everyday urban spaces and populations as objects of tracking, targeting, and control. Identifying the normalization of military and security practices within ordinary urban life, including the integration of digitized technologies of control into everyday infrastructures, means understanding that this militarization of the city coincides with the convergence between smart-city technologies, homeland-security systems, military technologies, and urban surveillance, making everyday urban infrastructures increasingly incorporated into a broader security apparatus.[093]

If this model is already being embedded within the urban fabric of modern cities, the risk for future megacities is the possibility of being able to control not only through surveillance and tracking, but incorporating these aspects in a space that authority is able to design and erect from scratch, transforming the future city within a panoptical dialectic since day zero, where control is embedded within the infrastructure of everyday life.

089
Fanon, 2004, p. 53

090
Davis, 2006b, p. 44

091
Kitchin, 2011, p. 945
Amin & Thrift, 2002, p. 293

092
Woodward, 2004, p. 29

093
Graham, 2009, p. 387



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Metropolis, Fritz Lang, 1927

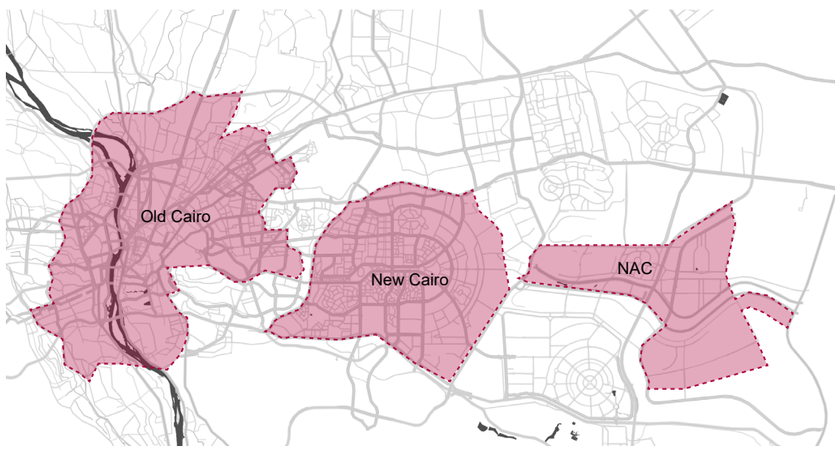
This raises a concern about the emergence of what could be described as a police city: an urban environment in which the anticipation of disorder increasingly shapes planning, architecture, infrastructure, and governance, where the language of security can gradually normalize forms of monitoring that would otherwise be politically controversial regardless of the geographical contexts, spanning between colonial or conflict zones and supposedly peaceful Western cities.

The distinction between civilian urban management and security operations can consequently become increasingly blurred: camera installed for traffic management may also contribute to policing; a biometric identification system developed for border control may become part of ordinary urban administration; a digital map designed for infrastructure management may simultaneously provide authorities with unprecedented knowledge of population movement. The megacity therefore becomes a paradox for future urban planning where on one hand, increasing scale and complexity make information, coordination, and technological infrastructure genuinely necessary; on the other, the same infrastructures can produce new asymmetries of power between institutions capable of collecting and processing urban data and populations who are subjected to those systems without equivalent access to the information produced about them.

The future of the megacity should therefore not be understood simply as a technological problem of managing greater numbers of people. It is fundamentally a question of how urban space will distribute visibility, mobility, information, and power. The danger identified by critical urban scholars is that planning may increasingly prioritize the prevention of disorder over the production of democratic urban life, turning surveillance into an ordinary component of infrastructure rather than an exceptional instrument of policing. Graham's concept of the new military urbanism is particularly useful in this regard because it shows how the city can become simultaneously a space of habitation and a "battlespace"—a territory whose populations and infrastructures are increasingly understood through the categories of risk, threat, prediction, and security. The challenge for future urban planning is consequently not to reject technology or large-scale coordination altogether, but to prevent the smart, efficient, and secure city from becoming synonymous with the controlled city.

Cairo's New Administrative Capital

The constant increase of urban population of the last decades begs the question of how to deal with issues such as less space, informal settlements, and low affordability amidst environmental challenges. The city of Cairo perfectly exemplifies the contemporary trend of megacities experiencing rapid growth alongside increasing environmental inequality. This condition is marked by a clear dual reality: on one hand, informal urban areas characterized by high congestion, pollution, poor sanitation, and lack of green space; on the other, exclusive high-end desert cities offering low-density living, ample spacing, and privatized access to nature. This trend is facilitated by state deregulation, privatization, and commodification of urban space. As a result, the city continues to face severe air pollution, overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, and uneven access to green spaces. Because of the morphology of Egypt, majority of urban settlements rise along the sides of the Nile. It's estimated that 95% of the population occupies only 5% of the total surface area of the country. This brought the birth of the New Urban Communities Authority (NUCA), an economic institution instructed by the Egyptian government to establish new urban settlements located more into desert areas. As of now, since 1977 NUCA has been able to complete 22 projects for new urban communities, with additional ones in ongoing design process or under construction. One could think that these utopic projects are just for the sake of better living, but when looking at the current political climate of Egypt we start noticing coincidences that leave very little to the imagination. In reality, a general issue with new urban communities is the occupancy rate, considering that only 31% of the baffling 30 million expected inhabitants actually live in these communities.[095] Along with that, rather than sustainable affordable heavens, these establishments resemble large mostly-car-dependent gated communities for the ultra rich (two-bedroom apartments starting from 50.000 USD and 12-lane highways[096] are not exactly indicators of green and affordable).
Probably one of the most concerning aspects, especially in the New Administrative Capital, is the strong military presence. Despite advertising itself as a futuristic green heaven, the company that largely funded the construction, the Administrative Capital for Urban Development, is 51% military owned and the NAC already counts more than 6.000 surveillance cameras. Current Egyptian president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi rose to power after the 2013 coup d'état, preceded by two years of protestatory turmoil among citizens. The latest general concern is that president Sisi, well aware of the modality in which the old government was overthrown, is trying to distance himself from old Cairo to avoid the possibility of insurrection due to protests against his government. The masterplan designed by architecture office Skidmore Owings, & Merrill (SOM) is the manifestation of a close collaboration between government, military and architects that aims to achieve delocalization of power in order to be physically untouchable by popular revolts; representing a common trope in the ways in which military modes are employed in urban planning.



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Visual representation of how the new iterations of Cairo seem to physically distance themselves from the heart of possivle insurrections;

094
Kitchin, 2012, p. 945

095
Kadry, 2025

096
Flaschberger 2025



M1.2 Big Brother is watching

The title of this section references the book *1984* by George Orwell, a rather fitting parallelism to talk about how the dynamics of military control within the city have radically transformed with the advent of digital surveillance, to the point that it was this really book the one of the first models that sparked the birth of surveillance studies in the second half of the last century.[097] In the orwellian dystopia, Big Brother is a highly militarized entity that, much like panopticon, watches and educates citizens to discipline, and sedates eventualities of thoughts and actions divergent from the ones of the Party through violent police intervention and re-education. With the digitalization of surveillance infrastructures, control becomes exercised through modulation rather than confinement, enabled by digital technologies and data-driven systems. Within the militarized society, this is evident in the increasing reliance on remote sensing, algorithmic targeting, and virtual infrastructures, which allow for forms of intervention that are both spatially expansive and temporally immediate.[098] The battlefield is thus reconfigured as a dispersed and networked space, where control is exerted at a distance and often without direct physical presence. This metamorphosis of control is talking about how the dynamics of the panopticon that until a certain point were strictly linked to a tangible material manifestation, now lose their physical form to disperse in other spheres.

The fact that authoritarian power loses its body means that it becomes much harder to fight, culminating in forms of societies of control,[099] in which power is no longer confined to enclosed institutions but becomes continuous, flexible, and networked. If the dynamics of spatial control change ontologically, so have to do their critical theories: the demolition of the panopticon[100] as a paradigm becomes necessary step to talk about the new modalities of surveillance. A possible formulation can be found within Agamben's *ban*opticon, a direct reworking of the foucaultian model to talk about the exclusionary policies[101] that characterize our time. In this framework, an important role is played by governments, using security as the excuse to expand and impose this net of surveillance and tracking especially since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Politics of uncertainty and fear become driving powers in the practices of profiling and containing (especially foreigners), representing a threat to the rights of free movement.

Later innovations like satellites represented additional landmarks in the total militarization of the globe. Having total scanning and weaponry in space drastically increases the sense of surveillance we feel thanks to the ease at which circulation of personal information happens. The intersection of technique and control is evident: a highly militarized atmosphere through highly precise and potentially lethal machinery far away where even the human eye can't see it, fundamentally exchanging the spatial position of the roles in the panopticon metaphor, since now it's not the cells that are around the guard tower, but it's the planet that becomes the cell around which the guard tower revolves. There is no ambiguity in whether we're being watched or not, now it's certain. With surveillance becoming decentralized and happening at every scale and in every place,[102] the totalitarian nature of liberal governments is more evident than ever.

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CCTV Countryside, Bansky, 2005

097
Graham, 2011, p. 149

098
Virilio, 2006, p. 139

099
Deleuze, 1992, p. 4

100
Haggerty, 2006, p. 24

101
Bigo, 2008, p. 1
Agamben, 1998, p. 53

102
Maria Los, 2006, p. 72

Technofascism, Palantir's manifesto

Palantir
@PalantirTech

Because we get asked a lot.

The Technological Republic, in brief.

1. **Silicon Valley owes a moral debt to the country that made its rise possible.** The engineering elite of Silicon Valley has an affirmative obligation to participate in the defense of the nation.

2. **We must rebel against the tyranny of the apps.** Is the iPhone our greatest creative if not crowning achievement as a civilization? The object has changed our lives, but it may also now be limiting and constraining our sense of the possible.

3. **Free email is not enough.** The decadence of a culture or civilization, and indeed its ruling class, will be forgiven only if that culture is capable of delivering economic growth and security for the public.

4. **The limits of soft power, of soaring rhetoric alone, have been exposed.** The ability of free and democratic societies to prevail requires something more than moral appeal. It requires hard power, and hard power in this century will be built on software.

5. **The question is not whether A.I. weapons will be built; it is who will build them and for what purpose.** Our adversaries will not pause to indulge in theatrical debates about the merits of developing technologies with critical military and national security applications. They will proceed.

6. **National service should be a universal duty.** We should, as a society, seriously consider moving away from an all-volunteer force and only fight the next war if everyone shares in the risk and the cost.

7. **If a U.S. Marine asks for a better rifle, we should build it; and the same goes for software.** We should as a country be capable of continuing a debate about the appropriateness of military action abroad while remaining unflinching in our commitment to those we have asked to step into harm's way.

8. **Public servants need not be our priests.** Any business that compensated its employees in the way that the federal government compensates public servants would struggle to survive.

9. **We should show far more grace towards those who have subjected themselves to public life.** The eradication of any space for forgiveness—a jettisoning of any tolerance for the complexities and contradictions of the human psyche—may leave us with a cast of characters at the helm we will grow to regret.

10. **The psychologization of modern politics is leading us astray.** Those who look to the political arena to nourish their soul and sense of self, who rely too heavily on their internal life finding expression in people they may never meet, will be left disappointed.

11. **Our society has grown too eager to hasten, and is often gleeful at, the demise of its enemies.** The vanquishing of an opponent is a moment to pause, not rejoice.

12. **The atomic age is ending.** One age of deterrence, the atomic age, is ending, and a new era of deterrence built on A.I. is set to begin.

13. **No other country in the history of the world has advanced progressive values more than this one.** The United States is far from perfect. But it is easy to forget how much more opportunity exists in this country for those who are not hereditary elites than in any other nation on the planet.

14. **American power has made possible an extraordinarily long peace.** Too many have forgotten or perhaps take for granted that nearly a century of some version of peace has prevailed in the world without a great power military conflict. At least three generations — billions of people and their children and now grandchildren — have never known a world war.

15. **The postwar neutering of Germany and Japan must be undone.** The defanging of Germany was an overcorrection for which Europe is now paying a heavy price. A similar and highly theatrical commitment to Japanese pacifism will, if maintained, also threaten to shift the balance of power in Asia.

16. **We should applaud those who attempt to build where the market has failed to act.** The culture almost snickers at Musk's interest in grand narrative, as if billionaires ought to simply stay in their lane of enriching themselves . . . . Any curiosity or genuine interest in the value of what he has created is essentially dismissed, or perhaps lurks from beneath a thinly veiled scorn.

17. **Silicon Valley must play a role in addressing violent crime.** Many politicians across the United States have essentially shrugged when it comes to violent crime, abandoning any serious efforts to address the problem or take on any risk with their constituencies or donors in coming up with solutions and experiments in what should be a desperate bid to save lives.

18. **The ruthless exposure of the private lives of public figures drives far too much talent away from government service.** The public arena—and the shallow and petty assaults against those who dare to do something other than enrich themselves—has become so unforgiving that the republic is left with a significant roster of ineffectual, empty vessels whose ambition one would forgive if there were any genuine belief structure lurking within.

19. **The caution in public life that we unwittingly encourage is corrosive.** Those who say nothing wrong often say nothing much at all.

20. **The pervasive intolerance of religious belief in certain circles must be resisted.** The elite's intolerance of religious belief is perhaps one of the most telling signs that its political project constitutes a less open intellectual movement than many within it would claim.

21. **Some cultures have produced vital advances; others remain dysfunctional and regressive.** All cultures are now equal. Criticism and value judgments are forbidden. Yet this new dogma glosses over the fact that certain cultures and indeed subcultures . . . have produced wonders. Others have proven middling, and worse, regressive and harmful.

22. **We must resist the shallow temptation of a vacant and hollow pluralism.** We, in America and more broadly the West, have for the past half century resisted defining national cultures in the name of inclusivity. But inclusion into what?

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Excerpts from the #1 New York Times Bestseller The Technological Republic: Hard Power, Soft Belief, and the Future of the West, by Alexander C. Karp & Nicholas W. Zamiska

Palantir Technologies was founded in Silicon Valley in 2003 by Peter Thiel (co-founder of PayPal) together with Alex Karp, Nathan Gettings, Joe Lonsdale, and Stephen Cohen. The founders' initial stated vision was to adapt data analysis technology developed for PayPal's fraud detection into a large-scale software platform enabling government agencies to analyze massive amounts of data for anti-terrorism purposes while, they claimed, preserving the civil liberties of American citizens. In the long run what came of it was that this framing was always precarious, and its subsequent erosion is not incidental but structural: the product of a business model that depends on the continuous expansion of the security state's appetite for private data, manifesting itself through extensive surveillance and military deployment, gaining consensus from intense government-funded propaganda and especially during post 9/11 general security hysteria. Palantir was not a civilian technology that found military applications, as that was incubated within the intelligence apparatus from the beginning. Being one of today's most influential companies in the fields of military development, surveillance and AI, its name, literally meaning "the eye that sees everything" from the magical crystal sphere in Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, is already pretty evocative of its intended purpose: total surveillance and control.

On the 18th of April 2026, the X account of Palantir published a 22-point manifesto on their idea of Technological Republic as a condensation of CEO Alex Karp and Nicholas Zamiska's book *The Technological Republic*; a synthesis that leaves very little to the imagination on the company's beliefs and future plans: a public articulation of a clear spatial ideology, a declaration of how power should be organized in space, by whom, and in whose interest, issued not by state, but by corporations whose revenue depends entirely on the politics it is advocating. In this case that means selling operational software to defense, intelligence, immigration, and police agencies. Having also been compared to a "rambling of a supervillain", the manifesto in this sense is technique presenting itself as ethics.

From a critical military geography perspective, the manifesto's most significant feature is the way it collapses the distinction between the civilian and the military, the technical and the political, the product and the ideology. Its argument in the first point that Silicon Valley owes a moral debt to the country that enabled its rise (the US), and that the engineering elite has an "affirmative obligation to participate in the defense of the nation," constitutes a direct call for the formalization of the military-industrial-academic complex[103] identified as one of the primary mechanisms through which the economy of war reproduces itself through civilian institutions. The framing of this obligation as moral rather than contractual is the document's ideological core: it attempts to transform a commercial relationship into an ethical imperative, naturalizing the entanglement of private capital and military power in a relation of military technique at the service of capital and the state, disguised as duty.[104]

The manifesto's spatial imagination is equally legible as a continuation of colonial agendas. In its 13th, 14th and 21st points, the repeated invocation of "the West"and the U.S. as a coherent and superior civilizational and pacifying actor, culminating in the assertion that pluralism and inclusivity must be resisted in favor of recognizing that certain cultures are harmful and regressive, reproduces exactly the hierarchical geography which is at the epistemic foundation of colonial spatial control: a world divided into the fully human and the administered, the settler and the managed.[105] The manifesto's rejection of what it calls "vacant pluralism" is a justification for the differential treatment of populations in space that advocates for the existence of zones in which some lives are legible as political subjects and others as security problems to be processed and managed.

During an investor call, founder Alex Karp stated that the role of Palantir is to make the institutions they partner with the best in the world, as well as arriving to scare its enemies and, when necessary, kill them. The company's concrete spatial practices make this legible at a material level. After announcing a strategic partnership with Israel's IDF in January 2024, the spy tech giant significantly expanded its operations in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, integrating intercepted communications, satellite data, and digital sources to help produce targeting databases (effectively kill lists) for the Israeli military. This is urbicide as algorithmic practice: the elimination not of a building but of the conditions of possibility for a population's legibility, reducing Palestinian lives to data points in a targeting system. Concurrently, in the United States, Palantir secured a $30 million contract with ICE to develop ImmigrationOS, designed to streamline deportation of individuals targeted through predictive algorithms aiming to manage population flows into the infrastructure of mass deportation. In both of these cases and in the complete entourage of AI kill technology and mass surveillance, the panopticon doesn't exist only on a material level with what is phisically perceptible like CCTV and identification, but becomes digitalized into the database: a form of control that is invisible, cumulative, and structurally resistant to democratic contestation precisely because it presents itself as neutral technical processing rather than political decision. However, strong criticism about the biopolitical implications this has should be brought up as necessary contestation on the digitalization of individuals and their subsequent de-humanization to favor a hegemonic system of control in favor of government interests.

When read as a spatial document rather than a political philosophy, the manifesto ultimately reveals the completion of a circuit that critical military geography has long traced: the militarization of civilian space, the normalization of surveillance as governance, and the privatization of sovereign violence. It's important to note however that Palantir did not invent this circuit, but inherited it from the genealogy of military technique that runs from colonial cartography through ARPANET to predictive policing. What is new is the manifesto's straightforwardness: the explicit claim that this is not only what Palantir does but what it believes, and that believing it is a form of moral superiority over those who dissent. This manifesto is an attempt to fix the distribution of the sensible[106] to determine, once and for all, which questions about the relationship between technology and violence are legitimate political objects and which are merely "theatrical debates" that responsible engineers must refuse to indulge. The foreclosing of that space of contestation is itself an act of spatial power, and perhaps the most consequential one the document performs.

As it's something that will be discussed later on, it's still relevant to mention now the entanglement of the manifesto's spatial logic within the dromological framework of total war. In its Virilian sense, this logic is organized entirely around the premise that the control of speed and information constitutes the decisive form of contemporary power. In point 4, the assertion that "the ability of free and democratic societies to prevail requires hard power, and hard power in this century will be built on software," positions AI as the constitutive infrastructure of the next era of deterrence, ultimately replacing the atomic age's logic of mutual destruction with one of total informational dominance. In the next point it becomes clear that AI is considered not only a necessity for the goals of securitization and innovation, but becomes the contemporary deterrence factor for spreading narratives of fear, since its stated that if the West is not the one harnessing the full potential of AI applied to military and surveillance to defend itself, what are called "our adversaries" will do that first and use it againsst us.[107] This is not a departure from military technique but its most advanced iteration: the battlefield is no longer primarily territorial but computational, and the management of differential mobilities, whether of data, populations, targeting, becomes the fundamental act of sovereignty. What Palantir is selling, and what the manifesto is justifying, is the capacity to govern movement faster than it can resist governance.

103
Giroux, 2015, p. 28

104
Galli, 2025, p. 12

105
Fanon, 2004, p. 53

106
Rancière, 2004, p. 12-13

107
Galli, 2025, p. 72
Kirby, 1994, p. 303

Surveiled cities

It seems evident that surveillance is at this point a intrinsic component of the urban fabric and of the ways in which citizens have been domesticated to its presence.[108] In the contemporary city, authority can distribute surveillance across cameras, sensors, databases, smartphones, biometric systems, transportation networks, and algorithmic platforms. The city itself becomes an information-generating environment in which movement, identity, consumption, and behavior can be rendered increasingly visible and manageable to institutions.[109]

Even in cities considered to be at peace, surveillance and security increasingly shape the production of urban space, blurring the distinction between ordinary urban planning and policing. London provides a particularly clear example of this: through the Secured by Design framework, Metropolitan Police Designing Out Crime Officers (DOCOs) advise architects, developers, and local authorities on the design of buildings and public spaces, influencing elements such as lighting, fencing, access points, landscaping, circulation routes, and the placement of CCTV. The London Assembly reported that MPS DOCOs had consulted on approximately 8,000 developments over four years, while conducting hundreds of environmental visual audits of existing spaces.[110] This means that policing is not confined to responding to crime after it occurs: it can intervene before a building or public space exists, helping determine the physical conditions under which urban life will take place. In this sense, surveillance becomes architectural. The logic of security is embedded within the built environment through what can be seen, who can enter, where people can gather, and which spaces are made more or less accessible. Contemporary security measures such as hostile-vehicle mitigation similarly transform streets and public spaces through barriers and controlled access. The significance of this development doesn't want to imply that London has become a "police city," but that the boundary between urban planning and policing becomes increasingly porous: the peaceful city is planned partly in anticipation of potential disorder, crime, or attack. Architecture consequently becomes a preventive technology of governance, shifting surveillance and security from an exceptional response to a permanent condition incorporated into the ordinary production of urban space that allows for easier installation of surveillance technology.

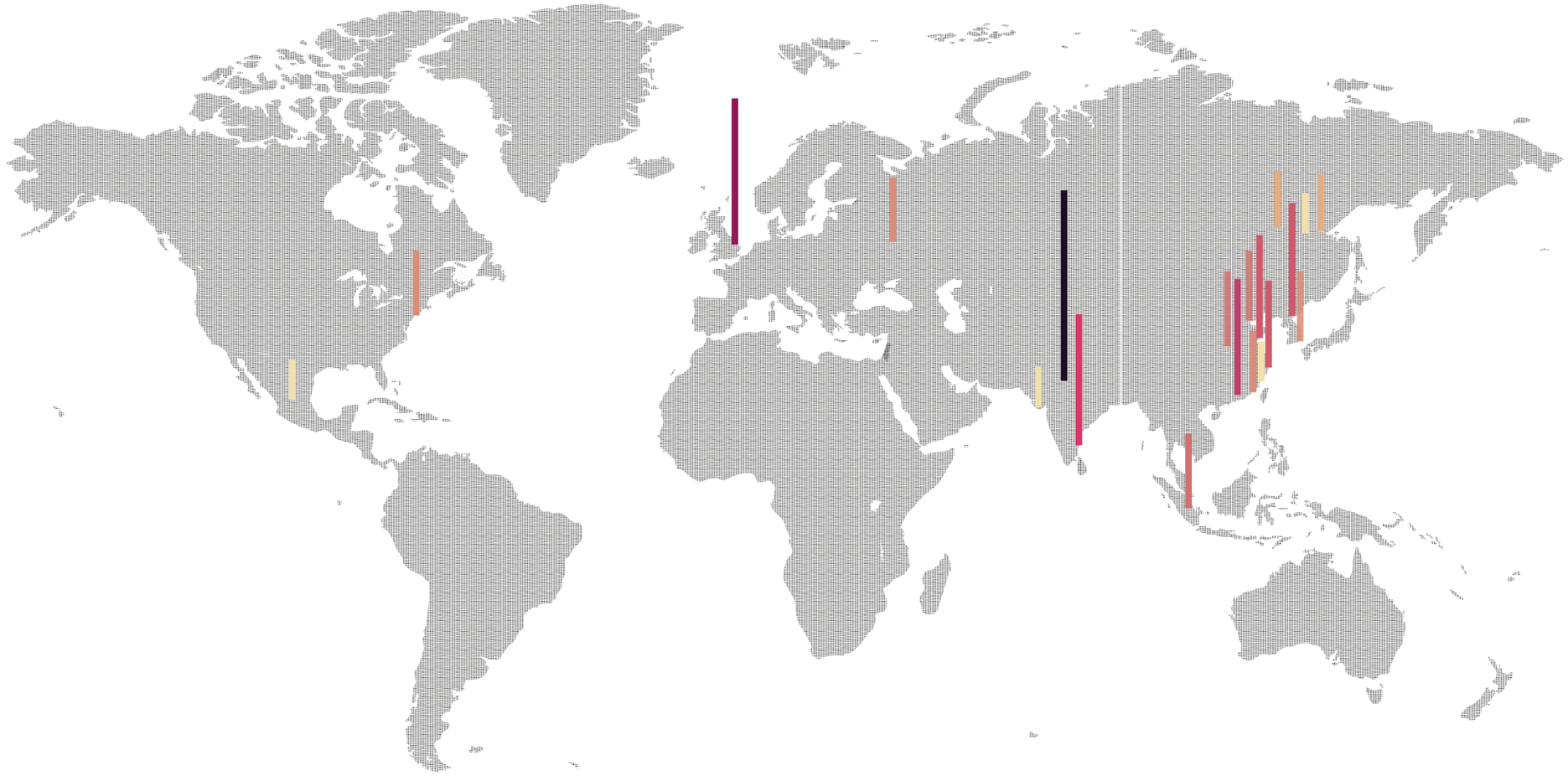
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Cities with most surveillance cameras per square mile

108
Foucault, 1991, p. 133

109
Kitchin, 2012, p. 946

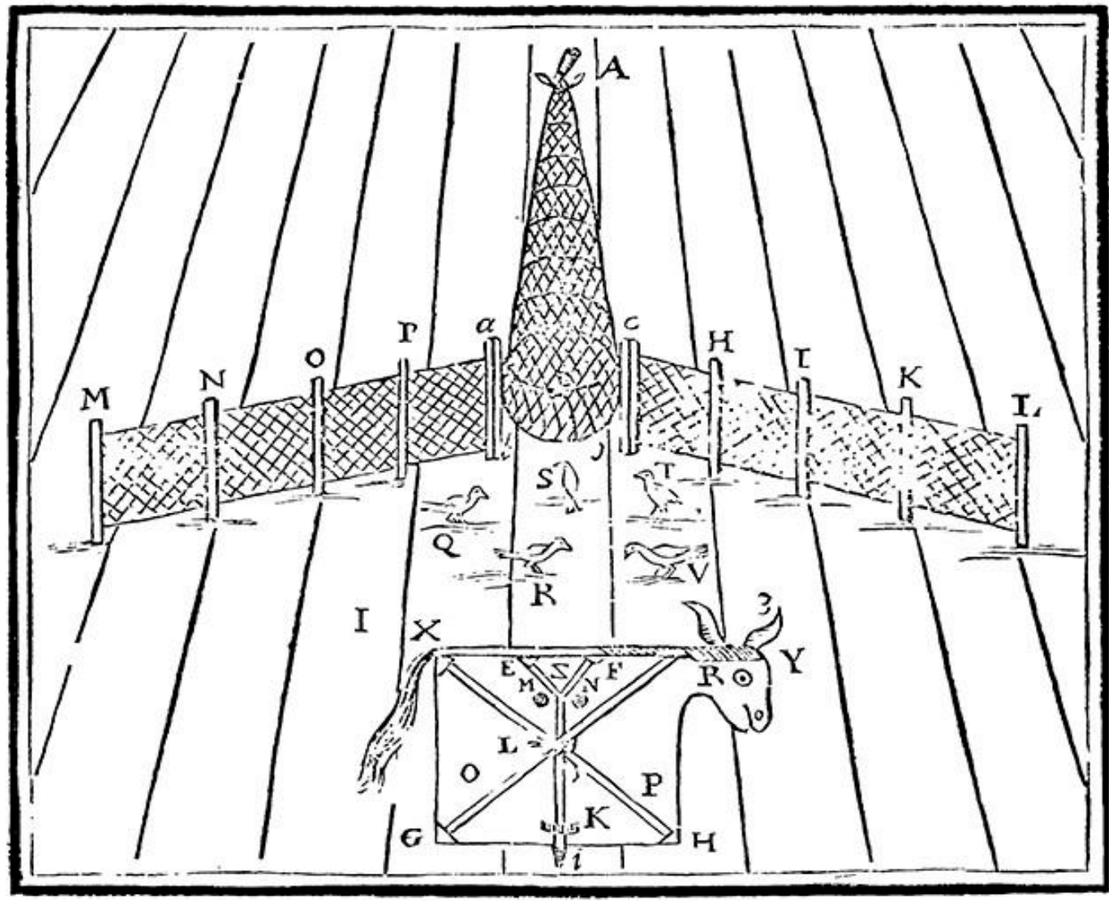
110
Safe by Design, London Municipaluty

Dehli, India	1.826,6
London, UK	1.138,5
Chennai, India	609,9
Shenzhen, China	520,1
Wuxi, China	472,7
Qingdao, China	415,8
Shanghai, China	408,5
Singapore	387,6
Changsha, China	353,9
Wuhan, China	339
Seoul, South Korea	331,9
Xianmen, China	228,7
Moscow, Russia	210
New York, US	193,7
Beijing, China	181,5
Taiyuan, China	174,4
Suzhou, China	165,6
Mumbai, India	157,4
Mexico CIty, Mexico	151,7
Changchun, China	139,6



Panopticon cities

M2. Dromological militarism



Rather than a philosopher, Paul Virilio called himself a "dromologist", or the one concerned with the study of dromology (*dromos*=race course from ancient Greek). The term coined by the same author, meaning the philosophy of speed, wants to explain how processes of nature get formalized and materialized as cities, states, and practices, arguing it through the hermeneutic of the military. He does this through the analysis of the government of differential mobilities, meaning how practices of harnessing and mobilizing, incarcerating and liberating things and people, are core mechanisms of the functioning of both individual and global dynamics.

Starting from an archaeological model found in Aristotle's Epitaph, in which it's stated that the essential object of any social system is to organize the military institution like all the others, Virilio looks at the ways in which society is organized and constructed and the way this influences our possibilities of being. He does this by looking at speed at a multiscalar level, highlighting a chronology of evolution in policies and technological advancements that contributed (and still contribute) to the shaping of society that runs on warfare in order to function.[111]

When it comes to state-making, stasis and circulation are the fundamental forces that regulate the formation of cities and societies. Harnessing the power to control and regulate these forces allows for the subsequent control of the space in which these forces operate. This way of organizing societal flows is very reminiscent of what Deleauze and Guattari call Apparatus of caputre,[112] a device used to represent the state's mechanisms of capturing, controlling and re-educating the flows of individuals that are out of its control. What Virilio does is to slightly modify Foucault. While the latter deals more with control, like in the model of the prison as a state of maximum visibility in which the idea of knowledge becomes a method of power;[113] Virilio plays with this concept and argues that power-knowledge is eliminated to moving-power. What is managed is not knowledge (like in the panopticon) but movement, never completely arrested, but managed. For dromology, we should study more tendencies and flows, rather than the management of knowledge that constitutes societies, since the second is ultimately a consequence of the first. With this way of operating, cities become like filters of circulation (whether of people, goods, knowledge), ultimately organized in such a way that they can grow faster than the incoming "threat", allowing for it to be more manageable overtime. This concept can be scaled to larger entities like states and governments, that manage flows by militarily reinforcing their internal and external borders through police and military personnel. The same approach is used also for wars and internal conflicts, by stretching the conflict over a long period of time to make it more palatable and controllable, instating the idea of defeating without the need of fighting.[114]

In a dromological society, regulation of speed is the fundamental ability that guarantees control. At the social level, this control manifests itself through center-periphery relations, like workers and lower class always being in movement (or being moved around) compared to the steady central authority. This is very reminiscent of the models of urban growth made by the Chicago School,[115] where even in the disomogeneous model, there's always a central nuclei around which the city revolves and/or develops. For Virilio, the strength of the buourgeoisie lies in its possibility to settle down, which when constituting cities and states on a larger scale, this makes it so that ideas of homeliness and nationality (and thus nationalism and territorialism) become embedded in society. In the end, it becomes a matter of managing and assessing the concepts of territory and its borders. In doing so, movement is used in two ways that often coexist: one is for expansionary purposes, and the other is to economically profit off of the dynamics between the in and out of borders.

The historical role of the French Revolution was a turning point in dromological analysis: the royal authority's incapability of suppressing the insurrections implied that the bourgeois' power was much more military than economic, yet it was a waking call for authoritarian powers to try to find more optimal ways to control these mobilizations. One of the first things that happened was the construction and nationalization of highways as a way to unify the country, but also for better controlling it through infrastructure. Additionally, the sudden realization that revolutionary movements could represent obstacles in the state's interests, the desire to conquer the waters rose.[116] Since the sea lacks absolute obstacles, the question now is: what happens when the sea gets controlled and materialized? On a practical level, there's a desire for exclusive domination of the sea for commerce for hegemony, monopolizing resources and movement. However, with the expansion of naval control, the very identity of the state would change, now becoming a mode of controlling, rather than just bound borders, blurring the lines between land and water. It's important to note though, that the desire to excercise control on sea was not the workings of the mercantile bourgeois that were part of commercial roads between maritime republics, but came directly from the states' authority the merchants were subject to.

Given the full accessibility and freedom of movement in every direction (only on surface though), naval







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Apparatus of Capture

111
Virilio, 1996, p. 23

112
Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 424
Smith, 2018, p. 223
Tilly, 1985, p. 171

113
Foucault, 1991, p. 18

^^
Models of urban growth theorized by the Chicago School

114
Virilio, 1986, p. 47

115
Burgess, 1925, p. 50

116
Virilio, 1986, p. 83

battles became the initial example of what Virilio calls total war, meaning that's happening everywhere. By re-designing the map of the world, there came the idea that states could import and transport war elsewhere. This had huge economical implications, since it meant that now states were able to create the sources of its conflict (more recent examples are the Suez and Panama canals that still today are at center of economic conflicts and interests), making of conflict a vehicular body. Now that the entire globe constituted a newly designed space of competition, war and transport became constitutive for trade and commerce at the global scale, still being perfectly aligned with today's market model of buying cheaper somewhere to profit by reselling at higher price somewhere else.

If in dromology stasis is death, this can apply also to empires, since the inability to expand implies the impossibility to extract resources from other places, making fighting against inflation in the homeland extremely hard without increasing capital to contrast that. This economical motivation became itself a reproduction of speed taking the shape of a sort of competition between European powers like in the "race for Africa".For Virilio, history progresses at the speed of its weapon systems, which is why the role of the dromological vehicle became fundamental in expansionary projects especially in colonial contexts. It's not about distance anymore, but rather about reachability at a certain speed. Western men were successful in colonial genocide simply because they were faster; this swiftness manifested in both the ways in which they operated and moved, but also from advantages like the shotgun, representing the technological inequalities on which colonial control thrives.[117] The West's hysteria for a "right to the Earth" made it so that the notion of nation became intrinsecally notion of penetration and expansion. Historically, this was further justified by concepts like the "white man's burden" to go around the globe to educate the uncivilzed, a model that still lives on today through the imperialist powers especially of the U.S. carrying out wars to "bring democracy" to countries that refuse economic subjugation.

Living in a dromocratic society is all about the ways in which the bodies of the modern proletariat have been co-opted by a number of military tactics in order to neutralize these bodies into an economy of circulation and constant accellerating exchange. Right now, after conquering the entirety of the physical realm, the dromocratic society exists by controlling and administrating virtual spaces,[118] expanding a logistical apparatus that transforms circulation of knowledge into the center of operational society. Yet one can ask themselves, is there someone immune to the dromocratic society? Virilio finds the answer in the "fleeting being". The fleeting being allows for a new dromocratic idea: the one of displacement without destination in space and time.[119] It imposes the idea of disappearance and distance from cataclism, ultimately breaking free from the oppressive system, that has to be careful not to be caught in the state's apparatus of capture. If I were to give an interpretation of the apparatus of capture, it would be that in all of its possible manifestations, it becomes a sort of extension of the panopticon. What before was conceptualized as a static essence of space, now is given limbs able to move and draw individuals in, an instrument that intercepts and puts everything where it's supposed to be through deployment of military power and control.

The following topics follow tropes of the philosophy of speed, presenting case studies that work by accellerating or blocking movement, displaying ways of how military power deals differently between flows of people, knowledge, and commodities.

117
Headrick, 1981, p. 198

118
Kurgan, 2013, p.53

119
Virilio, 1986, p. 55

M2.1 Vertical conquest

Until a certain point in history, wars were strictly horizontal. While that has never been true on an ideological level, with one or more sides always wanting to vertically subjugate the other(s), what I mean by this is that making warfare implied that regardless of the medium through which it was happening, whether on land or at sea, it was "with your feet on the ground". A sudden shift happened with technological advancements that lead to aerial warfare. Being able to fly (or sink deep with submarines) at a considerable distance from the ground and at elevated speed implied almost certain advantage against the other front tied on the surface (or just slower). Most notably Virilio has discussed how aerial warfare in World War I opened up a new chapter of war, it being battlespace, rather than just a battlefield. Despite this, the concept of having the high-ground in battle was always a direct indicator of who had the advantage compared to the other. Virilio argues that in just a few years modern technology has transformed war from a horizontal, surface-level conflict into a "volume" or "vertical" phenomenon, encompassing the sky, space, and underground.[120]

Adding dimensions to war, thus stretching it out, meant having more control to operationalize it. Colonizing the sky, and later conquering air space, were the new frontiers of the last and current century, that would guarantee indiscriminate control and influence on the surface below (or above). For dromology, the ease and speed at which a weapon could be transported/utilized went at the same pace as its destructive power. The higher machines went, the more indiscriminate they were with their targets; one could also argue that seeing people as small as ants from above, deprived the operators of bombs and planes of the little empathy they had in them. The impacts of this were clearly visible in World War II, when civilian populations became targets in ways they had never been before, with an impact even in countries that had not been invaded such as Britain and Japan. Since then, wars and conflicts have been characterized by acts of atmoterrorism,[121] meaning concerns not only of bombs and missiles, but also of radioactivity and meteorology (the terminology also hinted at this, think of terms like *Feuersturm*, the "storm of fire caused by magnesium bombs used during WW2). The differentials in counter-attack potential between military and resistance keep getting exponentially larger: while attacks from truck or car bombs were threats to the security of a state or powerful entity, often getting the title of "poor man's airforce", there were means of prevention that could be employed like walls and fences; on the other hand, aerial attacks are much harder to prevent, yet the privilege of being optimally vertically shielded is a reality only for the richer countries.[122]

In current times it's not anymore about inhabiting a territory that has to be fortified like a medieval city, but rather it becomes about strategies concerning speed of penetration. With the advent of internet and weaponry located in space, geographic localization seems to have lost its strategic value, transferring all the attention to the delocalization of the vectors; now what matters is the speed of the moving body and the undetectability of its path. What matters now are the politics of imperceptibility. The competitiveness of superpowers now concerns not where can we get to but who can get there faster and more imperceptibility. Already with space colonized through satellites, the virilian idea of absolute war had become a reality,[123] as that represented the very last frontier necessary to ensure that the absolute war could be promoted, replicated and maintained through its insediation and manipulation of virtual spaces in a society that is extremely dependent and influenced by media. As the differential verticality kept increasing and transforming, today's perception makes it seem as if controlling authorities are far from reach, giving us the idea that we are powerless to the possibility of overthrowing these hegemonies.

120
Virilio, 1986, p. 46

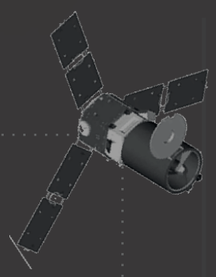
121
Sloterdijk, 2009, p. 21

122
Elden, 2013, p. 33

123
Virilio, 1986, p. 109

1910 1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 1980 1990

















Evolutionary trend

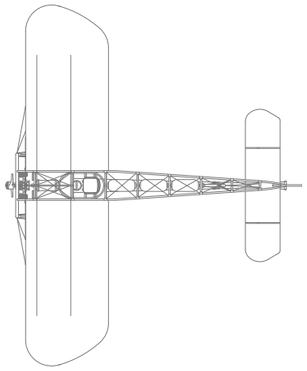
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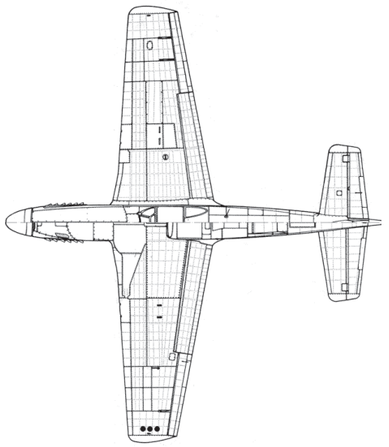
Military history can be read not only as the history of increasingly destructive weapons, but also as the history of an expanding conquest of new space and new directions, transforming warfare into a volumetric practice operating across multiple spatial dimensions. This geographical and technological transformation geographical completely reorganized the spatial conditions through which war is conducted.
Paul Virilio argues that modern warfare is inseparable from the acceleration of movement, as speed is considered the primary source of political and strategic power. Every technological innovation that increases velocity simultaneously alters the relationship between territory, distance, control, alimenting range of action and destructive power, and the history of vertical warfare and its dromological technologies shows this clearly.

The emergence of military aviation marked one of the first decisive moments in this transformation. During the Italo-Turkish War (1911–1912), Italian forces carried out the first military use of aircraft for reconnaissance and aerial bombing. Although these operations were militarily limited, they represented a profound conceptual rupture. Warfare was no longer restricted to the two-dimensional battlefield; military power could now operate vertically. Aircraft allowed armies to bypass natural barriers, observe enemy positions from above and strike targets that were previously protected by geographical distance. During the First World War, aviation rapidly evolved into an indispensable component of military operations, integrating reconnaissance, air superiority and strategic bombing into modern warfare. The battlefield expanded upward, introducing the atmosphere as a new military domain.

This extension of warfare into the air fundamentally altered the geography of conflict. Traditional defensive infrastructures (fortifications, mountains, rivers and borders) lost much of their protective value once military force could move above them. The aerial perspective also transformed military knowledge itself. Seeing from above became a strategic advantage, allowing armies to map, classify and target territory with unprecedented precision. Vision became inseparable from violence[124]. The military conquest of verticality was therefore both technological but epistemological: aerial observation produced new ways of understanding, controlling and ultimately attacking space.



Model: Blériot XI
Employed: WW1
Maximum speed: 75,6 km/h
Maximum altitude: 1.000 m

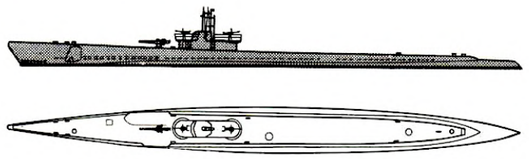


Model: North American P-51 Mustang
Employed: WW2
Maximum speed: 703 km/h
Maximum altitude: 12.700 m

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Vertical warfare evolution over the decades

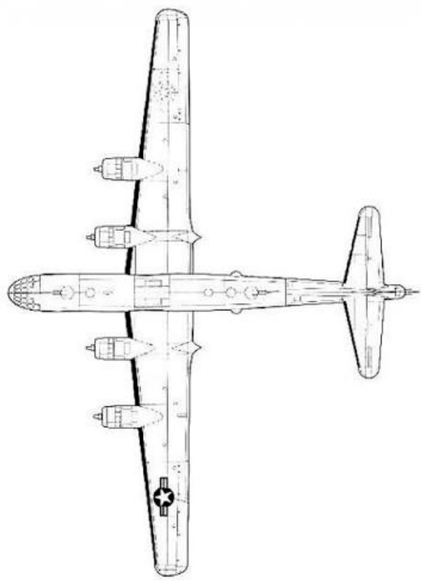
124
Graham, 2013, p, 77

125
Virilio, 1996, p. 54



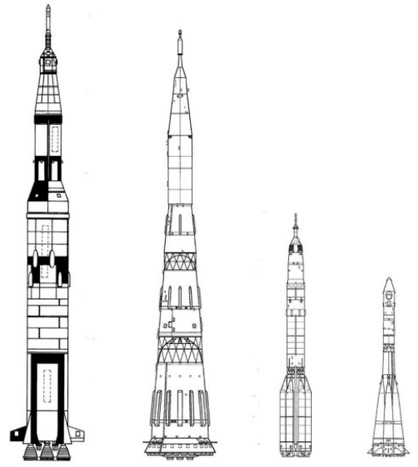
Model: Balao Class submarine
Employed: WW2
Maximum speed: 16,2 km/h
Maximum Depth: 120 m

A comparable transformation occurred beneath the surface of the sea. The development of submarine warfare introduced another vertical dimension to military geography by rendering the oceans volumetric rather than shallow navigable surfaces. During the Second World War, submarines became central instruments for disrupting maritime circulation, attacking supply routes and projecting military force invisibly across vast distances. Their strategic significance illustrates an important shift in the logic of warfare. Rather than conquering territory directly, military power increasingly sought to control flows of commodities, resources and logistics.[126] The submarine exemplifies how the geography of war expanded into previously inaccessible environments while simultaneously making conflict less visible. The battlefield became submerged, hidden and increasingly detached from direct territorial occupation.



Model: Boeing B-29 Superfortress
Employed: WW2, Hiroshima bombing
Maximum speed: 16,2 km/h
Maximum Depth: 120 m

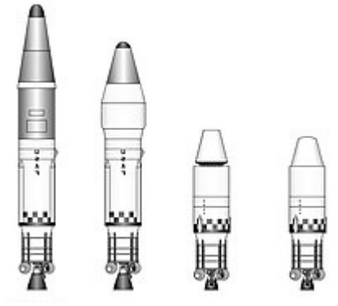
The culmination of aerial warfare emerged with the development of strategic bombing and nuclear weapons. The atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki represented the most extreme expression of the compression of space and time that Virilio identifies as characteristic of modern warfare. Delivered by the B-29 bombers Enola Gay and Bockscar, the atomic bombs condensed unprecedented destructive capacity into a single moment.[127] Entire urban environments could be annihilated within seconds. The temporal duration of battle collapsed into instantaneous destruction. Virilio argues that this acceleration fundamentally alters the relationship between movement and violence. With ballistic missiles, rockets and supersonic technologies, penetration and destruction increasingly coincide. The trajectory of the weapon becomes indistinguishable from the event of destruction itself. If earlier forms of transport reduced distance by increasing mobility, missile technologies render time itself increasingly irrelevant. The decisive strategic advantage no longer lies merely in occupying territory but in the capacity to strike almost instantaneously across it. This transformation produces what is described by scholars as a double disappearance. On one hand, there is the disappearance of matter through physical destruction. On the other, there is the disappearance of place itself as geographical distance ceases to provide meaningful protection.[128] Cities are no longer destroyed through prolonged sieges but through the immediate arrival of technologically accelerated violence. Speed dissolves the spatial separation between battlefield and target.



Model: Various ballistic missiles
Maximum speed: 3.700-28.000 km/h

Recent conflicts demonstrate that this logic persists even when destruction is temporally extended. The Israeli military campaign in Gaza illustrates how immense destructive force may be distributed across months rather than concentrated into a single nuclear event. The cumulative effects of repeated aerial bombardment produce levels of devastation comparable to those historically associated with weapons of mass destruction, yet violence unfolds through continuous military operations rather than a singular catastrophic explosion an thus seemingly more “acceptable” (estimated to be around 70.000 tonnes explosive weapons used in Gaza, which would mean the equivalent of six Hiroshima bombs).[129] The distinction between instantaneous and prolonged destruction therefore concerns temporal distribution rather than destructive capacity itself. Military acceleration has not eliminated duration but has reorganized it.

Stephen Graham argues that these technologies increasingly produce what he describes as “vertical geopolitics.” Advanced surveillance systems, precision-guided weapons and remote sensing technologies transform cities (particularly the ones in the Global South) into operational battlespaces in which everyday urban infrastructures become objects of military calculation. Distance is managed technologically so that military personnel may remain physically removed from the spaces in which violence is exercised.[130] The geographical separation between operator and target



Model: Samos reconaissance satellites
Employed: 1960s
Maximum altitude: 557 km

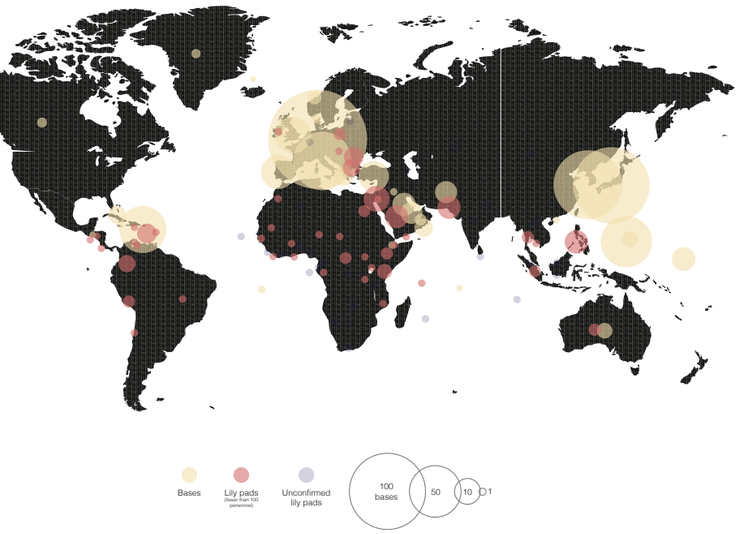
126
Virilio, 1996, p.65

127
Ibid., p. 68

128
Cowen & Gilbert, 2008, p. 21

129
Rogers, 2010, p. 26

130
Graham, 2004, p. 12



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Global footprint of the US military

131
Lindsay-Poland & Jeffery, 2009, p.49

132
Woodward, 2005, p.727-730

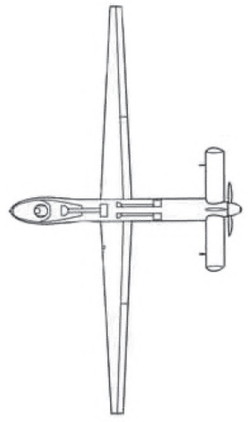
grows larger even as the precision of intervention increases. The result is a form of remote warfare in which military power operates simultaneously through proximity of information and distance of embodiment.

The conquest of space is not limited to weapons themselves but also depends upon extensive geographical infrastructures that sustain military mobility. Overseas military bases constitute one of the most significant spatial expressions of contemporary military power. Rather than projecting force exclusively from national territory, states increasingly rely upon distributed networks of permanent installations positioned across the globe that instate dynamics that are analogue the ones of colonialism.[131] These bases compress geopolitical distance by maintaining military capabilities permanently close to regions of strategic interest. Woodward notes that, in 1999, approximately 60,000 United States military personnel were stationed in Japan, more than half of whom were based on Okinawa. The island hosts dozens of military installations together with tens of thousands of service members and their families, despite representing only a small proportion of Japanese territory. Such concentrations reveal that military geography is not simply about defending national borders but about constructing an international architecture of logistical reach.[132] Military presence itself becomes infrastructural, where territory is valued less for its sovereignty than for its strategic location within global networks of mobility.

For Virilio, the vertical expansion of warfare reaches its most comprehensive form through the militarization of outer space: satellites have become indispensable components of military operations, providing navigation, communication, reconnaissance and targeting capabilities on a planetary scale. Modern armed forces depend upon orbital infrastructures that allow commanders to coordinate operations across continents while maintaining continuous surveillance of terrestrial environments. Satellites fundamentally alter the relationship between vision and territory, making military observation is no longer episodic but persistent. Rather than surveying specific conflict sites, orbital systems produce a permanent global field of visibility within which movement can be monitored almost continuously. The conquest of the atmosphere therefore culminates in a military gaze capable of integrating terrestrial operations into planetary systems of information. Militarizing the atmosphere and controlling the informational infrastructures through which space is represented coincides with what Virilio calls “total war”, meaning a perpetual state of military presence on a global scale.[133]

Drone warfare represents perhaps the most complete synthesis of these historical developments. Drones combine aerial mobility, persistent surveillance, satellite communication and precision-guided weaponry into a single technological system. Unlike conventional aircraft, they separate the location of military operators from the location of violence itself.[134] Observation, identification and destruction become integrated within continuous cycles of remote operation. From a dromological perspective, drones exemplify the convergence of speed, vision and military power. Information circulates almost instantaneously between satellite networks, command centres and aircraft operating thousands of kilometres away. The battlefield becomes a space of continuous monitoring in which potential targets are identified and engaged with minimal temporal delay, while the operator experiences war primarily through screens, data streams and digital interfaces rather than direct physical presence, increasing the differential fairness of military damages.

This transformation raises broader questions regarding the changing relationship between military power and political authority. If war making has historically been central to state making, contemporary military technolo-



Model: General Atomics RQ-1 Predator
Employed: by the US in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan
Maximum speed: 217 km/h

133
Virilio, 1986, p. 98

134
Gregory, 2011, p. 192



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White phosphorus being dropped by Israeli forces on Lebanon

gies do not negate this relationship but transform the spatial forms through which it operates. States increasingly exercise coercive power across borders without requiring permanent territorial occupation, relying instead upon networks of bases, surveillance infrastructures and remote weapons systems capable of projecting force globally.[135]

As Collier and Lakoff suggest, the crucial question is therefore not whether contemporary societies experience too much or too little security, but rather what particular forms of security are being produced and against which imagined threats.[136] Military geography increasingly revolves around anticipation, circulation and permanent preparedness rather than exclusively around territorial defence. Security becomes organized through infrastructures that accelerate intervention while extending surveillance across multiple spatial scales. Taken together, these developments reveal that the history of modern warfare can be understood as a progressive conquest of verticality and circulation. From the first military aircraft to orbital satellites and autonomous drones, each technological innovation expands the spatial domain within which military power operates while simultaneously compressing the temporal interval separating movement from destruction. The battlefield is no longer confined to terrestrial frontiers but extends across the atmosphere, the oceans, outer space and the informational networks that connect them. In dromological terms, the decisive object of military strategy is no longer territory itself but speed; geography gets reorganized through acceleration, producing a military landscape in which distance progressively disappears as a meaningful constraint on violence.

135
Graham, 2011, p. 132

136
Cowen & Gilbert, 2008, p. 21

M.2.2 Speed-blockers

After establishing that whoever manages to control the movements of people, ideas, and goods, is able to control the entirety of the dromocratic society, this implies that there's an authority capable of blocking (or at least slowing down) determined targets. The dromoligical metaphor of *stasis equals death* tells us that by blocking or filtering a vector, one is implicitly suppressing it.[137] The idea of speed-blocker encompasses the sets of instruments and concepts used to administrate movement across space, with the architectural figure perfectly exemplifying this idea being the wall, able to both enclose and protect, block or have to be turned around; yet the very existence of a this entity begs the questions of who has the authority to build these walls? Who is the authority that blocks or slows down the circulation? Why only some specific targets?

To clarify, these walls can be material and figurative, temporary and permanent, big or small, and can be deployed in a range of scenarios, varying from crowd control to blocking migratory movements, but in general they all carry a same idea of formalizing a space by controlling the space in which a determined conflict or friction takes place; the walls should not be imagined as material stacking of bricks (or not only at least), but rather should be thought as *limes*: the innate ways in which human beings organize, section and live space. The idea of limits is deeply embedded in the human condition, so much so that one wouldn't be able to quantify the amount of limits that humans cross and set upon themselves as ways of acquiring sense of self and make sense of the world around us.

This idea opens the conversation to the concept of borders and their political, social and cultural declinations, representing the very origin of the spatial paradigm of human mobility. As the social construct that they are, borders are both lived and produced on a daily basis by humans, resulting in the ultimate organization of space not only on a physical level (that's where walls , but also on an ontological one, as it delineates the conditions of being within those borders. Within the framework of privatization and nationalism, crossing any type of border or moving across different conceptions of space has led to produce narratives of migration, trespassing, border control, invasion, visas and passports to use against specific targets. As these narratives keep on standing, moving across space cannot be a neutral action, because by being divided, the crossed space itself acquires political, social and juridical connotations. The border, then, is never simply a line on a map, but more importantly is a technology of differentiation, a mechanism through which space is made to mean differently depending on which body crosses it and in which direction.[139] This asymmetry is the border's fundamental political content: the same threshold that is a formality for one body is a mortal risk for another, and this differential is not merely coincidental, but structurally produced.

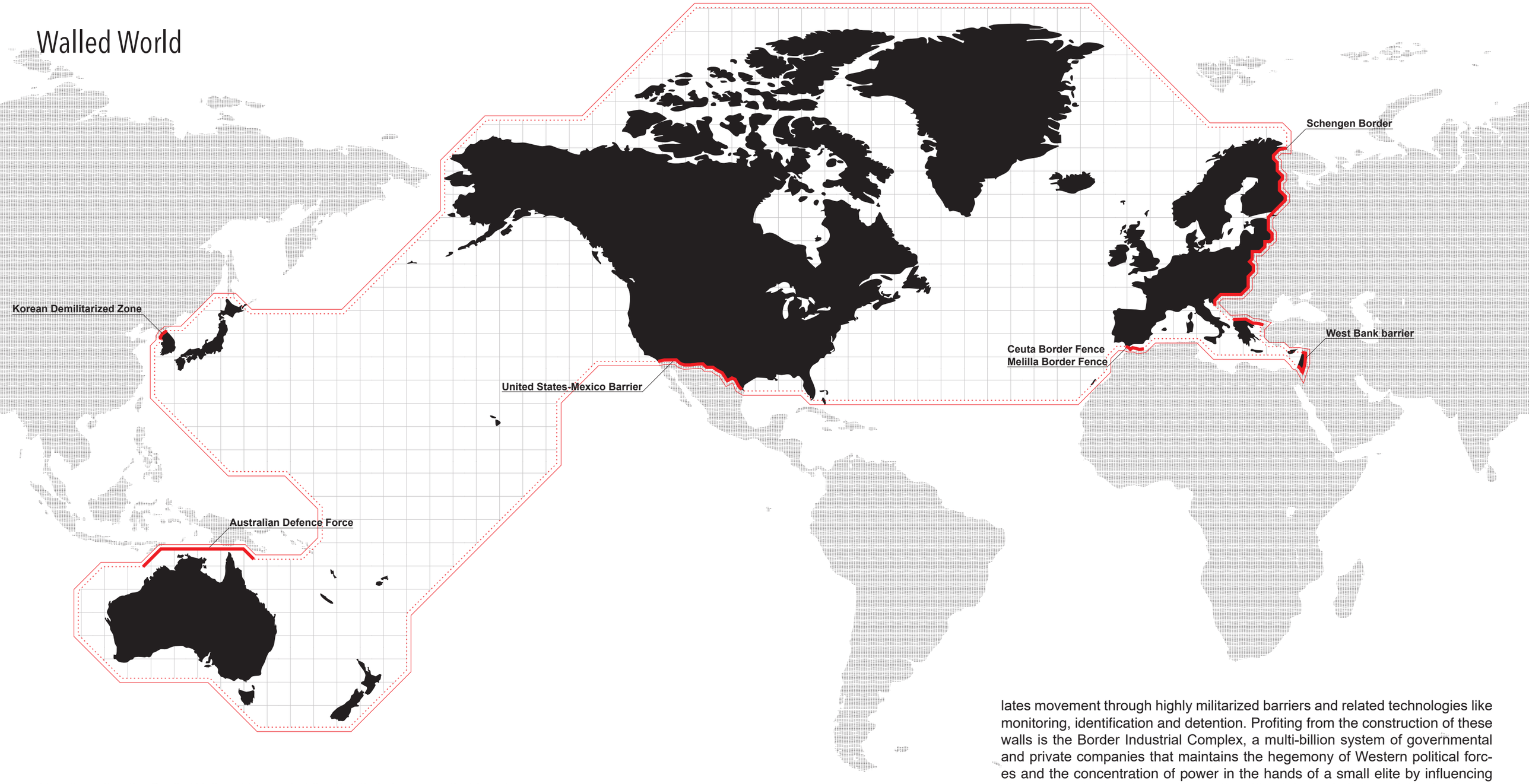
The next case studies dwelve into the genealogy of the wall and border at different scales, but ultimately confirming that the wall is never a genuine instrument of security, but rather a performance of sovereignty, staging control at precisely the point where control is most precarious, erecting shields that block movement and re-insert individuals where authority has decided for them where they belong, either within or outside the fences of the state. The agendas of containment is one of the prerogatives of authoritarian governments in order not to destabilize the status quo.

137
Virilio, 1986, p. 37

138
Gobbo, 2020, p. 27

139
Sferrazza papa, 2020, p. 21

Walled World



After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the South African apartheid system in 1989, the world seemed like it was starting to abandon forms of segregation and division of people. Needless to say that what happened was actually the opposite: since that year the construction of physical barriers on borders or in occupied territories drastically increased, bringing the total number of large walls from six in 1989 to more than seventy as of today (without counting the non-physical ones), with leaders advocating for building more. These barriers are very different from one another, born for different reasons at different times, like right after the events of 9/11 or during the refugee crisis of 2015 (fourteen walls have been built in that year alone); despite their differences, when looking at their geographical distribution and their purpose, it becomes evident that these walls are the perimeter of a very specific area of the globe, with the West becoming a sort of large gated community that perpetrates binaries and regulates movement through highly militarized barriers and related technologies like monitoring, identification and detention. Profiting from the construction of these walls is the Border Industrial Complex, a multi-billion system of governmental and private companies that maintains the hegemony of Western political forces and the concentration of power in the hands of a small elite by influencing discourses of migration and security, ultimately capitalizing off the bodies of migrants.[141] Through the use of a language of fear, these companies strive for the implementation of the latest technologies to secure the frontiers, making the market of internal security one of the most economically increasing sectors of the last years, yet often using methods that should be prosecutable by International Law for both the ones crossing the borders and the ones that remain on the other side.

In fact, the walls don't merely represent a division of geographical regions, but have dual implications for the ones within the walls and the ones outside of them, like economic desire to separate the rich extractivists from the poor exploited global economies, as well as the subsequent segregation and negation of human rights and dignity.

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Walled World

140
Centre Délas, 2020

141
Isaac, 2024, p. 2

Korean Demilitarized Zone

A strip of territory 250 kilometers long and 4 kilometers wide running across the Korean Peninsula, a buffer zone established not as a peace but as a pause. Erected after the Armistice Agreement of July 27, 1953, the DMZ was produced by each side withdrawing its troops 2,000 meters from the front line, with the Military Demarcation Line running through its center to mark exactly where the conflict had stalled. Critically, the United States, North Korea, and China reached the armistice agreement, but South Korea refused to sign it, meaning that a formal state of war between North and South Korea has technically never ended, making the DMZ not a postwar border but the frozen edge of an ongoing conflict, a wall built to administer its indefinite suspension.

The DMZ encapsulates the stark division between communism and capitalism, functioning as the Cold War's most perfectly materialized ideological boundary: a line where two world-systems faced each other in concrete and barbed wire. In dromological terms, the DMZ is a total speed-blocker: it arrests not only the movement of bodies but of goods, capital, and especially information, and familial bonds, severing a population that shares language, culture, and history into two hermetically managed circulation systems. Despite its name, both sides maintain large contingents of troops and heavy weaponry in close proximity, and the zone has been the site of ongoing military incidents and casualties across the more than seven decades since its establishment. What the DMZ makes visible, more clearly than almost any other border in the world, is the degree to which a line drawn in space by external powers can determine the ontological conditions of millions of lives, shaping not only where people can go but who they are permitted to be.





■□
DMZ from Euliji, 2008
Photo by Friar's Balsam
□■
Guard Post 128, 1989
Photo by U.S. Army

142
Kim, 2014

Australian Defence Force

The Australian Defence Force presents a case study in the militarization of the border that is particularly revealing precisely because the immateriality of its wall, made not of concrete but of water: an oceanic speed-blocker deployed across some of the world's most dangerous maritime passages to manage, intercept, and redirect bodies that the state has decided do not belong within its territory. The roots of the ADF trace back to the colonial military forces of the nineteenth century, which were consolidated following the federation of Australia in 1901 into a unified Commonwealth Military Force, a federation whose very formation was inseparable from the racial logic of the White Australia Policy, enacted in the same year, which explicitly linked national identity to the exclusion of non-European individuals from the territorial and demographic space of the new nation, at its core being a founding entanglement of military organization and racial border management, remaining an influence on the ADF's relationship to the border ever since. [143]

The most unambiguous contemporary expression of this genealogy is Operation Sovereign Borders, launched in September 2013, an unprecedented partnership between Australia's Department of Immigration and Border Protection and the Australian Defence Force to regulate its maritime borders, with a budget of $420 million, creating task forces of detection and interception of incoming boats of asylum seekers, and establishing offshore detention complexes in Manus Island and Nauru designed to house those who dare violate the policy, with the official position that no asylum seeker arriving by boat would ever be resettled in Australia.

In dromological terms, the operation is an apparatus of capture applied at the scale of an entire ocean: it implements a border protection posture of disruption, deterrence, detection, interception, regional processing, and resettlement, coordinated by a Joint Agency Task Force bringing together sixteen agencies whose explicit purpose is to manage differential mobility, accelerating some flows and arresting others with the full logistical apparatus of the state. What makes Australia's border regime particularly significant as a case study is its spatial inno-





■□
Camp in Nauru, 2003
Photo by EPA via BBC
□■
Immigration detention center in Manus, 2017
Photo from Reuters

143
Centre Delàs, 2014, p. 34

144
Ibid., p. 35









vation: rather than erecting a wall at the geographic limit of its territory, Australia effectively externalized its border outward into international waters and laterally into the sovereign territory of neighboring Pacific states. Its conversion of two former colonies (Nauru and Manus Island in Papua New Guinea) into proxy detention centers produced a two-decade project of stranding tens of thousands of asylum seekers in conditions documented to include widespread human rights abuses and deaths, becoming a matter of necropolitics in which the camp is not an exception to the normal spatial order but its deliberate offshore extension.[144] The intended effect of this coordinated effort is to secure national sovereignty as a unity, but the broader effect has been to devalue offshore life to secure onshore interests, confirming that Australia's oceanic border does not merely slow movement, but produces a differential geography of survivability, in which the right to reach territory and claim protection is distributed entirely according to which body is attempting the crossing and from which direction.

United States-Mexico Barrier

The United States-Mexico border barrier is perhaps the most politically overdetermined wall in the contemporary world, a structure whose history reveals, with unusual clarity, the degree to which the wall is never a response to a genuine security emergency, but rather the materialization of a political economy that requires the narrative of threat as its condition for reproduction.

The border itself was established through violence: American and Texan militias used force to establish it in the 1830s and 1840s, through a combination of settler colonialism and military conquest, meaning that the wall built today to keep Mexicans out is erected on land taken from Mexico by force less than two centuries ago: a spatial irony that the barrier's rhetoric of sovereignty systematically suppresses. The formal militarization of the border that developed incrementally through the twentieth century, but its decisive acceleration came in the 1990s under the Clinton administration, when steel surplus military landing mats from the Vietnam War were used to construct the first major border barriers in El Paso and San Diego. It's an interesting detail as it shows the genealogical continuity between military technique and border infrastructure in its material manifestation: the detritus of one war recycled into the infrastructure of another.[145]

The militarized border diverted migrants from urban crossings into dangerous desert landscapes, and in the decade following Clinton's fences, deaths along the border doubled, confirming that the wall's function was never to stop movement but to manage its lethality, making crossing survivable only for those with the resources to navigate it. The doctrine formalized under Clinton of "prevention through deterrence" is a clear dromological instrument: it does not block the vector, but redirects it into terrain that does the work as blocking on the state's behalf, producing death as an administrative outcome rather than a declared policy. Budgets for border and immigration control rose from $350 million in 1980 to $23.7 billion in 2018, with border patrol agents growing from 4.000 in 1994 to 21.000, and the parent agency Customs and Border Protection becoming the largest federal law enforcement agency in the United States, profiting from conventional warfare, shaping border-militarization policies from which they have profited through campaign contributions, lobbying, and placement of personnel in strategic government positions. Trump's wall, in this framework, was not an aberration but, the theatrical culmination of a bipartisan consensus that had been building the barrier for thirty years, and its most revealing feature was the explicit redirection of military construction funding, with the Secretary of Defense authorizing $3.6 billion in military construction funds for border wall sections, blurring the distinction between national defense and immigration enforcement that had previously been maintained as a legal fiction. What the US-Mexico barrier makes clear across its entire history, is the paradox of the wall that grows longer and more sophisticated in precise proportion to the state's inability to govern the economic conditions, being the one that produces

■□
□□
San Diego, 1992
Photo by Don Bartletti

□■
□□
New Mexico City, 2019
Photo by Mario Tama

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■■
Mexicali, California, 2025
Photo by Daniel Ochoa de Olza

145
Centre Delàs, 2014, p. 4

146
Ibid. p. 28-30

the movement it claims to be stopping.[146] The desert between Sonora and Arizona is not a failed border, but one calibrated to let capital through and to make the bodies that follow capital pay for the crossing with their lives.

Ceuta Border Fence and Melilla Border Fence

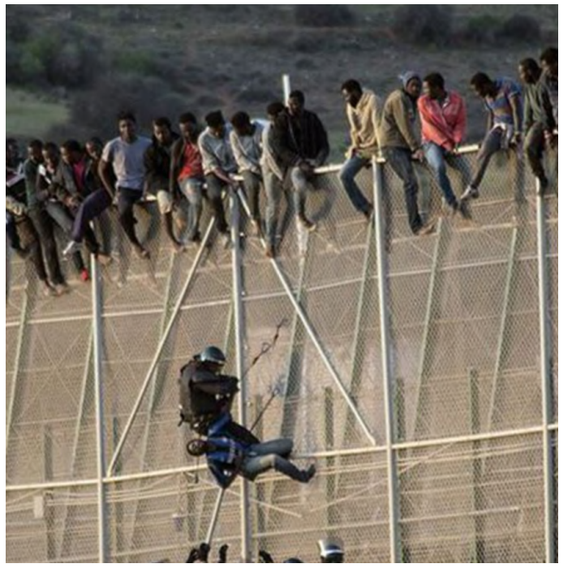
The border fences of Ceuta and Melilla represent one of the most geopolitically concentrated and theoretically rich instances of the speed-blocker in the contemporary world: two small Spanish enclaves on the northern coast of Africa, together measuring barely fifty square kilometers, that constitute the only land borders between the European Union and the African continent, and whose fences are therefore simultaneously local infrastructure and the southern edge of a continental political project.

The historical origins of the enclaves are themselves a product of colonial practices: Melilla has been under Spanish control since 1497 and Ceuta since 1640, both developing as military and trade centers linking Africa to Europe. Morocco, since its independence in 1956, has rejected Spanish sovereignty over the enclaves, viewing them as the final remnants of European colonialism on African soil, a claim the United Nations has not formally upheld, producing a territorial dispute whose irresolution is structurally functional for its workings: the ambiguity allows both states to instrumentalize the border for their own political interests without being forced to resolve it. The fences themselves are a product of the 1990s reconfiguration of European migration governance: the first border fence in Ceuta was constructed in 1993 with a length of 8.3 kilometers, funded 75% by the European Union, followed immediately by the Melilla fence in 1996, timed precisely to coincide with Spain's full integration into the Schengen Area, which transformed what had previously been a relatively porous threshold into a heavily fortified frontier.[147]

The current fence system consists of parallel three-meter high barriers topped with razor wire, equipped with fixed cameras, fiber-optic sensors, motion detectors, and military patrol on both sides, an infrastructure of total surveillance where movement is not only blocked but managed, sorted, and differentially permitted. The political logic animating the fences is not simply Spanish but European, since the EU has consistently funded the construction and upgrade of the barriers while simultaneously using Morocco as an outsourced border management partner. Morocco became an indispensable actor in deploying EU migration control strategy at the borders of Ceuta and Melilla, skillfully using this dependency as strategic leverage in its bilateral relationships with Spain and the EU; this arrangement in which a formerly colonized state is recruited to police the movement of other African bodies on behalf of the colonial power that still occupies its territory, produces a geometry of containment that is both postcolonial and neo-colonial simultaneously, where the necropolitics of armed violence from police and military keep being intrinsic features of the space, yet the bureaucratic narratives of a tripartite arrangement between Spain, Morocco, and the EU, allow each actor to disclaim direct responsibility for the deaths that their collaborative spatial management produces (most notable examples in recdent history are the 18 victims of Spanish violence in Ceuta in 2005, and the 37 in Melilla killed by Moroccan security forces).[148]

Schengen Area and Russian Border

Conceptually the Schengen Area presents itself as the process of dissolution of walls and liberation of movement within the EU. On June 14 1985, representatives of Belgium, France, West Germany, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands signed the Schengen Agreement, committing to the gradual abolition of internal border controls between signatory states in what was framed, and has been remembered, as a founding gesture of European unity and the overcoming of the divisions of war. The 1990 Schengen Convention supplemented this commitment by proposing the complete abolition of internal border controls alongside a









Ceuta Border Fence, 2017
taken from Reuters News

Ceuta Border Fence, 2025
Photo by Lucas Neves

Melilla border, 2018
Photo by Stephanie Jenzer

Melilla fence, 2018
Photo from Getty Images

147
Centre Delàs, 2014, p. 37

148
Centre Delàs, 2014, p. 40









common visa policy, creating the Schengen Information System , a massive database enabling member states to share information on individuals and goods transiting the zone. It is in this supplementary architecture, that the dromological logic of Schengen becomes understandable: the removal of borders for some is structurally conditioned on the hardening of borders for others, and the freedom of movement celebrated within the zone is produced by, and depends upon, the systematic immobilization of those excluded from it, ultimately only rescaling its borders between European states to the external frontier of the zone as a whole, where it operates with far greater force and far less visibility than the national borders it replaced.

The key institutional expression of this rescaled border is Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, established in 2004 and headquartered in Warsaw. Its presence has served to militarize Europe's external borders, funneling millions of euros into surveillance technologies and placing growing numbers of officers along the EU's frontier in ways that have constructed people on the move as a threat to be fought off at any cost, even at the expense of their rights and lives; and the freedom of movement that four hundred million Europeans enjoy is capitalized, is in direct contrast against the containment of those who approach the zone's edge from the outside. The agency's operational record documents the brutality of their practices: European and international human rights organizations have consistently reported abuses by officials from EU member states against people arriving at EU borders where Frontex is operating, including violence, illegal pushbacks, and denial of access to asylum in Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, and Malta; while in the Central Mediterranean, Frontex's drones have communicated the positions of migrant boats to the Libyan Coast Guard, which intercepts them and returns them to Libyan detention centers where people face crimes against humanity, all this thanks to an arrangement through which the EU outsources the lethal work of its border to a non-EU armed force, legally maintaining clean hands while administering the same necropolitical outcome from a distance. This strategy of border externalization has strong historical continuities with Europe's colonial past, helping to maintain European political and economic influence over formerly colonized territories while simultaneously restricting the movement of people who were once colonized; the same post-colonial economic arrangements that produce emigration from the Global South are protected by the same border apparatus that prevents the migrants those arrangements produce from reaching the territories that benefit from them.[149]

While in the Mediterranean Sea this border exists thorugh military blockade and interception of asylum seekers, on the continental side the Russian border takes a more material form through the multiple EU nations bordering Russia that have constructed high-tech border fences, most notably Finland, Latvia, Poland and Estonia, where military patrolling, surveillance cameras, sensors and barbed wire are deployed, with an inevitable strenthening after the war in Ukraine. This massive continental wall has important implications on a geopolitical level aswell, since controlling the borders with Russia is one of the main interests of NATO to contrast one of its supposed big enemies, confirming the logic of preemptive spatial organization at continental scale, that the border is never merely a line but always a disposition of force.

West Bank Barrier and the Jerusalem Wall

The West Bank Barrier is the most theoretically saturated case study in the contemporary politics of the wall, whose analysis has generated a substantial body of critical scholarship precisely because of the degree to which it's simultaneously a cartographic, political, and ontological act.

Construction of the barrier began in June 2002 following the Israeli cabinet decision to build a separation barrier in the context of the Second Intifada, with the declared objective of preventing Palestinians without permits from entering

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CPR in Pozzallo, Sicily, 2023
Photo from La Repubblica

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149
Cowen, 2008, p. 303

150
Centre Delàs, 2014, p. 24

151
Ibid. p. 32-34

Israel from the West Bank, framing it as a security issue, although that has been dismantled by the barrier's very essence.
A key factor in determining the barrier's route was the location of Israeli settlements, thereby laying the groundwork for the annexation of most of the settlements and much of the land designated for their future expansion, making the barrier a major political instrument for furthering Israeli annexationist goals rather than a neutral line of separation. At a total length of 713 kilometers upon completion, the barrier's route is more than double the length of the 1949 armistice Green Line, with 85% of its path running inside the West Bank rather than along the internationally recognized boundary, with the deliberate inclusion of settlement blocs on the Israeli side of the barrier and the equally deliberate exclusion of Palestinian communities from the spatial and juridical continuity of their own territory.
The International Court of Justice, in its 2004 Advisory Opinion, ruled that the sections of the barrier running inside the West Bank, together with its associated permit and gate regime, violate Israel's obligations under international law, and called on Israeli authorities to cease construction, dismantle completed sections, and compensate Palestinians harmed by its construction. This ruling has been systematically ignored by Israel, making it the ultimate example of the state of exception, as it hasn't faced since any repercussions by legal authorities contisues to constitute its own extrajuridical permanence.
Israeli planners transformed the occupied territories into a theoretically constructed artifice in which all natural and built features function as the weapons and ammunition with which the conflict is waged, designing a three-dimensional reorganization of space that operates not only on the surface through walls and checkpoints but vertically, through control of airspace above and tunnel infrastructure below, producing ultimately an architecture of occupation[152] rather than a border in any conventional sense. The human consequences of this spatial architecture are perpetually documented by the United Nations: approximately 150 Palestinian communities have farmland located in the Seam Zone between the barrier and the Green Line, accessible only through 69 designated gates controlled by Israeli authorities that are typically closed except during few specific times; Israel broke up contiguous Palestinian urban and rural blocs, imposing an arbitrary reconfiguration of space based on settlement boundaries and the convenience of Israeli security forces, recontextualizing Palestinians in spaces of ghettization and military controlled settlements: the architecture of apartheid is part of its epistemology.[154]
Analogue situations happen across the entirety of the State of Israel, where the barriers' consequences are influencial across several registers: demographic, as Israeli policy systematically reduces the Palestinian population within Jerusalem through permit revocation and residency stripping; spatial, as it severs Palestinian neighborhoods from one another; economic, as it destroys Jerusalem's role as the West Bank's metropolitan center; and political, as it forecloses the possibility of East Jerusalem serving as the capital of a future Palestinian state, even making a two-state solution not merely difficult but physically impossible.[153] Subsequently, the concept of ethnocracy to describe Israel's regime must be instroduced: a system in which a dominant ethnic group uses state power to advance territorial expansion while maintaining a formal democratic appearance. The barrier is framed as the latest instrument of this ethnocratic project that transforms a declared temporary security measure into a permanent colonial border, suppressing Palestinian political agency and foreclosing negotiated resolution.[155]









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something
something

152
Weizman, 2012, p. 34-48

153
B'Tselem, 2017

154
Yiftachel, 2006, p. 169

155
Yiftacheli, 2006, p. 172

(Cities as battlegrounds)

Before diving into the next subcategory, I need to open a parenthesis on how century-long processes have transformed citites in focal sites of military dynamics production. Cities have long constituted privileged sites of military confrontation, political unrest and struggles over sovereignty. From fortified walls and controlled gates to boulevards, policing infrastructures and contemporary surveillance systems, the urban fabric has repeatedly been reorganised in response to perceived threats and changing technologies of control.

The fortified city provides one of the earliest and most evident examples of this relationship. From antiquity through the medieval and early modern periods, walls constituted both defensive technologies and spatial boundaries that distinguished the city from its surrounding territory, redefining urban topography, while simultaneously functioning as powerful symbols of urban identity and political authority.[156] The wall therefore performed several functions simultaneously: it protected the settlement against external attack, regulated movement through gates, marked the limits of civic jurisdiction and materially distinguished the inside from the outside. The medieval city developed this relationship between fortification and urban governance further: the construction of walls was often connected not only to external military threats but also to the political and economic organisation of urban communities; the construction of new fortification circuits contributed to the consolidation of urbanised territory, while areas outside the new walls could become differentiated from the protected city.[157] The fortified perimeter thus became an instrument for organising urban space as much as a military response to external enemies. The gate had an equally important role: entry into a fortified city was channelled through a limited number of controlled points, making the circulation of people and commodities legible to authorities. In the early modern city, the fortification system therefore acquired functions beyond defence, functioning also as an administrative technology: it helped produce a city that could be monitored, taxed and governed.[158]

However, the development of gunpowder artillery from the fifteenth century onwards transformed this relationship. Traditional high medieval walls became increasingly vulnerable to cannon fire, producing new forms of fortification based on lower, thicker walls, angled bastions and geometrically organised defensive systems. The so-called trace italienne represented a major transformation in the relationship between military technology and urban form. Fortifications became increasingly complex spatial systems designed to provide overlapping fields of fire and to prevent attackers from approaching vulnerable points. At the same time, the expansion of defensive systems could place substantial constraints upon urban development. Cities became spatially organised around military requirements, with walls, bastions, and controlled approaches determining patterns of circulation and construction, allowing for military technology to produce space itself. [159]

Cities have also historically been spaces of internal political conflict, including riots, revolutions and popular uprisings. This becomes particularly visible in nineteenth-century Europe, when growing urban populations, political instability and the emergence of mass politics transformed the relationship between cities and state power. Like it was for Paris before Haussmann, dense and irregular urban districts could provide significant advantages to insurgents, while military forces faced difficulties moving through narrow streets and responding rapidly to barricades. The barricade is topical because it demonstrates that the relationship between urban form and political control is not unidirectional: if authorities shape cities to facilitate surveillance and military movement, urban populations can appropriate the same physical environment for resistance.[xxx3] The existing urban fabric could therefore be temporarily militarised from below: paving stones, furniture and debris were converted into fortifications, while the spatial complexity of the city was used to obstruct state forces, a place in which both the state and its opponents attempted to manipulate the same material environment.

If urban form can influence the relative power of authorities and populations in moments of unrestì, the city can therefore be used as a political technology: its spatial organisation helps determine who can move, who can observe, who can gather and who can intervene, but at the same time, the history of militarised urbanism demonstrates that control is never complete, as urban populations continually reinterpret and appropriate spaces in ways that exceed the intentions of planners and authorities. Stephen Graham argues that contemporary cities have become increasingly central to military and security doctrines, producing what he calls the “new military urbanism,” where everyday urban spaces, infrastructures and populations are increasingly rendered as objects of surveillance, targeting and security intervention. [xxx4] Contemporary militarisation involves the normalization of military and security practices within everyday urban environments, as technologies and techniques originally developed for warfare increasingly circulate into civilian security practices, while the boundaries between policing, military operations, surveillance and intelligence become increasingly blurred. Contemporary security infrastructures,in this way, operate through continuous monitoring across much more diffused spaces through CCTV networks, biometric identification, predictive policing, data collection, access-control systems and other technologies. These practices contribute to the transformation of everyday urban space into a potentially limitless battlespace in which ordinary movements and infrastructures can become objects of security intervention.

The historical comparison reveals a transformation from architectural enclosure to distributed surveillance and mobility management. The wall concentrated control at particular boundaries, while contemporary systems can distribute control throughout the urban environment. The gate has not disappeared so much, but multiplied into airports, metro stations, checkpoints, digital platforms, surveillance cameras and controlled-access buildings.[xxx5] Similarly, the military patrol has been supplemented by automated systems capable of tracking populations and identifying perceived threats within ordinary urban circulation.

Military and security authorities seek to produce urban environments that are legible, accessible and controllable, while citizens engaged in protest or resistance can seek opacity, density, obstruction and alternative forms of spatial organisation. The use of defensive techniques by both sides demonstrates why urban form and transformation cannot be treated as politically neutral. The urban fabric becomes a material archive of struggles over sovereignty and control. Its walls, streets and infrastructures reveal not only how cities have been defended from external enemies, but also how states have attempted to govern the populations contained within them and how those populations have repeatedly transformed the same spaces into sites of resistance. This leads me to the following category of military presence.

156
Intagliata et al., 2020, p. 6

157
Sferrazza Papa, 2020, p. 38

158
Friedrichs, 1995, p. 34

159
Davis, 2005, p. 267

160
Graham, 2009, p. 387
Graham, 2012, p. 138

161
Ibid, 2009, p. 341

Temporary containing walls

The next case studies that fall under this categorization aim at unraveling two different episodes at different scales in Italian history of militarization of the urban fabric and violent frictions between movements of protest and police forces.

I believe it's relevant to mention these case studies because the ways in which military presence influenced urban space is at the intersection of the M1.1 and M2.2, meaning the junction between the ways in which power shapes the urban fabric to manage citizens, and apparati through which military forces try to suffocate movement they deem hostile to them. This resulted in short but intense periods of conflicts within the city, where the urban fabric was transformed and operationalized through the installation of temporary elements that contained within themselves the dialectical and physical properties of walls and border controls of access to specific areas only to a designated number and type of individual.

Both show as well how in order to maintain control of the narratives that the media outlets released about the events, considering the turmoil at national level both case studies reached, police and governmental authorities were able to manipulate public opinion through the use of technical instruments.

G8 in Genoa

The G8 summit held in Genoa between 19 and 22 July 2001 was probably a major episode in the history of the anti-globalisation movement and an extraordinary episode of urban transformation in Italy and Europe.
For several days, Genoa ceased to function as an ordinary city and became a temporary security apparatus:[162] streets, squares, ports, railway infrastructure and public buildings were reorganised according to the requirements of the summit and the anticipated confrontation between state authorities and hundreds of thousands of protesters.

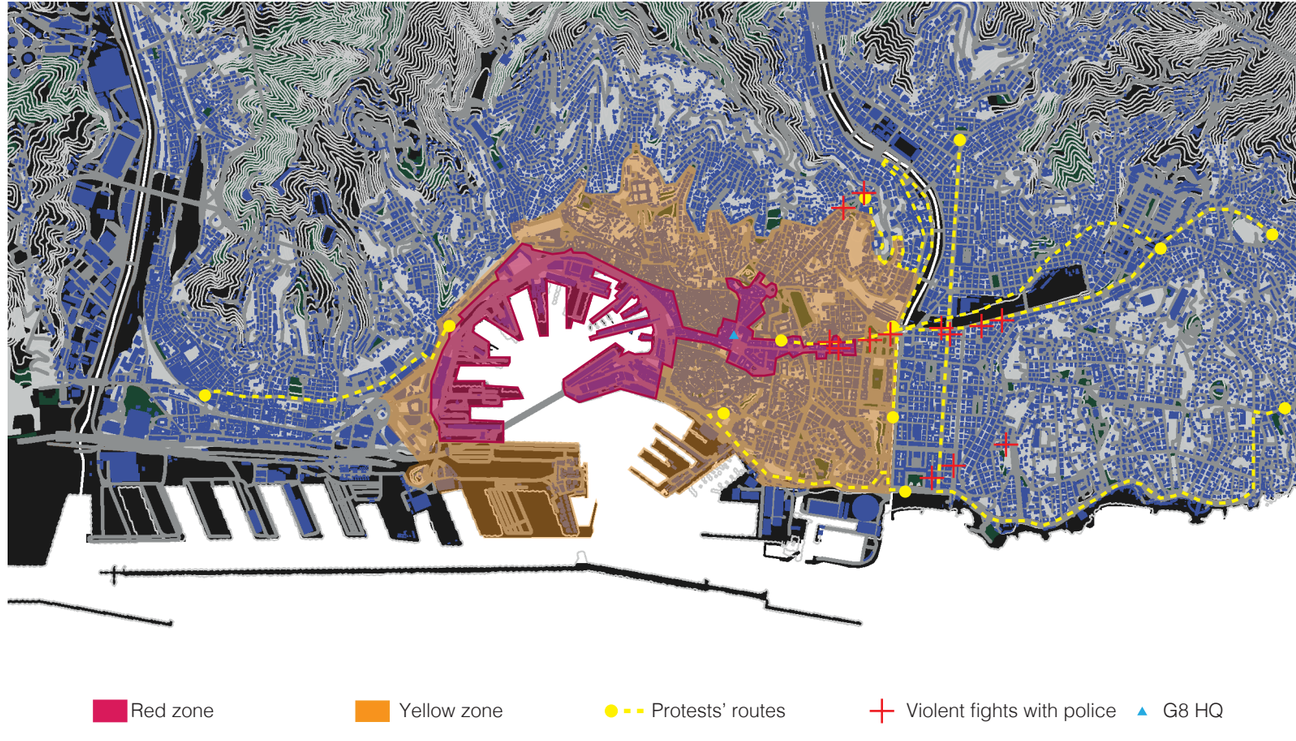
What makes Genoa particularly significant is that the security operation did not simply take place inside the city: it actively reorganised the city itself. Urban space became a means of controlling movement, separating populations and concentrating political power.[163] Meanwhile, Genoa became a kind of temporary battlespace in which barriers, checkpoints, surveillance, restricted zones, mobility corridors and tactical positions altered the relationship between territory and movement. Genoa's physical geography already presented particular difficulties for the organisation of a high-security international summit, as the city is compressed between the sea and the mountains, and its historic centre contains a dense network of narrow streets, while major roads and transport corridors run through relatively constrained coastal spaces. Contemporary reporting emphasised precisely this relationship between urban morphology and security: unlike cities with large monumental boulevards and open spaces, Genoa's historic fabric offered numerous confined spaces in which visibility and movement could be difficult to control.

This aspect is relevant because the military spatial manifestations were fundamentally concerned with the relationship between terrain and movement. Genoa's morphology therefore created a paradox: the city was selected as setting for an international political summit, but its physical structure made the complete separation of leaders, residents and demonstrators extremely difficult. The solution was not to adapt the summit to the existing city, but to temporarily adapt the city to the summit.

The most visible expression of this transformation was the creation of the red and yellow zones. The summit was centered on the Palazzo Ducale, at the edge of Genoa's historic centre, and a restricted security perimeter was established around it. The city was effectively divided into territories with different levels of accessibility. The red zone was the most heavily restricted area, while surrounding areas became spaces in which demonstrations and security operations could occur, representing a temporary restructuring of the urban map. The boundaries of the red zone were materialised through large metal barriers and controlled entrances several meters tall and a city in which checkpoints interrupted routes that normally formed part of everyday life. Residents living inside the restricted area could find that a journey of a few minutes required leaving through one checkpoint and returning through another.[164]

The crucial urban phenomenon here is differentiated accessibility. While a city normally assumes a relatively continuous network of public streets, during the G8, this continuity was deliberately broken. Space was no longer simply public or private, and the city was consequently transformed from a continuous network into a fragmented territorial system. This is one reason why the concept of "red-zoning" has subsequently attracted attention in security and urban studies, with Genoa as an important early example of a broader logic in which authorities use colour-coded spatial divisions, barriers and controlled perimeters to manage perceived insecurity.[165] In this interpretation, Genoa anticipated forms of urban security that became increasingly familiar in the years following 2001.

The security operation also changed the visual and psychological charac-



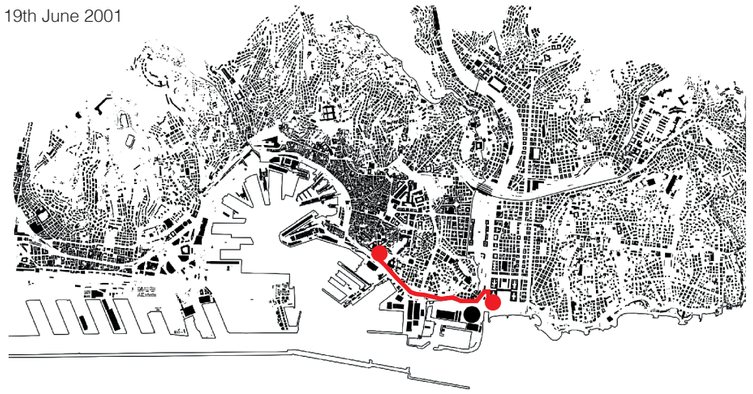
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Genoa masterplan with G8 modifications

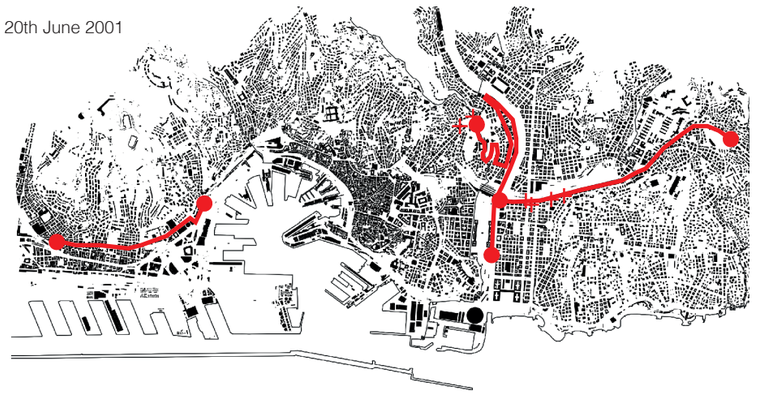
162
Vidal, 2001

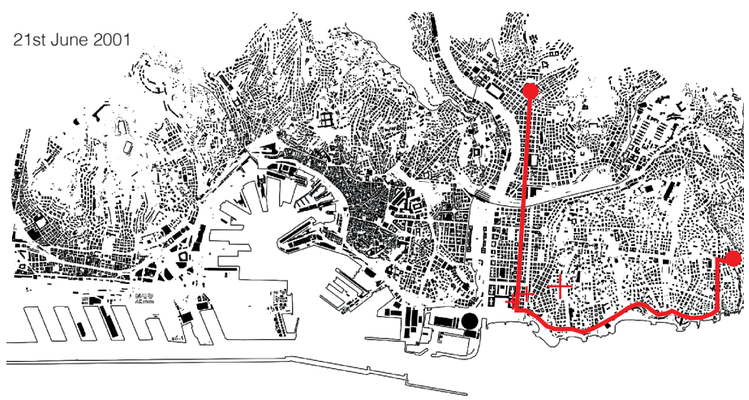
163
Jerrems, 2024, p. 311

164
Amnesty International, 2001

165
Jerrems, 2024, p. 313







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Routes of protests and violent altercations between protesters and police.

ter of Genoa. Approximately 20,000 law-enforcement personnel were deployed according to contemporary accounts from the municipality and other sources.[166] Roads, transport infrastructure and access points were placed under heightened control, with businesses closed and large numbers of inhabitants leaving before the summit. This produces an important distinction between militarisation and the literal presence of the military: a city can become militarised without being occupied by an army in the conventional sense; militarisation occurs when principles associated with military geography (territorial control, surveillance, restricted access, defensive perimeters, threat assessment and tactical mobility) begin to structure ordinary urban life. In Genoa, the result was a temporary landscape in which apparently ordinary objects acquired strategic functions. A street barrier became a defensive perimeter. A crossroads became a checkpoint. A square became an assembly area. A railway station became a controlled gateway. A school could become a logistical or organisational space. A historic building could become the centre of international political power.

The city also experienced a striking transformation in terms of population density. The municipality's chronology records the arrival of approximately 20.000 security personnel on July 19th, while hundreds of thousands of demonstrators participated in events during the following days. At the same time, many residents temporarily left the city.[167] Thus Genoa experienced two apparently contradictory processes simultaneously: mass concentration and mass evacuation.

The Genoa Social Forum coordinated a large and heterogeneous movement that included pacifist, environmental, labour and anti-globalisation organisations. On 19 July, a demonstration for migrant rights involving roughly 50,000 people passed without major incidents. The following day, however, different demonstrations moved through different parts of Genoa, while some groups explicitly intended to challenge the boundaries of the red zone.
The geography of the demonstrations consequently became a geography of contact and separation. The police sought to prevent protesters from entering certain spaces; protesters sought to approach or breach those spaces; and other groups attempted to move through the same urban territory for entirely different purposes. The resulting conflict was therefore spatial before it was merely physical.

The confrontations can be understood



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20th July 2001 protest

166
Comune di Genova, 2011

167
Ibid.

using the military-geographical concepts of mobility, chokepoints and territorial control. A narrow road or intersection could determine whether a large demonstration could move forward. A barricade could transform an open street into a controlled boundary. A police line could function as a mobile territorial frontier. The death of Carlo Giuliani in Piazza Alimonda on 20 July became the most consequential individual event of the summit. It transformed the political meaning of the confrontation and became one of the defining images of the Genoa G8.[168]

In conventional military geography, controlling the territory is crucial because it allows actors to control movement, resources and access. Something similar occurred temporarily in Genoa. The state attempted to control access to the summit and to channel demonstrations away from politically sensitive spaces. Protesters attempted to make their presence visible precisely by approaching those spaces and challenging the spatial boundaries established by the authorities. The resulting conflict was therefore partly a struggle over who had the right to occupy and move through the city. The authorities' objective was to make certain spaces inaccessible. Protesters' objective was, in part, to make their political presence impossible to ignore. The city consequently became the medium through which political power was expressed.

The events continued beyond the main confrontations of 20 and 21 July. On the night between 21 and 22 July, police raided the Diaz school, where activists and journalists were staying. The following day, the school became a major site of investigation and public controversy. The detention centre at Bolzaneto was also associated with serious allegations of abuse. These episodes subsequently became central to judicial and political investigations into the handling of the summit. Their significance for urban geography is that they demonstrate that the security landscape was not restricted to the visible red-zone perimeter. It extended through a network of institutions and logistical spaces: schools, police facilities, roads, squares, transport nodes and temporary detention sites.[169]

The G8 in Genoa can therefore be read as a short but extremely intense episode of urban territorialisation. For several days, the ordinary city was suspended and replaced by a security-oriented geography. The historic centre became a fortified political enclave. Streets became controlled corridors. Squares became potential confrontation points. Infrastructure became strategically significant. Residents experienced restrictions on movement. Protesters attempted to challenge spatial boundaries. Security forces sought to maintain them. The summit lasted only a few days, but the spatial experiment it represented was significant. Genoa demonstrated how rapidly a democratic city could be reorganised around the management of perceived threat. It also showed how protesters could use the same urban geography in the opposite direction: exploiting density, visibility, movement and public space to challenge political authority. Seen from this perspective, the G8 was not simply an event that happened in Genoa. For those four days, Genoa itself became one of the principal arenas of the event. Its streets, architecture, infrastructure and geography became active participants in the political conflict. The city was simultaneously a setting, an instrument and an object of struggle.



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One of the temporary walls that organized movement within the red zone

168
Limes, 2001

169
Bachschmidt, 2021, p. 12
Comune di Genova, 2011

Askatasuna

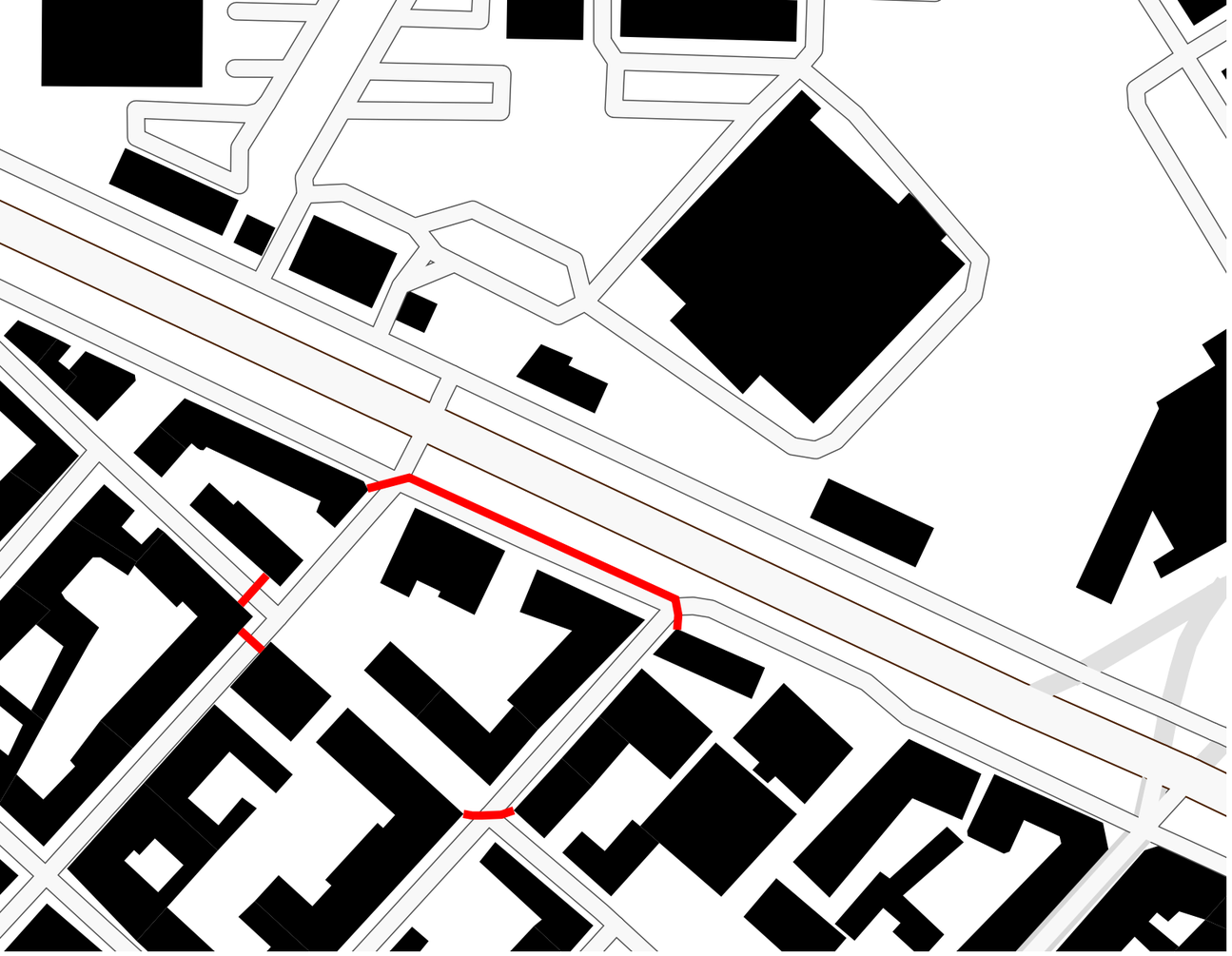
Askatasuna was a self-managed social center that operated for almost thirty years in an occupied building at Corso Regina Margherita 47 in the Borgo Vanchiglia neighborhood, hosting free Italian language courses for migrants, sports facilities, concerts, summer centers for children, and political assemblies. The building it occupied was a nineteenth-century structure that had been abandoned by the municipality since 1981, first squatted by a group of autonomous activists on October 15 1996, the occupation lasted nearly three decades until the municipality of Turin under mayor Stefano Lo Russo had pursued a "patto di collaborazione", sought to formalize the center's relationship with the city and recognize it as a common good: an attempt, in institutional terms, to convert a space of counter-power into a managed form of civic participation. It was this agreement, and the political model it represented, that the national government moved to destroy.

At dawn on December 18, 2025, the DIGOS (the political division of the Italian state police) supported by an disproportionally large deployment of riot police, armored vehicles, and law enforcement personnel in full anti-riot gear, surrounded the building and carried out the eviction and seizure of the premises by direct order of Home Affairs Minister Matteo Piantedosi, thus making it an intervention ordered by local government, in what critics immediately identified as a political rather than administrative act. The proportionality of the operation to its stated objective was immediately legible as theater rather than law enforcement: the Prefettura of Turin confirmed that only six activists were found inside the building at the moment of the eviction, for whom the state deployed armored vehicles, water cannons, and a neighborhood-wide lockdown.

What followed the eviction is, from a critical military geography perspective, more significant than the eviction itself: the state did not withdraw once the building had been cleared, but maintained a continuous, massive police presence in Vanchiglia for months afterward, transforming a residential neighborhood into what residents and local politicians began calling a permanent zone of occupation, a display of urbicide delineated by fences and checkpoints in the heart of Turin. From the eviction of December 18, 2025 through March 2026, thousands of police officers took turns in shifts guarding an empty, walled-up building, with a total cost to public funds that the police union estimated at 2.8 million euros. Residents described anti-riot police patrolling streets, squares, and the entrances to schools on a daily basis, with a pervasive atmosphere of surveillance and intimidation that reduced evening social life in the neighborhood and generated a widespread sense of living under military occupation. It's notable to observe that quantifying the cost of the presidio without acknowledging that the deployment was the direct consequence of a political choice based exclusively on repression rather than dialogue was intellectually dishonest, and that the model of militarized security belonged to Trump and his followers, with the Interior Ministry choosing to spend millions of euros guarding that place rather than investing the same funds in urban and social regeneration.

The demonstrations and marches that took place for the months after the occupation of the area were met with great participation from both Turin citizens and on the national level, but were also subsequently met with resistance from an asimmetrical display of armed forces inteded to contrast and suppress the dissent that people were showing towards a suppressive governamental act.

The larger and more consequential mobilization came on January 31



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Vanchiglia neighbourhood in Turin with barriers and access points following the shutdown of Askatasuna

2026, when a national demonstration was called in solidarity with Askatasuna, drawing participants from across Italy in what became one of Turin's largest political gatherings in years. The march began peacefully, with tens of thousands of people converging from three separate starting points, but the peaceful character of the demonstration collapsed in the late afternoon, when a contingent of several hundred masked autonomists detached from the main body of the march and moved toward Corso Regina Margherita, as the group approached the police cordon near the sealed building, culminating in violent conflicts on both ends. During that evening and on the next days, videos from the protest started circulating on social medias, making the event gain national attention for its brutality and its divisiveness. While a group of people were siding with the citizens, especially after seeing how brutal policemen were being towards protestors, major media coverage and attention from the government was given to the few instances in which it was police to be "damaged". Most notably it was the official account of the Polizia di Stato that published images of injured policemen on their socials, only to later come out that the published images were modified with AI.

The police subsequently stated that the image had been chosen from among the most viral images circulating on the web in those days and had not been generated or altered by the State Police itself, a clarification that while technically plausible, did not resolve the central problem: a law enforcement institution with millions of followers on state-verified social media accounts had amplified and

officially endorsed an AI-manipulated image of its own officers in the immediate aftermath of a politically charged confrontation, at a moment when the government was constructing a public narrative of organized terroristic violence to delegitimize an entire political movement.

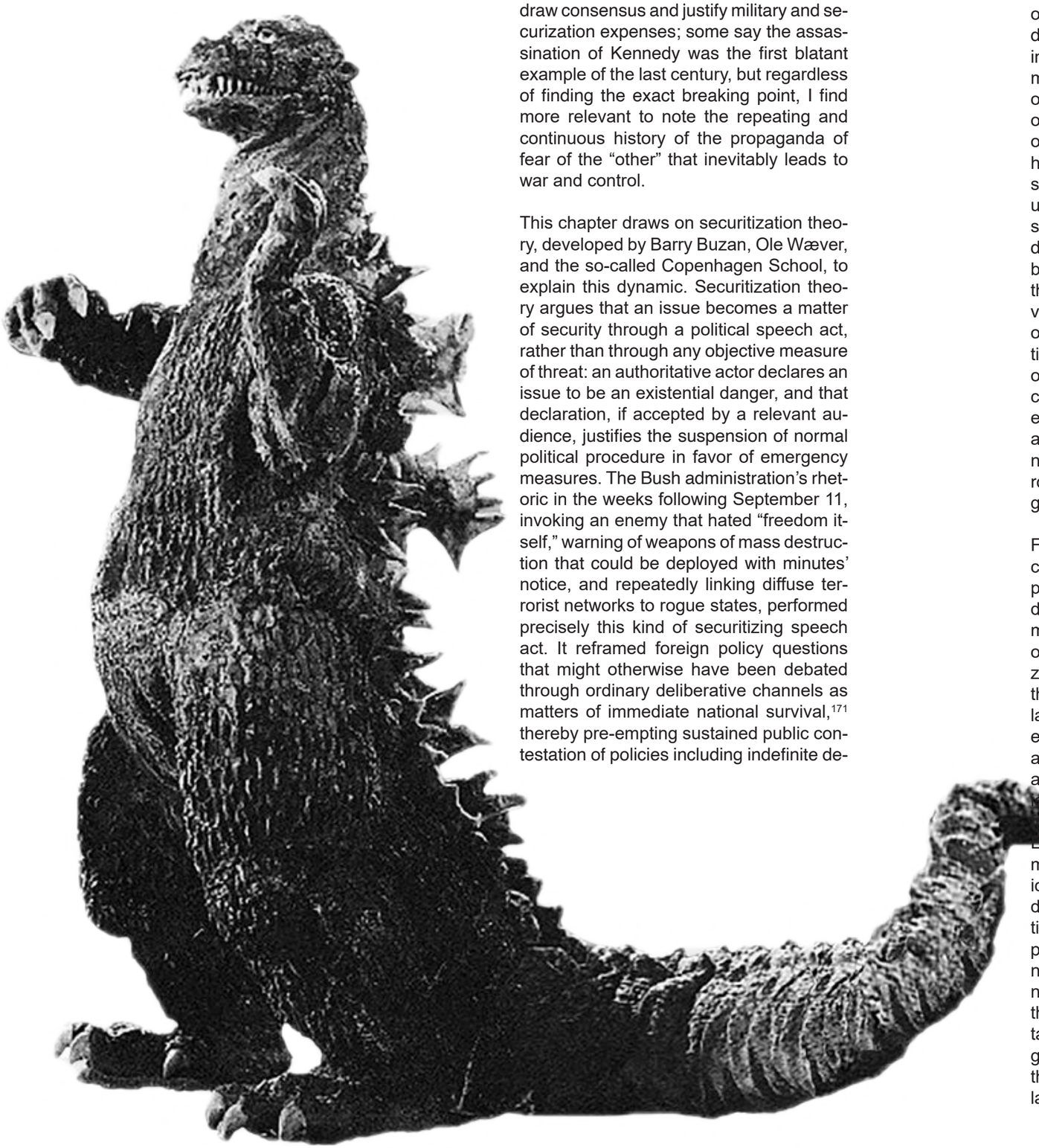
The events surrounding Askatasuna were significant to show how governamental and military powers act in order to bring forward their interests, not only occupying spaces and disrupting through physical presence and violence, but also through control of narratives and manipulation of information through media.





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Images published by the Italian Police altered with AI

170



M3 Politics of fear

It's hard to establish a single event that unveiled how much fear had always been the factor to be instrumentalized by power to draw consensus and justify military and securization expenses; some say the assassination of Kennedy was the first blatant example of the last century, but regardless of finding the exact breaking point, I find more relevant to note the repeating and continuous history of the propaganda of fear of the "other" that inevitably leads to war and control.

This chapter draws on securitization theory, developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and the so-called Copenhagen School, to explain this dynamic. Securitization theory argues that an issue becomes a matter of security through a political speech act, rather than through any objective measure of threat: an authoritative actor declares an issue to be an existential danger, and that declaration, if accepted by a relevant audience, justifies the suspension of normal political procedure in favor of emergency measures. The Bush administration's rhetoric in the weeks following September 11, invoking an enemy that hated "freedom itself," warning of weapons of mass destruction that could be deployed with minutes' notice, and repeatedly linking diffuse terrorist networks to rogue states, performed precisely this kind of securitizing speech act. It reframed foreign policy questions that might otherwise have been debated through ordinary deliberative channels as matters of immediate national survival,[171] thereby pre-empting sustained public contestation of policies including indefinite detention, the erosion of habeas corpus, and the invasion of Iraq.

A second and complementary resource is the sociology of risk and fear associated with Ulrich Beck's account of the "risk society"[172] and Frank Furedi's work on the broader culture of fear in late modern societies. Beck's argument that contemporary societies are organized less around the distribution of goods than around the management of manufactured, often invisible risks helps explain why terrorism proved such a durable organizing threat:[173] unlike a conventional military adversary, the terrorist network is diffuse, difficult to locate definitively, and capable of striking anywhere, which means the risk it poses can never be fully verified as eliminated. This structural open-endedness is politically productive, as it sustains a permanent state of anticipatory anxiety that, unlike a conventional war with an achievable endpoint, has no natural terminus, and it is precisely this open-endedness that legitimated the War on Terror's unprecedented duration and geographic reach.

For a critical military geography, the crucial move is to recognize that this politics of fear is as psychological or discursive as it is spatial. Fear was mapped onto specific imagined geographies[174] that sorted the world into zones of danger and zones of safety, threatening "elsewheres" and a homeland requiring protection. Media coverage, government threat briefings, and popular culture together produced and circulated cartographic imaginaries of an arc of instability stretching from North Africa through the Middle East to South and Central Asia, a mental map that did significant political work: it rendered military bases, drone strikes, and prolonged occupation in these regions legible not as expansionary projects but as defensive necessities, proximate threats to be neutralized before they could reach the homeland. The consensus for sustained military presence in these regions was thus manufactured in part through a spatial imagination that collapsed the distance between a village and metropolis.

This affective and spatial politics of fear also did crucial work in disciplining domestic dissent. To question the necessity of a particular deployment, detention policy, or surveillance program was readily framed, especially in the political climate of the early 2000s, as a failure to appreciate the gravity of the threat, or worse, as a form of disloyalty. Fear therefore operated to both justify military presence abroad and to narrow the field of legitimate political debate at home, producing a bipartisan security consensus that persisted, with periodic erosion, well over a decade after the initial attacks.[175] Understanding this affective consensus-building is essential background for the chapter's subsequent sections, since the legal exceptions, vertical technologies, urban interventions, and necropolitical categorizations examined below were politically enabled by, and in turn helped to sustain, a durable and deliberately cultivated politics of fear.

Before turning to the theoretical vocabulary of everywhere war, territory, and exception, it is necessary to account for the affective and political conditions that made events like the Cold War and the War on Terror's spatial expansion possible in the first place: namely, the cultivation of a pervasive politics of fear. The rapid and largely uncontested authorization of two major invasions, the constant concern over international conflict a global program of extrajudicial detention, and an open-ended expansion of executive and military authority did not occur simply because policymakers judged them strategically sound. It occurred because a domestic and international public had been persuaded, through a sustained discourse of imminent existential threat, that such measures were not merely advisable but necessary for survival. Fear functioned not as an incidental backdrop to the war but as one of its primary conditions of possibility, the affective infrastructure upon which consensus for sustained military presence abroad was built and continually renewed.

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Godzilla, cinematic representation of nuclear histeria in the 1950s

171
Bigo &Tsoukala, 2008, p. 2

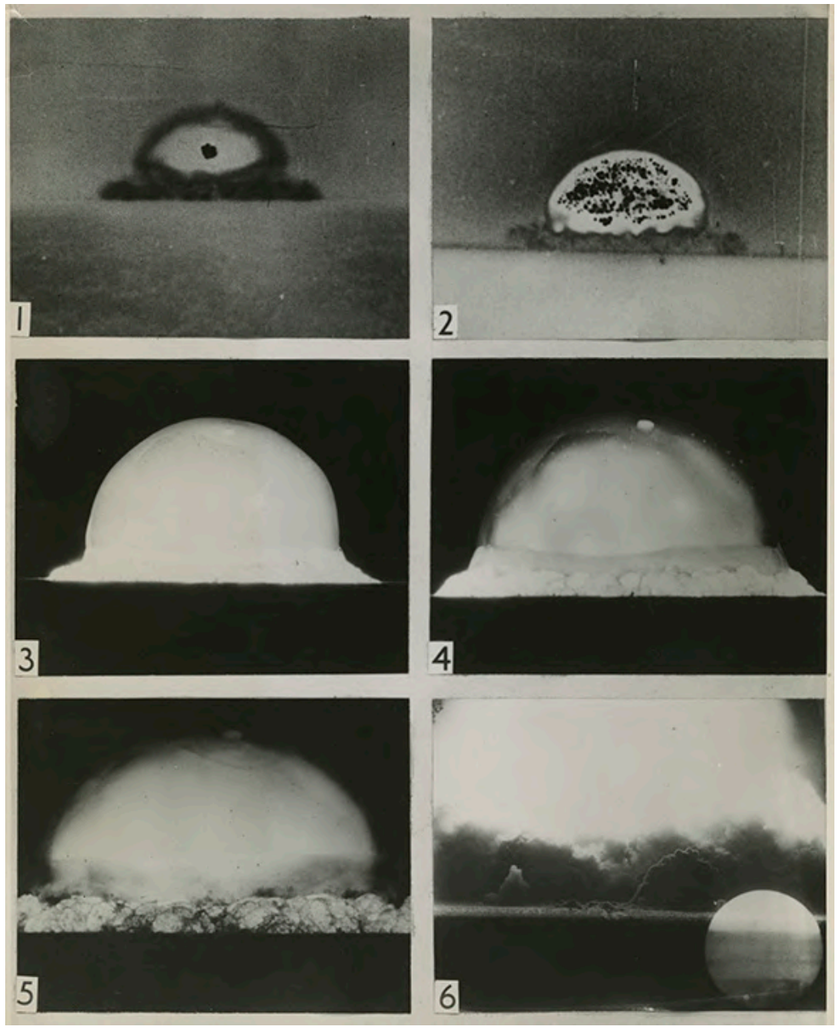
172
Elden, 2007, p. 834

173
Davis, 2017, p. 8

174
Gregory, 2004, p. 17

175
Ibid., p. 24

Cold War and nuclear deterrence



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Testing of nuclear weaponry

The Cold War is commonly understood through the language of superpower rivalry, ideological confrontation and nuclear strategy. Such an approach is useful, but it can also make the period appear strangely detached from physical space. The Cold War was not fought only through diplomatic negotiations, military doctrines and weapons programmes, but it was also built into landscapes and infrastructures. Missile fields, radar stations, military bases, communication networks and underground command facilities formed a material geography through which the strategic confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union was organised. Since the 50s, nuclear deterrence depended on the ability to locate, protect, disperse and connect military capabilities across territory.

This geographical dimension is particularly important because nuclear strategy is often presented as if it operates independently of place. Strategic theories tend to reduce the problem to calculations concerning weapons, targets and probabilities. Yet, strategy is necessarily geographical, even when geography is not explicitly acknowledged as such. In the case of nuclear deterrence, questions of distance, territory, location and the physical characteristics of states could affect strategic calculations and perceptions of vulnerability.[176] Geography was therefore part of the conditions that made deterrence possible.

The central problem of nuclear deterrence was the possibility of a first strike. If one state could destroy the other's nuclear forces before they could be used in retaliation, the credibility of deterrence would be weakened. Nuclear strategy therefore placed considerable importance on survivability. Weapons needed to remain available after an attack, while command and communication systems had to function well enough for political authorities to retain control. This produced a particular spatial logic: military systems were dispersed, concealed, hardened and connected through redundant infrastructures,[177] to ensure that the wider system could continue to operate under conditions of extreme disruption. The prospect of nuclear war influenced telecommunications, transport infrastructure, urban planning and the location of specialist facilities. Cold War urbanism started dealing of the problem of creating infrastructure capable of surviving nuclear attack. Telecommunications networks and technical facilities were dispersed and sometimes located according to considerations of secrecy, expertise and survivability, positioning otherwise appear to be ordinary decisions about planning and infrastructure as part of a wider military geography shaped by the nuclear condition.

The bunker occupies a particularly revealing position within this geography. It is perhaps the most recognisable architectural response to the nuclear threat, but reducing it to a shelter misses much of its significance. Aside from somewhere to hide, depending on its scale and function, it could serve as a command center, communications facility, government headquarters, military operations center or civil-defense shelter. Its architecture was consequently determined by what needed to survive. The aim was protecting human bodies from blast and radiation, but also protecting particular political and military functions. The nuclear bunker should be understood as part of a longer history of buried and semi-buried defensive structures, but what changed during the twentieth century was the scale and proliferation of this architectural form. Under the conditions of the Cold War, underground construction extended from relatively small shelters to major civic and military facilities; it became an important architectural expression of modernity because it combined technological rationality with an increasingly extreme concern with protection and survival.[178] Yet there is something contradictory about this architecture: modern architecture is often associated with openness, light, circulation and the rational organisation of space, while the nuclear bunker represents almost the opposite tendency being thick, enclosed and underground. Yet it is also highly rationalised: rooms, corridors, entrances, ventilation systems, power supplies and communication facilities are organised according to specific calculations about survival, A kind of underground architectural modernism, in which reinforced concrete and controlled relationships between interior and exterior respond directly to the technologies of modern warfare.[179]

The geographical significance of the bunker comes partly from this relationship between visibility and invisibility. A military base or missile installation can often be clearly identified in the landscape. A bunker, by contrast, disappears into the terrain: its strategic importance may be located underground, while the surface gives relatively little indication of what lies beneath it. This does not make the site geographically insignificant, but on the contrary, concealment itself becomes a geographical strategy. Access roads, security zones, communications systems and restricted areas can all mark the presence of military infrastructure even when the principal structure is hidden, but the underground becomes a particular way of organising relations between military power and territory. The bunker can have a political connotation as well, as a space in which geopolitics, security and the management of life intersect.

176
Gray, 2013, p. 117

177
Barney, 2015, p. 65

178
Boyd & Linehan, 2018, p. 247
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179
Ibid., p. 250

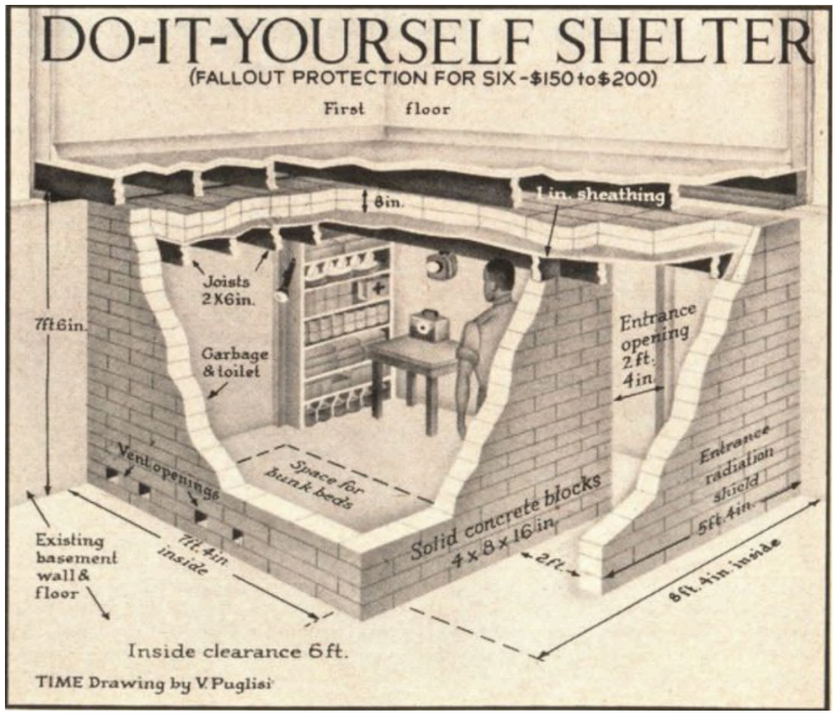
The bunker was intended to provide a protected environment from which government functions could continue during a nuclear war, turning an underground space into a potential center of political continuity. This raises an important question about what exactly was being protected. The language of civil defence can suggest that the purpose of nuclear shelters was simply to preserve human life, but in practice, Cold War protection was uneven. Military command structures, government authorities and strategic communication systems received forms of protection that could not necessarily be extended to entire populations. The distinction matters because it reveals that security was not distributed equally across space. Some people and infrastructures were treated as strategically indispensable, while others were exposed to a much greater degree of risk.[180] David Pike's analysis of Cold War bunker culture makes this point in a different way, distinguishing between several forms of bunker space, including domestic shelters, community facilities and government "supershelters". These different forms reflected different ideas about survival and security. The government bunker in particular represented an attempt to preserve political authority through the physical isolation of a protected administrative space.[181] The question of survival was therefore inseparable from questions of political hierarchy.

The bunker also complicates the conventional understanding of deterrence. Deterrence depended upon the assumption that nuclear war should never occur, since the consequences of an exchange were expected to be catastrophic. Yet states simultaneously invested in infrastructure designed for precisely that eventuality. The bunker is consequently an architecture of a war that was supposed to remain hypothetical. Its construction acknowledged the possibility of nuclear conflict without resolving the problem of what survival would actually mean after such a conflict. This gives bunker architecture an important temporal quality, being built in anticipation of a future event rather than as a response to an existing one. Thickness, depth, ventilation, blast protection, redundancy and communications were all attempts to spatially anticipate an uncertain future. On top of this, bunker architecture assumes that nuclear war is sufficiently possible to justify extraordinary expenditure, but also sufficiently unlikely that normal political and economic life can continue above ground. The result is an unusual landscape in which catastrophic violence is simultaneously imagined as imminent and kept outside everyday experience.[182]

The geographical scale of this process is also worth emphasising. Nuclear deterrence operated at the global level, but its material consequences were often local. A decision about strategic vulnerability could result in a communications facility being built in a particular town, a restricted zone being established around a military site, or an underground command centre being excavated beneath a particular landscape, which is how peripheral places could become strategically significant because of their incorporation into military networks, reshaping the development of relatively small towns whose importance was not otherwise obvious.[183] The bunker is therefore part of a wider infrastructural system rather than an isolated building, depending on electricity, telecommunications, transport, personnel and information. The bunker consequently represents a node within a much larger network of military infrastructure.

Even after the end of the Cold War, the physical structures did not disappear when the geopolitical circumstances that produced them changed. Some have been abandoned, others adapted for new purposes, and some have become heritage sites showing how structures originally associated with nuclear preparedness can acquire new meanings once their military function has disappeared. The persistence of these sites raises a further issue for critical military geography: militarisation does not necessarily end when military activity ends; the landscape can retain traces of previous strategic priorities: concrete structures, restricted territories, tunnels and altered land uses can remain long after the original threat has receded, extending the materiality the Cold War today in parts of the landscape.[184]

The bunker is not the only architectural form that spread during the Cold War useful for connecting geopolitical strategy with material geography. Nuclear deterrence is often discussed through concepts such as mutually assured destruction, second-strike capability and strategic stability, but it also depended upon the construction and maintenance of particular spaces: missile silos, submarine bases, radar installations, communication networks and command bunkers. The strategic system existed through these material arrangements that became physically embedded in the landscape. The apparent contradiction of an architecture of survival constructed around the possibility of societal destruction, defensive, but whose existence depended upon offensive nuclear capabilities, made the bunker readable as a particular spatial response to the problem of nuclear uncertainty. Deterrence required the threat of destruction to be credible, while bunker construction attempted to make the consequences of that destruction survivable for selected people and institutions.[185] The resulting landscape was neither entirely civilian nor entirely military. It was a hybrid geography in which ordinary spaces were reorganised around an extraordinary possibility. This is significant because it shifts attention away from the weapon alone and towards the material conditions through which military power operates. Nuclear deterrence was built into concrete, tunnels, communication networks, restricted zones and patterns of settlement. Beneath the apparent stability of the Cold War bunker brought together protection, secrecy, technology and political authority in a single architectural form. The bomb is political, not because of an explosion that should never happen, but because it constitutes the ultimate form of surveillance.[186]



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Fallout shelter diagram, 1959, TIME

180
Klinke, 2015, p. 1, 4

181
Pike, 2021, p. 103

182
Virilio, 2006, p. 98

183
Leetma et al., 2023, p.120

184
Kinnear, 2020, p.77

185
Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 43-45

186
Virilio, 2006, p. 100

Urban fear and defensible space

The relationship between fear, urban space and security provides an important bridge between environmental criminology and critical military geography. In 1972, Oscar Newman's concept of defensible space argued that the physical organisation of residential environments could influence levels of crime by encouraging territoriality, natural surveillance and informal social control. The underlying idea was relatively straightforward: when residents can clearly identify and observe the spaces around their homes, they are more likely to take responsibility for them, while potential offenders are more likely to perceive that they are being watched,[187] making architecture part of a wider strategy of crime prevention. The significance of defensible space, however, extends beyond its application to housing design, as it contributed to a broader way of thinking about security in which physical space could be deliberately organised to distinguish between those who belonged and those who did not. Thus, it became clear that security is not simply imposed on space from outside, but can become embedded within the design and everyday functioning of the built environment.

Newman's approach has also been criticised for its tendency towards environmental determinism. The assumption that particular spatial arrangements will produce particular social behaviours can make the relationship between architecture and crime appear more direct than it actually is. Crime, fear and social disorder are shaped by social relations, inequalities, policing practices and perceptions of particular groups.[188] This idea of fear becomes the shaping element when considering the subsequent development of fortified urban landscapes and how perceptions of crime, gangs, social disorder and urban instability become translated into walls, gates, surveillance systems, private security and controlled forms of access. The result is the imagery of the "fortress" city: an urban environment in which security increasingly depends upon separation and exclusion. [189]

Security measures can therefore have a self-reinforcing character. The more urban space is divided into protected and unprotected areas, the more normalised the idea becomes that certain spaces and populations require defensive treatment. Security consequently becomes materialised through architecture while simultaneously shaping perceptions of urban space through surveillance systems, barriers, checkpoints, target-hardening techniques and forms of territorial control that were historically associated with military settings can become part of everyday urban security.[190] This provides a useful distinction between defensible space and militarised space. Newman's approach was largely concerned with creating environments in which residents could exercise informal control over their surroundings, but militarised urbanism involves a more explicit emphasis on threat, surveillance, exclusion and technological control. Nevertheless, there is an important continuity between the two, as both approaches treat the organisation of space as an instrument of security. The difference lies partly in the scale and intensity of the mechanisms involved and in the political assumptions behind them.

In São Paulo, Teresa Caldeira's examines the emergence of fortified enclaves in response to perceptions of crime and insecurity: gated residential developments, private security and controlled access create spaces in which particular social groups can separate themselves from the wider city. She argues that these forms of enclosure are not simply architectural responses to crime; they also reproduce social and spatial inequalities. Security becomes an apparatus with the ability to withdraw from shared urban space, while those outside the enclave can increasingly be constructed as potential threats.[191]

The critical geographical significance of this process lies in the way that apparently neutral security measures can produce differentiated forms of citizenship and access. Certain groups gain greater control over movement and access, while others experience increased surveillance or exclusion. Urban security therefore becomes a question of who is able to claim and control space, and this complicates the notion of the "threat" itself: gangs, crime, terrorism or disorder are often presented as objective dangers that simply require a spatial response, but a critical approach asks how these threats are constructed, by whom, and with what consequences. The identification of particular populations as threatening can contribute to their marginalisation (spatial and non), while the architecture designed to protect against them can make that marginalisation appear natural or necessary; that's how fear can become institutionalised through architecture, policing and planning.

The city becomes a space in which military and security rationalities can be normalised without necessarily appearing explicitly military. Both the bunker and the fortified city respond to perceived existential threats by attempting to control exposure through spatial organisation. The scale and nature of the threats are obviously different: nuclear war cannot be meaningfully compared with everyday crime. Yet both demonstrate how security concerns can become materialised systems of control. The critical question is what happens when these forms of protection become normalised, and whose security they ultimately prioritise. The movement from defensible space to fortified and militarised urbanism suggests that urban security is a process through which societies define danger, organise territory and determine who is entitled to protection. For a critical military geography of the city, this makes the built environment an important site for studying how security becomes both socially imagined and materially produced.

War on Terror and total war

The War on Terror, declared in the immediate aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001, offers a paradigmatic case through which to interrogate the spatial transformation of contemporary warfare. Where prior conflicts, however imperfectly, could be mapped onto discrete territories, front lines, and declared theaters of operation, the War on Terror was announced from its outset as a conflict without spatial or temporal limit. Its target was not a state but a diffuse, non-state network; its geography was consequently not a bounded battlefield but an "everywhere war"[192] that could in principle be waged in any place at any time through a complex set of practices, technologies, and doctrines that actively produced new kinds of space, new relationships between violence and territory, and new categories of who and what could be targeted, detained, or governed.

The result of a type of conflict like the War on Terror makes visible processes that are often obscured in more conventional accounts of war: the production of legal grey zones, the verticalization of the battlespace, the folding of counterinsurgency doctrine into urban planning, and the extension of the battlefield into the airport, the border checkpoint, and the metropolitan street. Through the next paragraphs organized thematically, rather than chronologically, the idea is to move from the conceptual vocabulary developed to describe the war's spatiality, through its principal empirical registers, to the biopolitical logics that underpinned targeting decisions, underlying how a climate of fear and intolerance helped fuel one of the most devastating conflicts of the current century.

187
Newman, 1972, p. 31

188
Taylor, Gottfredson & Brower, 1984, p. 303-331

189
Davis, 2006, p.346
Ibid., 2005, p..269

190
Graham, 1996, p.237

191
Caldeira, 2000, p. 25

192
Gregory, 2004, p. 51

Classical geopolitical and military-geographic approaches have generally assumed that war has a relatively legible spatial structure: fronts, rear areas, and neutral zones, each governed by different legal and operational rules. The War on Terror disrupted this spatial grammar, as conflict was no longer confined to clearly defined battlefields. Gregory's concept of the "everywhere war" captures this shift particularly well. Rather than a war organized around a recognizable front, it describes a dispersed and mobile battlespace that could take very different forms at the same time, from the remote control of drone strikes to close-quarters urban combat.

A second important conceptual resource is Stuart Elden's rethinking of territory. For Elden, territory is not simply a pre-existing container within which political activity takes place, but is historically produced through particular technologies of power, including practices of measurement, calculation, and legal ordering, along with struggles that characterized the War on Terror over the very mechanisms through which territorial sovereignty was established, suspended, or made ambiguous.[193] The airspace over Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas offers a useful example. Pakistani sovereignty was formally recognized, US forces nevertheless conducted drone operations there, and the practical operation of the programme often treated the question of sovereignty as secondary to the capacity to strike.

Legal framework

A third resource is Giorgio Agamben's theory of the state of exception. This provides a way of understanding how the War on Terror produced spaces in which ordinary legal protections could be suspended in the name of security. Guantánamo Bay is the clearest example: a space that was presented as being outside the normal reach of US law while remaining under US control. These three approaches should not be treated as competing explanations. Instead, they provide complementary ways of understanding the same broader development: a form of warfare that depended on the creation of new spatial arrangements, many of which were deliberately left legally ambiguous. The United States had leased the site from Cuba since 1903, but it has never been incorporated into US sovereign territory.[194] This legal position became central to the Bush administration's detention policy. The administration argued that detainees held at Guantánamo did not enjoy the full protection of the US Constitution and could also be treated as falling outside important protections of international humanitarian law. The unresolved status of the base therefore became a practical tool of detention policy rather than a merely technical question of jurisdiction, starting with the designation of detainees as "unlawful enemy combatants" and continuing through a series of Supreme Court decisions that progressively challenged the idea that the executive could place the detention regime beyond meaningful judicial review.

But Guantánamo was only one part of a much larger system. The CIA's network of "black sites" extended across Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, creating a largely hidden geography of detention and interrogation. Investigations by the US Senate Intelligence Committee, the European Parliament, journalists, and human rights organizations have helped reconstruct this network and the role played by host governments.[195] These sites were not simply exceptions to an otherwise coherent spatial system. They were part of how the War on Terror operated. Detention depended on finding or creating places where ordinary forms of oversight could be avoided, and jurisdictional ambiguity was therefore an operational resource. This is also where the concept of "lawfare" comes into play. Legal argument was not simply something that followed military operations; it was part of the process through which those operations were made possible.[196] Questions of geography and questions of law were consequently closely connected. Where a detainee was held affected which legal protections could be claimed, while legal interpretations helped determine which spaces could be used for detention in the first place. The involvement of private military and intelligence contractors further complicated this picture. Companies such as Blackwater, later known as Xe Services and Academi, and CACI became involved in the wider security and detention infrastructure. Privatization dispersed responsibility across state agencies, military organizations, intelligence services, and private companies, making accountability more difficult to locate.

Verticality

The rapid expansion of armed unmanned aerial vehicles after 2001, particularly in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia from the mid-2000s onwards, changed the way military space was organized. The battlefield increasingly depended on altitude, sensor range, persistent surveillance, and the technical systems that made up the "kill chain."

Drones appear to reduce the physical distance between the person conducting surveillance and the person being targeted, but they also create an entirely new kind of mediated distance. A drone operator may be sitting thousands of kilometres away from battlefield, watching a live surveillance feed and making decisions about people on the ground. The result is not the disappearance of distance but its reorganization through technology. Physical separation and operational proximity can exist at the same time. The concept of the "kill box" in this context is a designated area of airspace in which lethal force can be authorized under particular conditions. Its significance lies in the way it turns a three-dimensional portion of space into a temporary zone of military authority. The practice of "signature strikes" raises similar questions.[197] In these operations, individuals could be targeted on the basis of observed patterns of behaviour rather than confirmed identification.

Both practices demonstrate how the vertical geography of the War on Terror changed the relationship between seeing, knowing, and killing. Visibility from above did not simply provide information; under certain conditions, it became part of the justification for the use of lethal force. Vertical warfare also depended on a substantial terrestrial infrastructure. Drone operations required bases, communications systems, maintenance facilities, intelligence networks, and access agreements. Forward operating locations in Djibouti, the Gulf states, and elsewhere were therefore as important to drone warfare as the airspace in which the aircraft operated.

There is also a temporal dimension to this form of warfare. "Pattern of life" surveillance, for example, depends on observing a particular area over an extended period in order to identify routines, relationships, and behaviours.[198] Days or weeks of surveillance can therefore be compressed into a single moment of lethal action. This creates a distinctive relationship between time and space: persistent observation requires a continuing presence over a particular territory, even when the eventual act of violence lasts only seconds.

Urban warfare

Another dimension of the War on Terror concerns the growing importance of the city as a military space. This was particularly evident in Iraq and Afghanistan, and later in operations against the Islamic State in Mosul and Raqqa. The US Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual (FM 3-24), published in 2006, reflected this shift by placing considerable emphasis on population, infrastructure, and the social organization of urban areas. Military doctrine increasingly incorporated techniques associated with urban planning and social analysis, including population mapping, infrastructure assessment, and "human terrain" analysis. This design of counterinsurgency blurred the boundaries between military and civilian forms of expertise. Architects, anthropologists, planners, and other specialists could be brought into military operations in an effort to make complex urban environments more understandable and, ultimately, more controllable.[199] The city became

193
Elden, 2007, p. 231

194.
Gregory, 2006, p. 407

195
Hafetz, 2020, p. 46-50

196
Morrissey, 2011, p. 284

197
Kaplan, 2017, p. 161-163

198
Gregory, 2017, p. 31

199
Graham, 2012, p. 138
Gonzàlez, 2010, p. 111

not simply the setting for military operations but an object of military knowledge and intervention.

Fallujah in 2004 and Mosul in 2016-17 provide important examples of how this worked in practice. Operations in both cities involved the systematic clearing of neighbourhoods, the use of checkpoints and population registration systems, and extensive destruction of homes and infrastructure through attempts to classify, monitor, and regulate urban populations. The relationship between overseas warfare and domestic policing is equally important: technologies, equipment, surveillance practices, and ideas about security developed during the War on Terror did not necessarily remain overseas, as some were subsequently incorporated into policing and urban security practices in the United States and Europe, the already mentioned "boomerang effect," in which techniques developed in colonial or military settings return to shape security practices within the state itself. What may be distinctive about the twenty-first century is less the basic logic of population control than the scale and sophistication of the digital information available to military forces.

Necropolitics and the Governance of Life

The previous sections have examined exceptional spaces, vertical warfare, and urban combat. This section shifts attention to the political processes through which populations within those spaces were classified and made targetable. Necropolitic' focus on the power to determine who may live and who may die helps illuminate the categories used during the War on Terror to distinguish between "combatants" and "civilians" and, within those categories, to determine whose deaths would be recognized and whose would disappear into more ambiguous forms of accounting.[200]

On top of this, the idea of grievability adds another dimension to this argument: a selection of whose lives are publicly mourned and whose deaths receive little recognition helps explain why civilian casualties did not always carry the same political or moral weight.[201] Some deaths became major public events, while others were described as unfortunate but unavoidable consequences of military operations. The distinction between lives that are publicly grieved and those that remain largely invisible is therefore closely connected to the politics of security. These theoretical arguments can be connected to the practical systems used to count and classify casualties.

Organizations such as the Bureau of Investigative Journalism and Airwars have documented and contested official accounts of civilian deaths, while disputes over the meaning of "collateral damage" have repeatedly exposed the political assumptions built into casualty reporting.[202] At the operational level, practices such as pattern-of-life analysis, watchlists, and biometric databases transformed these categories into procedures for surveillance and targeting.[203] The necropolitical classification was built into physical and technological infrastructures: surveillance systems, checkpoints, biometric databases, intelligence networks, and the kill chain itself. Decisions about who could be watched, stopped, detained, or targeted were therefore also decisions about how space and populations were organized.

Securitized Homeland

The geography of the War on Terror cannot be understood solely through its overseas theaters of operation, because the conflict also transformed domestic space, particularly through the securitization of borders and airports. The creation of the US Department of Homeland Security in 2002 and the expansion of aviation security following the establishment of the Transportation Security Administration were central parts of this process. Airports became especially important because they brought together large-scale civilian mobility with new systems of risk assessment, surveillance, and pre-emption.

200
Mbembe, 2013, p. 13

201
Butler, 2009, p. 3-15

202
Ford & Richardson, 2023, p. 809

203
Kaplan, 2017, p. 166

204
Amoore, 2006, p. 341

205
Quinlan, 2015, p. 227

206
Coward, 2009, p. 26

207
Gregory, 2004, p. 49

Biometric borders and aeromobility shaped this transformation: the airport became a space in which individuals were increasingly assessed according to risk categories before they had actually done anything wrong. In this sense, some of the logic associated with the overseas battlespace was translated into everyday systems of mobility management: people were screened, categorized, and sorted according to perceived levels of risk.[204] Domestic securitization also had a distinctly racialized geography: Muslim communities in cities such as New York were subject to disproportionate surveillance, including through programmes associated with the New York Police Department's Demographics Unit. More broadly, counterterrorism practices, technologies, and personnel developed in the context of overseas warfare became increasingly present in ordinary domestic policing.[205] This process is central to what critical geographers describe as the "war comes home."

The significance of this development is that the "everywhere war" should not be understood simply as a metaphor. It describes a real spatial process in which the boundary between an overseas theatre of war and the domestic homeland became increasingly difficult to maintain. Security practices developed in one geographical context could be transferred to another, while the distinction between civilian space and battlespace was repeatedly reworked.

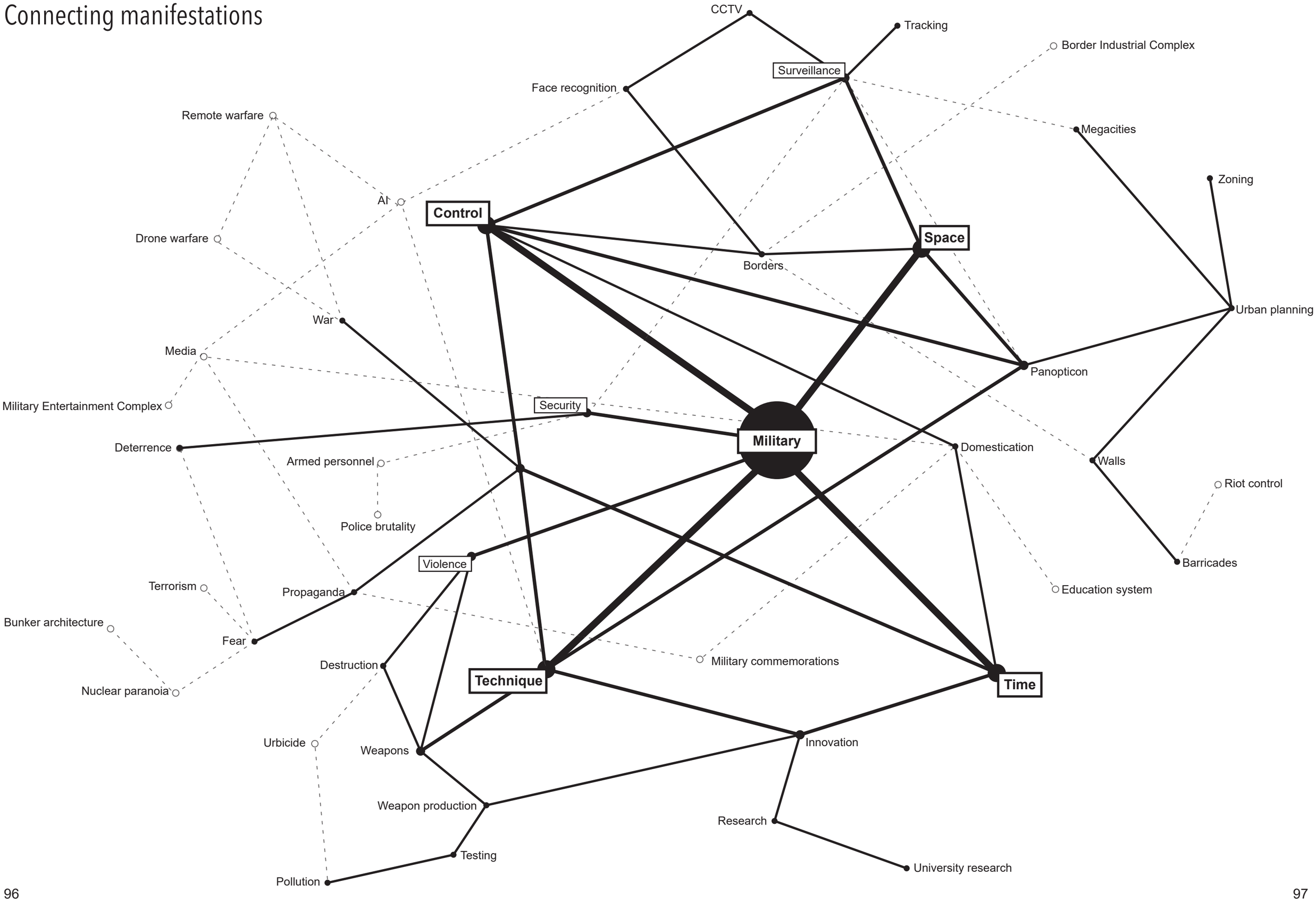
Researching the spatial geography of the War on Terror presents a particular methodological problem because much of the infrastructure involved was deliberately concealed.[206] Classification, extraordinary rendition, covert operations, and the distribution of responsibility among intelligence agencies and private contractors all made these spaces difficult to identify and map. Researchers often have to work with fragmentary, redacted, or disputed information. This creates an epistemological problem, but it is also a substantive finding. The difficulty of mapping certain spaces is not simply an unfortunate obstacle faced by researchers; it is partly the result of how those spaces were designed to operate. Rather than treating these gaps as methodological shortcomings, the question should be what it means that particular spaces were constructed to resist both legal scrutiny and geographical visibility.

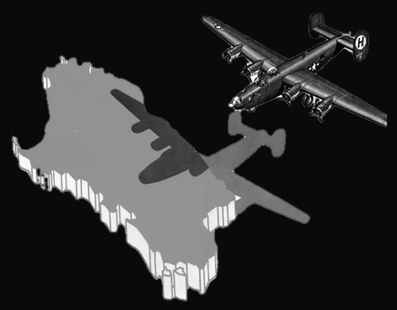
Rupture or Continuity?

Does the War on Terror represent a genuine rupture in the spatial history of warfare, or is it better understood as an intensification of much older forms of colonial and imperial spatial control? On one hand, the War on Terror introduced forms of digital surveillance, remote targeting, and algorithmic classification that have significantly altered how military power operates across space. On the other, many of its underlying practices have clear precedents in colonial histories of extraterritorial rule, aerial policing, population classification, and the distinction between governable and supposedly ungovernable populations. The drone is only the latest development in a much longer history of using air power to monitor and control populations at a distance.[207]

The themes developed here (legal exception, verticality, urbanization, necropolitics, and homeland securitization) should not remain isolated case studies, but should provide the basis for the argument developed in the later chapters of the thesis. Taken together, these themes point to a common spatial logic. What matters, then, is not any single technology or doctrine, but the way these different practices worked together. A critical military geography is particularly well placed to make that relationship visible. The War on Terror can therefore be understood not simply as a collection of military campaigns, but as a broader spatial project in which law, technology, territory, population, and security were repeatedly reorganized around new forms of military power.

Connecting manifestations





Awareness check

Before addressing the themes that will be developed in the following pages, I find it necessary to acknowledge the nature and sensitivity of the issues under discussion. The struggles and events examined here concern a land in which I was not born, but which, through family and personal ties, I nevertheless feel deeply connected to. I believe in the right of the Sardinian people to self-determination and sovereignty over their own land, just as I believe in the same right for all peoples who experience the injustices of colonial and extractive forms of imposition.

The events presented in the following sections will be examined in relation to the theoretical framework developed in the previous pages. The analysis will draw both on historically documented events and on contemporary developments and dynamics that continue to shape the presence and activities of the military in the Mediterranean and, more broadly, within the international context. While acknowledging the personal position from which this research begins, the analysis will nevertheless seek to remain as closely grounded as possible in documented sources and established facts, while also giving consideration to the concerns expressed over time by activists, political representatives, and local communities regarding the impact of military presence and political and industrial activities on Sardinian territory. For me, acknowledging my own positionality is an integral part of the research process and of my relationship with a territory that cannot be understood as a neutral space, but rather as a place shaped by ongoing conflicts, memories, and claims.

Ultimately, I retain the hope for a future in which greater autonomy may contribute to restoring dignity to Sardinia, protecting its territory, and healing it from the poisons it was inflicted.

Presa de cussèntzia

Prima de afrontare sas temàticas chi ant a èssere sviluppadas in sas pàginas chi sighint, considero netzessàriu abèrrere una curta parentesi de cussèntzia in raportu a sa natura e a sa sensibilidade de sos argumentos tratatos. Sas luchas e sas vicèndas chi ant a èssere analisadas apartenent a una terra in ue no so nàschidu, ma chi, gràtzias a ligàmenes familiares e umanos, sento profundamente bìtzina. Credo in su deretu a s'autodeterminatzione e a sa soberania de su pòpulu sardu subra de sa terra sua, comente pro totu sos àteros pòpulos chi bivent sas injustìtzias de impositziones de tipu coloniale e estrativu.

Sos fatos presentados in sas setziones chi sighint ant a èssere postos in relatzione cun su cuadru teòricu isviluppadu in sas pàginas anteriores. Si at a fàghere riferimentu tantu a vicèndas documentadas istòricamente, cantu a eventos e dinàmicas contemporàneas chi sighint a influentzare sa presèntzia e s'atividade militare in su Mediterràneu e, prus in generale, in su cuntestu internatzionale. Cando si parte dae una positzione personale, s'anàlisi chircarà però de mantènnere un'aprocciu su prus possìbile aderente a sas fontis e a sos fatos documentados, dende ispàtziu fintzas a sas preocupatziones manifestadas in su tempus dae ativistas, esponentes polìticos e comunitades locales in contu de s'impatu de sa presèntzia militare e de sas atividades polìticas e industriales subra de su territòriu sardu. Arricòschere su pròpiu positzionamentu est pro mè parte integrante de su traballu de chirca e de su raportu cun unu territòriu chi no benit osservadu comente unu spàtziu neutru, ma comente unu logu attraversadu dae cunflitos, memòrias e rivendicatziones ancora presentes.

Restat, in fine, sa speràntzia de unu futuru in su cale una majore autonomia potzat contribuire a torrare a sa Sardigna dignidade, tutela de su territòriu e a sanare-la dae sos velènos chi l'ant istadu inflitos.

Presa di coscienza

Prima di affrontare le tematiche che verranno sviluppate nelle pagine successive, ritengo necessario aprire una breve parentesi di presa di coscienza rispetto alla natura e alla sensibilità degli argomenti trattati. Le lotte e le vicende che verranno analizzate appartengono a una terra nella quale non sono nato, ma che, attraverso legami familiari e umani, sento profondamente vicina. Credo nel diritto all'autodeterminazione e alla sovranità del popolo sardo sulla propria terra, come per tutti gli altri popoli che vivono le ingiustizie di imposizioni di stampo coloniale ed estrattivo.

I fatti presentati nelle sezioni successive saranno messi in relazione con il quadro teorico sviluppato nelle pagine precedenti. Si farà riferimento sia a vicende storicamente documentate sia a eventi e dinamiche contemporanee che continuano a influenzare la presenza e l'attività militare nel Mediterraneo e, più in generale, nel contesto internazionale. Pur partendo da una posizione personale, l'analisi cercherà tuttavia di mantenere un approccio il più possibile aderente alle fonti e ai fatti documentati, dando spazio anche alle preoccupazioni espresse nel tempo da attivisti, esponenti politici e comunità locali riguardo all'impatto della presenza militare e delle attività politiche e industriali sul territorio sardo. Riconoscere il proprio posizionamento è per me parte integrante del lavoro di ricerca e del rapporto con un territorio che non viene osservato come uno spazio neutro, ma come un luogo attraversato da conflitti, memorie e rivendicazioni ancora presenti.

Rimane, infine, la speranza di un futuro nel quale una maggiore autonomia possa contribuire a restituire alla Sardegna dignità, tutela del territorio e curarla dai veleni che gli sono stati inflitti.

Military manifestations of Sardinia

The next chapter is entirely dedicated to the Sardinian territory and its entanglements with military presence and its influences on landscape, urban fabric, human and environmental settings. The reasons for dedicating such a significant part of this research to the island are multiple: one is personal, as despite not being my home, the family ties I have that live there, their stories and testimonies of what every Sardinian has been thrust upon for decades have always been enough to sprout in me the desire to always try to be as involved as possible when it comes to support the Sardinian cause. The second reason is evidential: Sardinia holds the primate for most militarized region in Italy and Europe, a record that comes with some of the most deleterious consequences on economic, sanitary, ecological and spatial spheres in all Europe and thus in a supposedly at-peace scenario, so it would be hypocritical of me not holding our national government and the general management of the situation at the same standards like I've done in the previous pages.

The categories of military presence and case studies mentioned in the last chapters are not dialectically separated from the investigation of Sardinia, but become propaedeutic tools of analysis that contextualize the different military forms present on the island and draw parallelisms with other past or present scenarios in order to recognize repeating patterns. A similar approach is conducted here, selecting sites of interest that are emblematic to uncover the mechanisms in which the military spread and infiltrated material and dialectic spaces and how it presents itself, starting from WW2 and after, since on one hand it's the origin of the still existing manifestations on the island, but on the other, many activists, scholars and locals believe that the Italian government in 1945, with the Marshall Plan, Italy signed a lifelong debt obligation to the exploitation of the island.

Sardinia: the aircraft carrier of the Mediterranean

This next part of the research is devoted to an on-field investigation on Sardinia and its military manifestations. The concepts that have been explained in the previous pages will serve as the theoretical foundation for understanding how military presence influences the territory of the island over the course of its history starting from World War II, as its strategic position in the center of the Mediterranean Sea has been the main reason why even today military powers are interested in operating in it. Talking about militarized Sardinia in its past, present and future through a critical spatial analysis is extremely important to understand and shine a light on the negative and oppressive nature of militarism on both social and economical development at the expense of natural ecosystems, civil rights, and democratic structures, and I hope the next pages will reflect that.

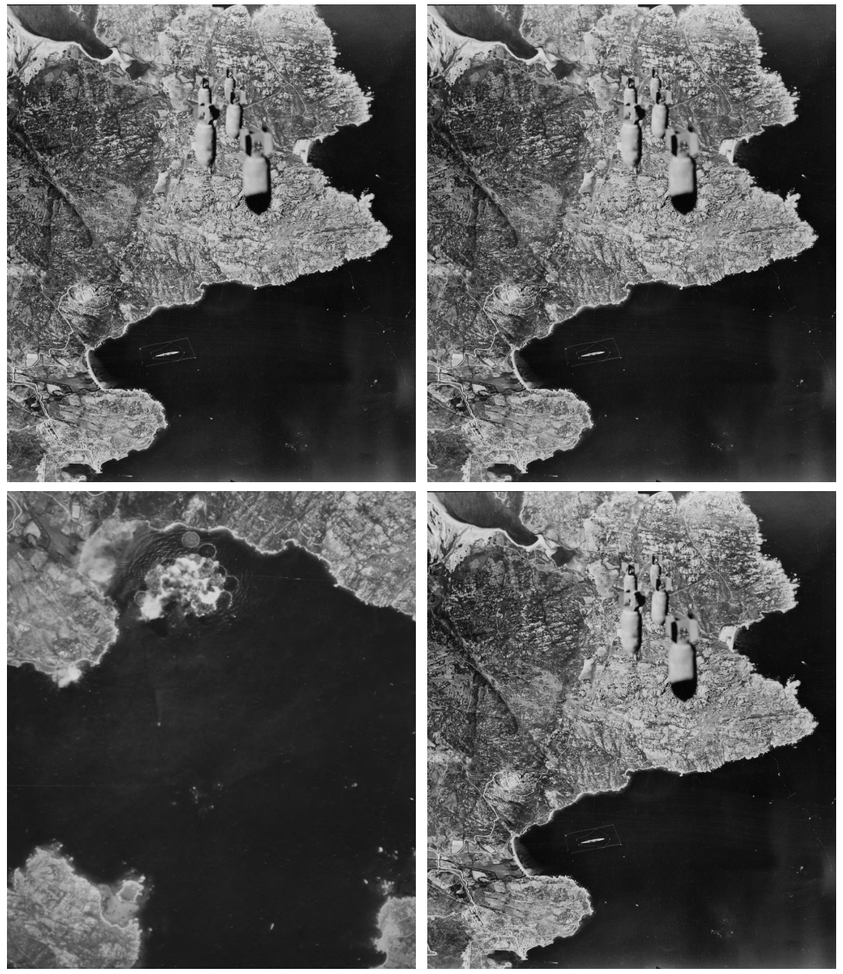
A brief history

To understand how the intense militarization of Sardinia, that in multiple occasions has been defined as a fully-fledged occupation, started, we must look at Italy during the fascist regime and the military strategies that were deployed to contrast the other armies during the second global conflict that ultimately lead to its defeat and subjugation to the winners' conditions.

In the years right before the war, Italy was fifth in rank among naval powers (preceded only by the UK Royal Navy, the US Navy, the Imperial Japanese Navy, and the French *Marine Nationale*). While the other countries were preparing by building aircraft carriers that could delocate air force landing space onto the sea to widen their operative radius, Italy firmly decided that they wouldn't need any of this type of ships, as the two islands of Sardinia and Sicily (the first especially) were considered by the regime two huge aircraft carriers in the middle of the Mediterranean[001] already in perfectly tactical positions. This strategic decision was totally unshakable: both Mussolini and at-the-time Minister of the Navy admiral Thaon di Revel (who even threatened to resign his position if these ships were to be built) were convinced that the islands had the major advantage of being unsinkable. As the events of World War II unfolded, it was clear that while Sardinia and Sicily might have been unsinkable,[002] it didn't mean that they were invulnerable.

To prepare for war, the first significant series of military settlements since the Savoyard insediation in the 18th century were built to set up Sardinia for its role as war machine. At the time the most important military base was the one in Elmas, but multiple airports called "*campi di manovra*" (literally maneuver ranges) were built to saturate the offensive capability of the rest of the island, most notably the ones of Decimomannu and Villacidro. The way it was organized was very much colonial in its practice: while on one hand fascists was stealing and occupying common pastures and rural land from farmers to build these military ranges, on the other the commands that operated these bases lived in colonial houses or were hosted in the farms neighboring the bases. It will become evident in the next pages that the relationship between these spatial manifestations of militarism and their external entourage will be a central question in the analysis of this territory, as the activities carried inside their perimeter always tend to bleed out and affect the outside.

The years of the war weighted heavily on Italy, and Sardinia was not exempt from the mass destruction that characterized the conflict. While planes left from the center of the Mediterranean to spread death and violence, air forces from the other front did the same in the opposite direction, bombing cities and hitting military targets. For what concerns the Sardinian territory, the months between February and May of 1943 were the ones where most areas of the island were hit by bombs, like in Olbia, Sassari, Alghero, Sant'Antioco, or the bay of Palau during the sinking of the Trieste Cruiser;[003] yet the city that had to endure repeated carpet bombings for months was Cagliari, most notably during the great incursions on February 28th 1943 and on the 13th of May of the same year, aimed at compromising the near aeronautical installations, but that ended up destructing more than half of the city's urban fabric and causing more than a thousand victims.[004] The direct consequence of this urbicide was an alternating period of displacement from the "mournful necropolis"[005] to the countryside, with Cagliaritans trying to find hospitality among the farmers and a first period of subsequent tensions between country folks and "casteddaiu" (literally "from the castle")[xxx4] that showed how the two groups during wartime weren't initially able to understand their mutual needs and sufferance.



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Sinking of the Trieste cruiser,

001
Pinna, 1973, p. 45

002
Coni & Serra, 1982, p. 9

003
Ibid. p. 82-83, 92-92, 117

004
Ferdinando Di Lauro, Sardegna: settembre 1943, Roma, S. M. E. Ufficio Storico, 1973: 2.

005
from a poem by Serra

006
Coni & Serra, 1982, p. 12

The period that followed Mussolini's arrest in July 1943 and the subsequent Nazi occupation gave an image of what Sardinia is to many locals still today; while the *duce* was held captive in Villa Weber on Maddalena island waiting to be moved to Gran Sasso as the German troops approached, the island faced several months of drought and was increasingly feeling isolated from the continent, left to be surrounded by the ring of enemy submarines and fighter-bombers, leaving the islanders to their fate. This will be something that will be more emphasized in the next pages, but this period showed how there always was an Italy of first class and one of second class.

On the positive though, this turned out to be the best option, as when the Nazis finally left Sardinia undisturbed after destroying or abandoning majority of their military bases, the island lived a unique transition compared to the rest of Italy, as with the Allies of WW2 (mainly the US, UK, USSR and China) settling in, it was freed from nazifascist occupation and became an anglo-american safe zone. Despite the sudden sigh of relief, Sardinia was still extremely worn-out by the bombings and by the deportations of many sardinians in the nazi concentration camps, and the truth is that even the American presence in the island was never really going away.

After the War: weapon or colony?

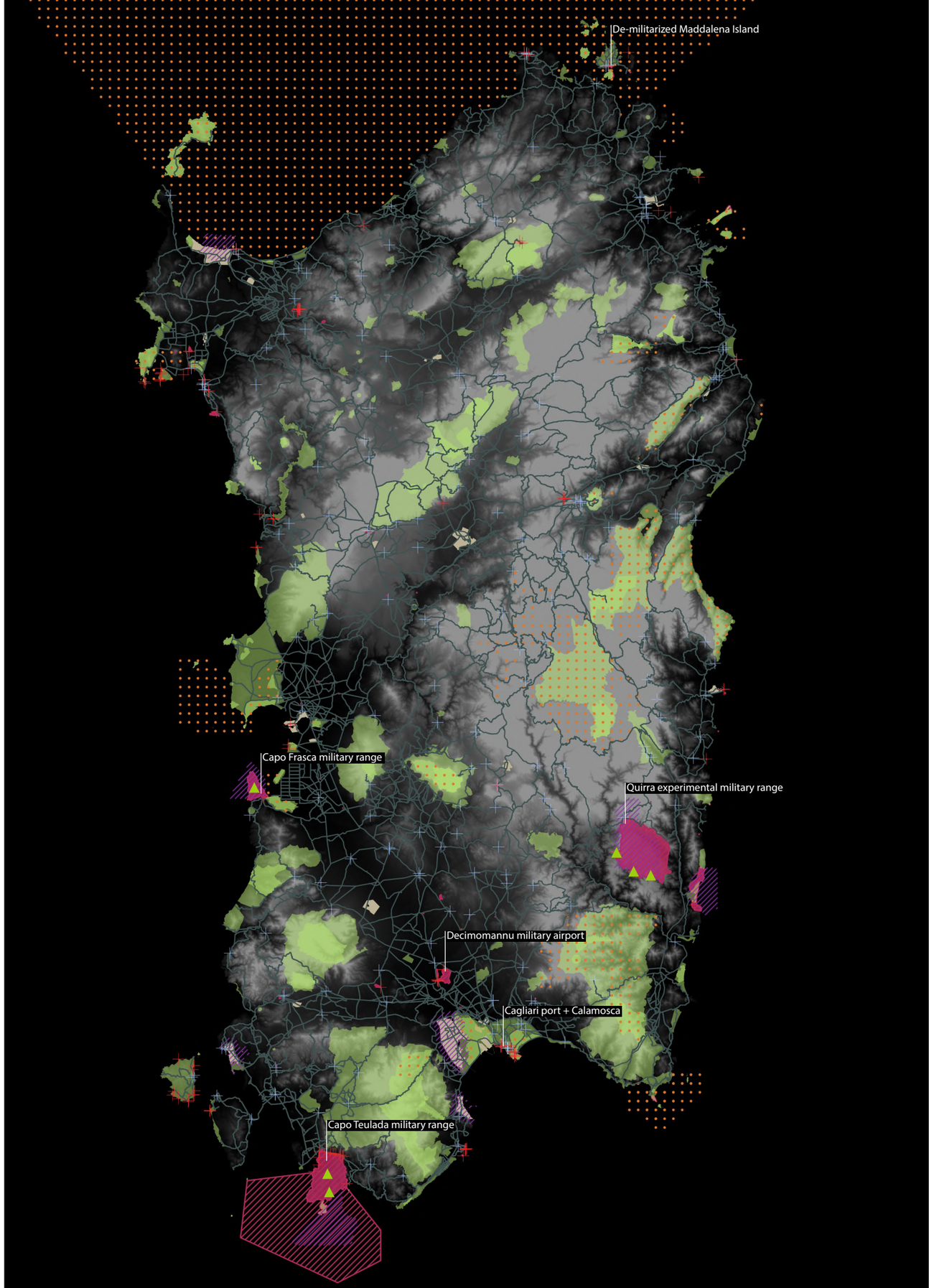
The traditional patterns of colonialism underwent a profound change during the second half of the last century, even though its oppressive and exploitative essence remains unchanged. National liberation movements have led numerous colonies to the status of nation-states, but in reality none of these new states, formerly colonies, have been able to free themselves from the subjugation of imperialist powers, and despite its geographical and political position, Sardinia was not exempt.

After 39 months of endless war, Sardinia's participation in the second global conflict came to an end. The role of aircraft carrier it was given had found only partial execution, as its specific offensive task ended up being extremely limited due to the insufficient technical resources of the Italian army that with the progressing of war kept weakening.[007] With the winners of WW2 deciding how to take over the losers' territories among themselves and the birth of NATO, new tensions emerged. The U.S., realizing the strategic position of Sardinia in the Mediterranean at the beginning of the Cold War, feared that the Soviet Union would have had too much power if they were to get it, and thanks to the trans-Atlantic alliance, this resulted in Sardinia becoming a NATO logistical hub during the 50s with the excuse of Italy seeking security and funding, while in reality the island became a playground for military testing and U.S. colonial extractivist practices.[008]

Even the minor colonial powers, such as Spain, Italy, Portugal, and Greece, have not been spared this forced scheme: in exchange for military bases, the exploitation of raw materials, and access to state markets, these "allies" of the "old civilization" are guaranteed capital, technological tools, weapons, and a certain level of consumerist well-being within a specific political order. Within all of this, many scholars and Sardinians deem that Italy has effectively sold Sardinia to the U.S. as a military service area in exchange for the U.S. guaranteeing the Italian ruling class control over economic and political power.

From the 50s on, the **Bilateral Infrastructure Agreement** (BIA) is signed, and Sardinia faces an enormous capital expenditure in military development and military presence on the island comes at an all-time high, allowing it to be used as a link in NATO's strategic chain,[009] as an aircraft carrier and missile base at the heart of the Mediterranean, transforming it in nothing more than a tool of war. This is when a duality between dirty war and clean war arisen. While the dirty war is one that uses nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, the clean one that uses "conventional" weapons (a term used to denote the entourage of weapons that we have internalized as normal to see, coined to make something terrible seem less terrible).

Since it's operating in supposedly at-peace territories and having to deal with the possibility of public and legal turmoil, military research underwent a shift in focus: the goal now is to achieve a weapon effect that is, if not identical, at least similar to the one that has been banned or deemed immoral while still using a proper weapon considered more commonly less destructive. This is the fluid medium of ambiguities and secrecy through which, for example, depleted uranium projectiles have been used for the last



007
Coni & Serra, 1982, p. 15

008
Nuti, 1993, p. 252

009
Bedini, 2013, p. 34

010
Camillo, 2019, p. 94-95

decades for military testing on the island without facing proper legal repercussions.[010]

Many scholars, activists and Sardinians consider the situation as a factor of major passive income in the American economy (just as all armies and armaments of the world are) that are the people the ones that end up paying for. It's in these decades that the construction of majority of the military bases takes place, with most still operating today, causing the enduring frictions between operating bases and their respective servitù.

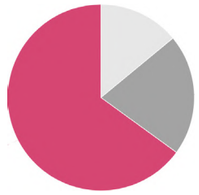
Servitù

To understand the interests and risks involved when discussing Sardinian military ranges, it is necessary to clarify the often misunderstood concept of "servitù". In Italy they occupy approximately 0.15% of the national territory. Sardinia is affected far more than the average, with 0.65% of its territory involved, followed at a distance by Friuli-Venezia Giulia with 0.36%. To this figure must be added military state-owned land, which occupies 0.261% of the national territory, equal to 783 square kilometers out of a total of 300.492: Friuli-Venezia Giulia accounts for 1.3% of its respective territory, and Sardinia for 0.958% of state-owned land. Yet, 65% of Italian military easements are located in Sardinia.

The term, often generically and erroneously used to describe territory with a military presence, actually has a very specific meaning that was introduced during the Napoleonic period, carried over into the Albertine Statute, and remains in force today in Italian legislation, governed by the substantive "New Regulation on Military Servitudes" of 1976 and a further amendment of 1990.[011] As summarized a few years ago in the 2007 Defense Committee's Fact-Finding Report on Military Easements, **"the term *servitù militari* refers to the set of restrictions and prohibitions that may be imposed on both private and public property located in the vicinity of military installations and similar facilities."** Therefore, military easements should not be confused with the so called *demanio* (meaning the formal ranges and bases themselves): rather, they refer to the surrounding areas, subject to restrictions on free use due to their proximity to the military zone.[012]

Two factors influenced the undiscriminated infiltration of the military on sardinian and italian territory, one of regional political nature, and the other of legal framework, both working in synergy to benefit the other. The second is able to be produced undisturbed because the first allows it to, as many sardinians denounce the poor management from regional authorities of the island's inhabitants' and landscape's protection from military activities' consequences. Even though it must be said that Sardinia and mainland Italy were not the only ones having to endure NATO's military presence on national soil, the difference between Italy and those other countries lies in the fact that the latter, in the 1980s (coinciding, moreover, with a change in domestic government) undertook a comprehensive contractual revision of the regime governing foreign military bases on their national territory. By entering into framework agreements approved by Parliament and, as such, made public, they regulated the most significant aspects of the bases' use and ensured a certain degree of transparency regarding the entire matter.[013] What has been lacking in Italy, however, is precisely the signing of a similar agreement that, without delving into technical details regarding the use of the facilities and following the formal procedures of the authorization law and the implementing law, would have ensured a clear legislative framework.

Mariella Cao explains: "The island is economically strangled. Yet mayors of towns near the firing ranges generally claim that the bases bring significant economic benefits. Are we so sure? Let's say you're right, then be consistent: if they create prosperity, demand that compensation no longer be paid. Italian law states that those areas cause economic and social harm, and for this reason the municipalities involved are compensated by the state."



Distrubution of military presence in Italy by region

Sardinia:	65%
Sicily:	21%
Other regions:	14%

011
Maturi, 2016, p.54

012
Brigaglia, 2006, p. 161

013
Di Ernesto, 2013, p. 23

*
Legge 24/12/1976, n. 898

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Legge 02/05/1990, n. 104

014
Pinna, 1985, p.37

In addition to stating that these facilities cause economic and social harm to the entire community, the 1976 law stipulates that there must be an equitable distribution of military burdens*. The law also required each region to designate the portions of territory that could be set aside for military use. Of course, they all flatly refused. In the 1990 amendments**, it was therefore decided that the Minister of Defense is obligated to ensure equitable distribution (which has never been done). The question now is to understand who operates these facilities. Sometimes the mistake is made of defining Sardinian firing ranges as NATO bases, but this is not the case: the management of these areas is in the hands of the Italian armed forces, even if foreign forces may use them.

The evolution of the legal framework in regards to the servitù shows how as time went by, military activity in Italy always had an element of the military prevailing over the needs of citizens:

Law No. 1849 of December 20, 1932: few strict provisions that delegated full authority to the Minister of Defense and, in urgent cases, to local military commands, to determine whether, where, and when to impose restrictions, as well as to assess the advisability of lifting them. As we have seen, the aforementioned legislation took no account of military interests, which were always, in any case, and a priori considered to prevail, even of the collective needs of the populations residing in the territories subject to or to be subjected to restrictions, nor of the local public authorities representing them. Such a state of affairs clearly stemmed from the distorted notion that the "national interest" was solely that of the central administration of the State.

This lead to the production of Law 24th December 1976, n. 898 where it was basically said that:

1. Military facility construction plans must be aligned with the region's land-use plans;
2. The easement restrictions will be in effect for a limited period of five years; upon expiration, the situation must be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, failing which the restriction will lapse;
3. Live-fire military exercises must be conducted within predetermined areas and in accordance with established procedures, in order to minimize disruptions and inconvenience to civilian activities;
4. Proposals for the establishment of new servitù must be reviewed by a "Comitato Paritetico Misto per le Servitù Militari" composed of six representatives from the relevant region, five representatives from the Ministry of Defense, and one representative from the Ministry of the Treasury;
5. The same must apply to the most important exercises;
6. The president of the regional government of the region in question may request the disclosure of information necessary for a thorough review of any tax proposal, even if such information is subject to military secrecy:
7. Finally, the President of the Regional Council may appeal the decision, requesting that the matter be referred to the Council of Ministers, and is entitled to attend the meeting convened to address the issue;
8. Compensation for land use restrictions is paid out according to new criteria under which, in addition to the individual directly affected, compensation is also paid to the municipality in whose territory the restricted land is located, in an amount equal to 5% of the total compensation due to the property owners;

The law thus appears to be a tool capable, in theory, of restoring balance to the relationship between two interests that are finally regarded as having equal "national" im-

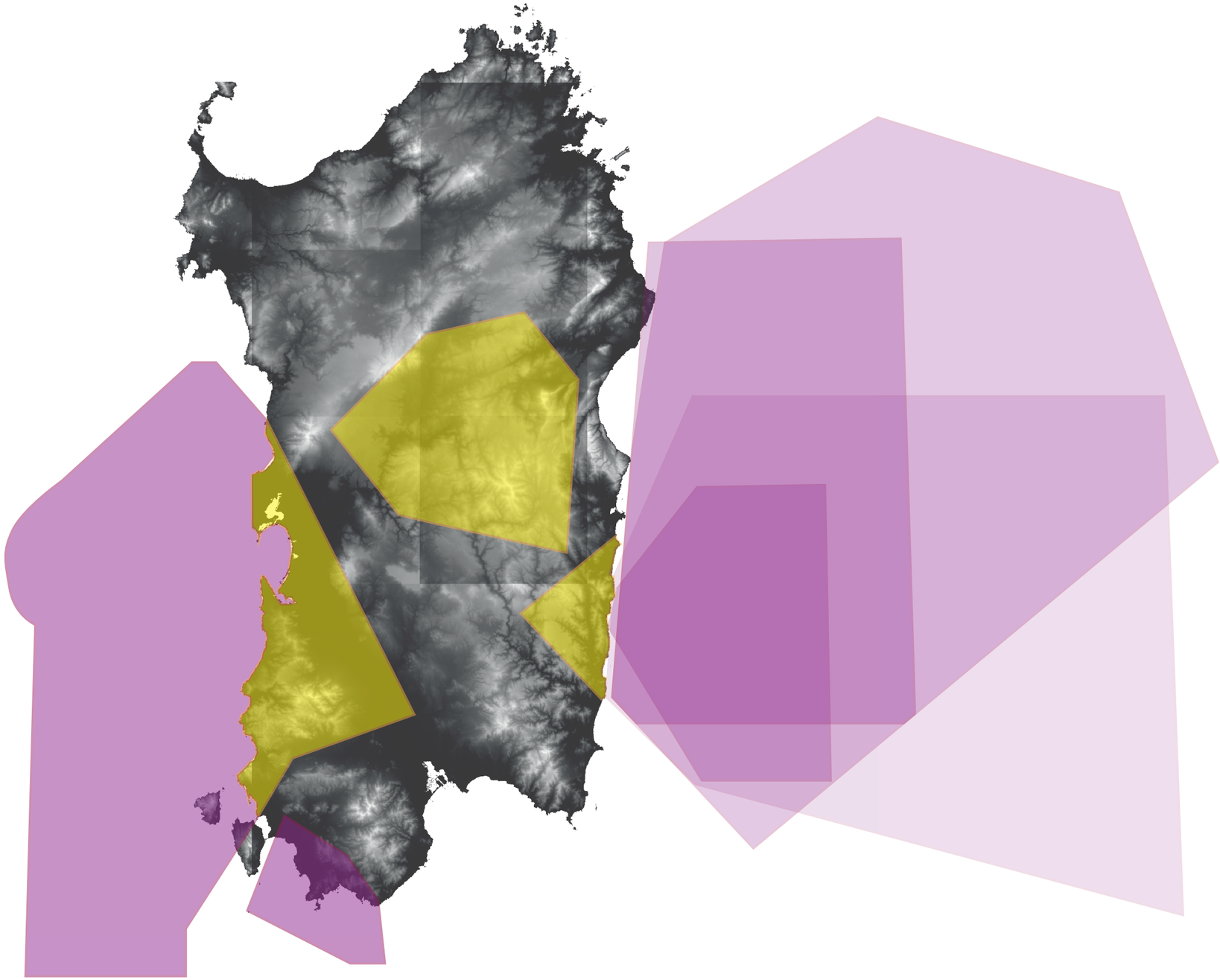
portance: on the one hand, the efficient organization of the country's military defense; on the other, the peaceful and no less efficient development of local communities. [014]

Since 2007, the year this document was written by the Defense Commission, nothing has changed. In the case of firing ranges, there is more: access is not exclusive to NATO military personnel alone. Subject to agreements, armed forces from non-NATO countries can also rent the bases for training, for example the Israelis or the Libyans (during Gaddafi's time), as well as some private military companies that test their weapons right there, on Sardinian soil.

At this point, it's evident that the military machine is nothing more than a tool for capital that is justified and supported by the legal system, one that looks more towards profit that moral. The F-35s the Italian Air Force has bought are being purchased not because they are needed, but because an industrial complex has been built where certain parties stand to profit. Finmeccanica, the largest company in the defense industry, is the landing spot for all the high-ranking generals who retire; defense ministries that have never had anything to do with the military except superficially are put in charge; consequently, no one in the government has ever known how to manage the military, and they have always gone unpunished and the status quo has never been shaken. [015]

There are two other ways in which the military presence manifests itself in a territory: one is through maritime exclusion zones, where access may be temporarily restricted to civilians for security reasons, and the other concerns military airspace, except when it is open for commercial purposes. These firing ranges stand out from other training areas because live-fire exercises are actually conducted there. Military training can involve small teams or tactical groups of 800 soldiers, and in exceptional cases, such as Operation Trident Juncture in November 2015, the numbers soar: in the overall operation, 36,000 military personnel from 30 different countries (including 28 NATO members), 140 ships, and 60 aircraft were deployed at the Capo Teulada firing range, the Decimomannu military airport, and several other bases in Italy, Portugal, and Spain.[016] The next pages will deal with the spatial implications of these ranges, uncovering the discrepancy between the declared land use and the actual activities taking place within them. Although these areas are formally designated for military purposes, the land-use analysis shows that vast portions are not permanently occupied by military infrastructure or installations. Military exercises, in fact, take place at specific times during the year, and access is restricted during those periods; however, outside of these periods, the same areas are accessible and used by farmers, shepherds, and even tourists.

Within the military perimeter, agricultural and pastoral practices are still active, particularly sheep grazing, but it is not uncommon to find remnants of weaponry and military debris among this vegetation, a sign of the often problematic coexistence of civilian uses and military activities. The core of the military leadership's business: testing, leasing firing ranges to foreign organizations, industries, and governments. A massive economic impact, but one that benefits only the military.[017]

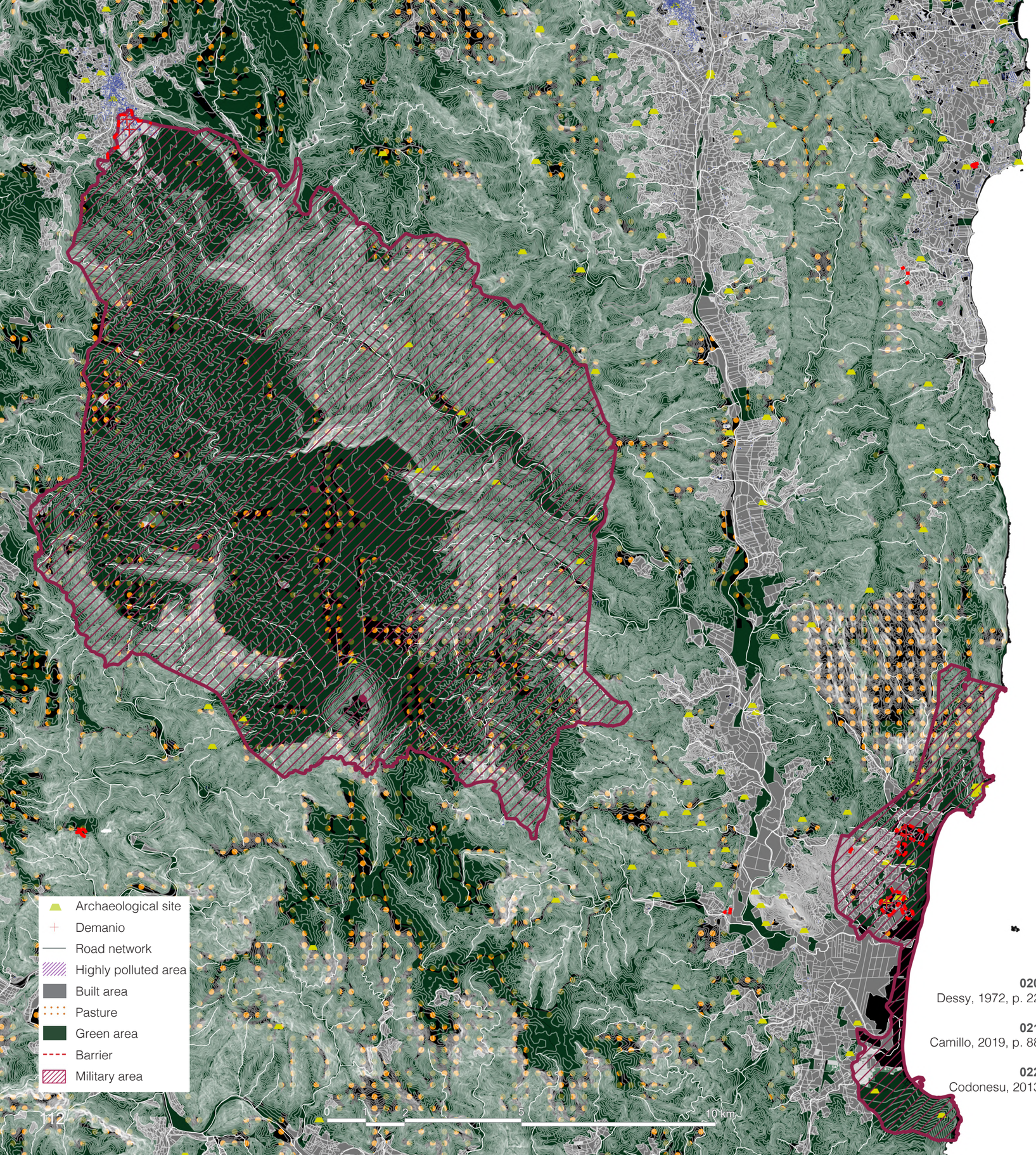


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Areas under military costraints

015
Camillo, 2019, p. 100

016
Codonesu, 2013, p. 22

017
Camillo, 2019,. p.94-95
Porcedda & Brunetti, 2011, p. 19



S1 Poligono di Salto di Quirra

The Quirra firing range is perhaps the most dramatic in terms of environmental and health consequences, so much to have birthed the infamous Quirra Syndrome. In the 1950s, the Italian Air Force, in search of the ideal location for testing, military training, and research, identified the area around Salto di Quirra in southeastern Sardinia. The area embraces hills and sea, and is perfect because it is scarcely populated. Time was running out, and above all, a new missile launch pad was needed, as the one at the Furbara test range, near Rome, was insufficient for the ambitions of the Italian Air Force, which aimed to reach space. With the blessing of Luigi Broglio, then head of the Air Force's Department of Military Studies and Munitions, the "Aeronautical Weapons Range" opened its doors in Quirra in August 1956.

Within a few years, the base became so important that it was transformed into a joint-service training range, meaning being shared with the other branches of the Italian armed forces. It covers an area of approximately 132 square kilometers, or 13.200 hectares. The in-land portion of the range is headquartered in the hilly area of Perdasdefogu, and covers approximately 120 square kilometers; the portion in the sea of the range on the other hand, encompasses about 14 kilometers of coastline, for a total of approximately 1.100 hectares. Perdasdefogu, Villaputzu, and Villagrande are the villages in the area that suffered the most land expropriations in 1956,[020] and aside from a rural economy based on livestock farming and some agriculture, the only activity in the area was linked to the old mines abandoned since the 1960s. Quirra, a small hamlet of Villaputzu consisting of a handful of houses and a few sheepfolds, is the narrow strip of land between the sea-side and land-side test ranges.

For years, the firing range known as Poligono Sperimentale di Addestramento Interforze di Salto di Quirra (PISQ) has been the site of training for domestic and foreign military units, as well as testing and trials of missile systems and targets, industrial experiments, and research. Open-fire activities generally take place without restrictions from September to June, while they are suspended during the summer months to make space for the tourism economy, other sore spot of Sardinia's administration (though in recent years, following the uproar over the Quirra case, exercises have been significantly reduced). Each year, the exercise schedule is prepared based on requests submitted to the command, subject to approval and discussion of the details, but only from statal authority, with the inhabitants left basically voiceless.

Here lies the another problem: the base can also be leased to civilian and/or foreign users, including private companies, under a memorandum of understanding that governs activities, testing, and negotiations regarding the fee for using the area. The issue is very delicate because the use of the base is covered by industrial and military secrecy, and thus is difficult to verify exactly what the companies are testing.[021] The range's commanders, however, have always reassured that during the agreement phase, all weapons to be tested must be listed and must be included in the approved list; therefore, in theory, no exercise takes place without the knowledge of the range's leadership and the State. Yet the fact that a self-certification is sufficient to declare what was used has raised considerable suspicion.
Furthermore, there is the issue of cleanup: in addition to the exorbitant rental price (around 50.000 euros per hour, according to the magistrate who opened Pandora's box in 2011), private companies must commit to leaving the area cleaned up. But what kind of cleanup are we talking about? Essentially, it's a partial cleanup, since a thorough cleanup would entail exorbitant costs and has never been carried out at a military firing range, so the companies only deal with the collection of bullet fragments. The former mayor of Villapuztu and engineer Fer-

020
Dessy, 1972, p. 22

021
Camillo, 2019, p. 88

022
Codonesu, 2013



















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Stills from the documentary Materia Oscura, 2013 by Massimo D'Anolfi e Martina Parenti

nando Codonesu says that the costs of the necessary cleanups across the three major Sardinian firing ranges. In short, the final cost comes to approximately 1.5 billion euros.[022]

At Quirra (PISQ), the Confederation of Small Municipalities and Towns of the European Union (CTME) requested the preparation of a document detailing the types and volumes of activities, which include:[023]

- Surface-to-Air (S/A) missile launch activities;
- Air-to-Air (A/A) missile launch activities;
- Air-to-surface (A/S) missile launch and bomb release activities;
- Surface-to-surface (S/S) missile or rocket launch activities;
- Experimental cannon firing activities;
- Experimental activities for aerospace research purposes;
- Release of IR countermeasures (Flare);
- Launch of remotely piloted aircraft;
- Air-to-surface (A/S) bomb release operations;
- Firing of small arms and light weapons;
- Helicopter operations;
- Blasting and EOD qualification training;
- Fuel fire operation;

A notable set of data comes also from the registers of activity for the various missiles launches that took place **from 1970 to 2003**. During this span a total of **2797 missiles** were launched, but as if already the number itself wouldn't be enough to raise concerns, out of these there were **5 that fell outside of the safe "bell"**. The records detail what went wrong and where they landed, with some ending up on the hills or in the fields around the perimeter of the range, but one instance of one landing only 300 meters away from A-road 125, the main road of eastern Sardinia.[024]

Something that not many tourists would know is that in the sea area off the Perdas firing range, fuel is being tested that will later be used, for example, in missiles launched into orbit by NASA, dispersing particulate matter into the air which, according to IARC Directive 231 of 2013, is the main cause of cancer development. This of course poses an issue firstly over the bathability of the beach of Murtas, but most importantly over the health security of bathing in those waters. Effectively one should raise the doubt of how effective a superficial cleansing of a beach that is militarily tested nine months of the year actually can be.

The poisoned land, the poisoned people

What has been happening in the Sardinian servitù, but especially in Quirra, is the slow poisoning of an entire ecosystem. This situation make one wonder about how safe it actually is to be in proximity of these ranges, when in reality it's not really the possibility of a crazy missile crushing you the most concerning or probable event, but rather something practically invisible that is now part of that area, showing how the effects of war do not end with the war, nor do they end at geographical borders; the wind carries them far and wide, posing a risk of inhalation, ingestion (even by animals) or if it settles on food.[025]

The Quirra case is probably one of the most shocking legal battles as there weren't really any consequences paid on the guilty side. In the early 2000s, health authorities detected an unusually high rate of lymphomas, leukemias, and other cancers among shepherds, residents, and civilian workers in the surrounding municipalities. Investigations by the Lanusei Public Prosecutor's Office Domenico Fiordalisi uncover a one-hectare military waste dump containing asbestos, and evidence that within the firing range, controlled explosions are being carried out as a form of illegal waste disposal. This results in a partial confiscation of the range after the results of the environmental and healthcare laboratory analysis, from which emerges that in 12 out of 18 analyzed corpses had thorium in them, along with hav-

023
Codonesu, 2013, p. 76

024
Ibid., p. 77-78

025
Maturi, 2016, p. 23-24

ing documents with the names of 167 victims of thorium in the Quirra range. What was able to make the difference and direct the responsibility towards the military range was Dr. Maria Antonietta Gatti's study on particle dispersion: her research was able to show how the fine particles of substances like thorium and depleted uranium contained in weapons turned these minuscule elements effectively into invisible bullet;[026] a discovery that probably must have hit the right spot, as two days after testifying at the Quirra trial, the Financial Police raided Professor Gatti's laboratory.[027]

Domenico Leggiero, a former Air Force pilot, says that 7.500 soldiers are suffering from cancer, 366 of whom have died. The Italian government does not protest because since after WW2, with all of the international deals, the ranges are basically used as a form of deterrence for economic gain. Along with these numbers, the media resonance of two deaths of individuals who served in the military and later fell ill opens the conversation to considering these ranges not only as a place for producing apparati of death and destruction, but death machines by full right, as the dissemination of illness hits not only whoever is outside, but also (and mainly) the ones who follow orders inside. Even in these cases, the legal process for filing a complaint is complicated; for civilians, it is even more difficult to establish a link to military service, but Dr. Gatti continues to state that the connection is clear. She has developed a diagnostic technique to identify what she calls "nanopathologies." She attributes the blame primarily to nanoparticles released during explosions (citing Gulf War syndrome as an example), explaining that at high temperatures, the inorganic substances released by the impact between projectile and target vaporize and reform into micro and nanoparticles that remain suspended in the air, like a gas. Aside from a general due concern over the use on these substances and the lack of transparecy and morality, there's also an issue of unprepairedness on the safety requirements adopted by the Italian military, as the Americans had already noted this in 1978 in a report at the Elgin, Florida base ("Morphological characteristics of particulate material formed from high-velocity impact of depleted uranium projectiles with armor targets," Air Force Armament Laboratory, 1978), while Italian soldiers handled these ammunitions and their waste completely unequipped.

Already in the campaigns since 1991, the U.S. Army realized that soldiers had to cover themselves from head to toe to avoid the negative effects of uranium in the projectiles. The numbers



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Remains of military weaponry in Quirra

026
Camillo, 2019, p. 57

027
L'Unione Sarda, 22 February 2018

are frightening, however: NATO says that 11.800 depleted uranium rounds were fired in Bosnia, and 30,000 in Kosovo, while Italian soldiers in Somalia were basically wearing shorts and shirts.

Until the early 2000s, no one had spoken publicly about the potential risk of contamination in the areas surrounding the firing ranges. Checks may had been carried out, but not in an ideal manner. Even when the Menapace Commission proposed the "health and environmental monitoring," two months later the "health" component disappeared from the program, or the even worst issue of the interests revolving around the test ranges, such as the relationship between the Ministry and the University of Siena (in particular Professor Francesco Riccobono, who conducted analyses at Quirra and excluded the presence of thorium from the results).[028]

Though what really opened the Pandora's box and shined a light that the rest of the country simply couldn't turn away from were the denunciations of two veterinarians in 2011, that reported a scary rise in number of deformations in newborn livestock. This event reopened the case as it posed an issue also to the entire economical system of the surrounding villages and a serious health risk due to the commerce of the derived products from the animals.

In the village of Escalaplano especially, a situation of silence prevailed because those who protested due to birth defects and demanded explanations were silenced by their own community out of pride and territorial concerns/economic fear, since also the firing ranges themselves are a form of income for the local communities. The issue of shepherds who grazed their flocks in the firing range and then kept the birth of malformed livestock under secret for fear of being denied the right to pasture there. The last straw came when at a certain point grazing was prohibited, since the activity of the ranges couldn't (or rather wouldn't) be stopped since granted by the Defense Department.
The most rec
ent developments from the legal framework see the conclusion of the first-degree trial resulted in the acquittal of the eight former generals accused of environmental disaster, due to "lack of sufficient evidence to establish the facts" as for the judge there wasn't any convincing proof of the link between rising cancer and deformations, and military activities in the range despite the overwhelming scientific evidence presented. While today activities definitely decreased, the range is still used and represents a major influence on surrounding communities and regional administration.





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The infamous mutation of the lamb with two heads near the Quirra range

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Military exercise at the Salto di Quirra range

028
Camillo, 2019, p. 33-36

029
Il Fatto Quotidiano, 11 November 2021

S2 Poligono di Capo Teulada

The military range of Capo Teulada was established in 1956 on the south-western coast of Sardinia as part of the broader reorganisation of NATO's southern European defence infrastructure in the early Cold War period. Its creation followed a pattern common to other Italian peripheral territories: lands were expropriated from local communities without meaningful consultation, in the name of national security imperatives negotiated far from the island. When the Italian Ministry of Defence identified the zone in 1957 for the construction of what would become a 72 km^2 polygon, it was obliged to purchase the land from the approximately 250 families who lived and grazed there. Of these, 13 families refused to leave and were forcibly expropriated. Local memory preserves darker details still: stories circulate that the abandoned houses of these families were used as the first targets for weapons tests on the range,[030] a claim that, if true, would make the landscape itself a record of dispossession.

In total, there were 232 acts of expropriation. The range now occupies approximately 7,200 hectares and has become the second largest military installation in Italy, and one of the most significant firing ranges in southern Europe. Its perimeter extends for roughly 50 kilometres and includes stretches of coastline in Porto Scudo, Porto Zafferano, and the beach once known as Spiaggia degli Americani, accessible from the sea for only two months per year, during summer. The rest of the year, these spaces are sealed from civilian life, and the sea of Teulada is "lent" to Sardinians and fishermen during certain periods. This situation has caused a phenomena specific to the Sardinia, but especially for Teulada, that puts the range at the center of the fishing economy: the case of the indemnities of Teulada's fishermen has become a well known issue,[031] where fishermen are granted a compensation from the range as they materially can't continue their activity due to the military occupation.

The range is used intensively for live-fire exercises across land, sea, and air scenarios by the Italian Armed Forces and by NATO allies, effectively transforming this corner of Sardinia into a permanent theatre of simulated war. Ground combat training, naval landing exercises, artillery and missile testing, and combined NATO operations all take place here. Large-scale maneuvers such as NATO's Operation Trident Juncture have been conducted in part at Teulada, bringing an international military presence that underscores how the range functions less as a national defence asset than as a shared resource of the Atlantic alliance, one whose costs are borne almost entirely by the local territory.[032]

The landscape bears witness to the intensity of this use. The entire territory of the small peninsula within the range is scarred by the passage of military vehicles and pitted with craters. Beaches are literally asphalted during simulated amphibious landings, a form of violence inscribed directly into the coastline. Between 2008 and 2016 alone, investigations later confirmed that 556 tonnes of war materiel were expended within the polygon's boundaries.

In 2014, an attempt to modernise the range's impact was announced through the "Sistema Integrato per l'Addestramento Terrestre" (SIAT) project, a 19.8 million euros investment in virtual simulation systems that, in theory, would reduce dependence on live munitions. Part of the project involved the construction of two training villages within the range: one designed to resemble a Central European setting, the other a Middle Eastern urban environment, a detail that speaks volumes about the geopolitical imaginaries being rehearsed here. The project was presented partly as an environmental measure, though critics noted that it did not address the contamination already accumulated across decades of live-fire activity,[033] nor did it alter the fundamental character of the site as

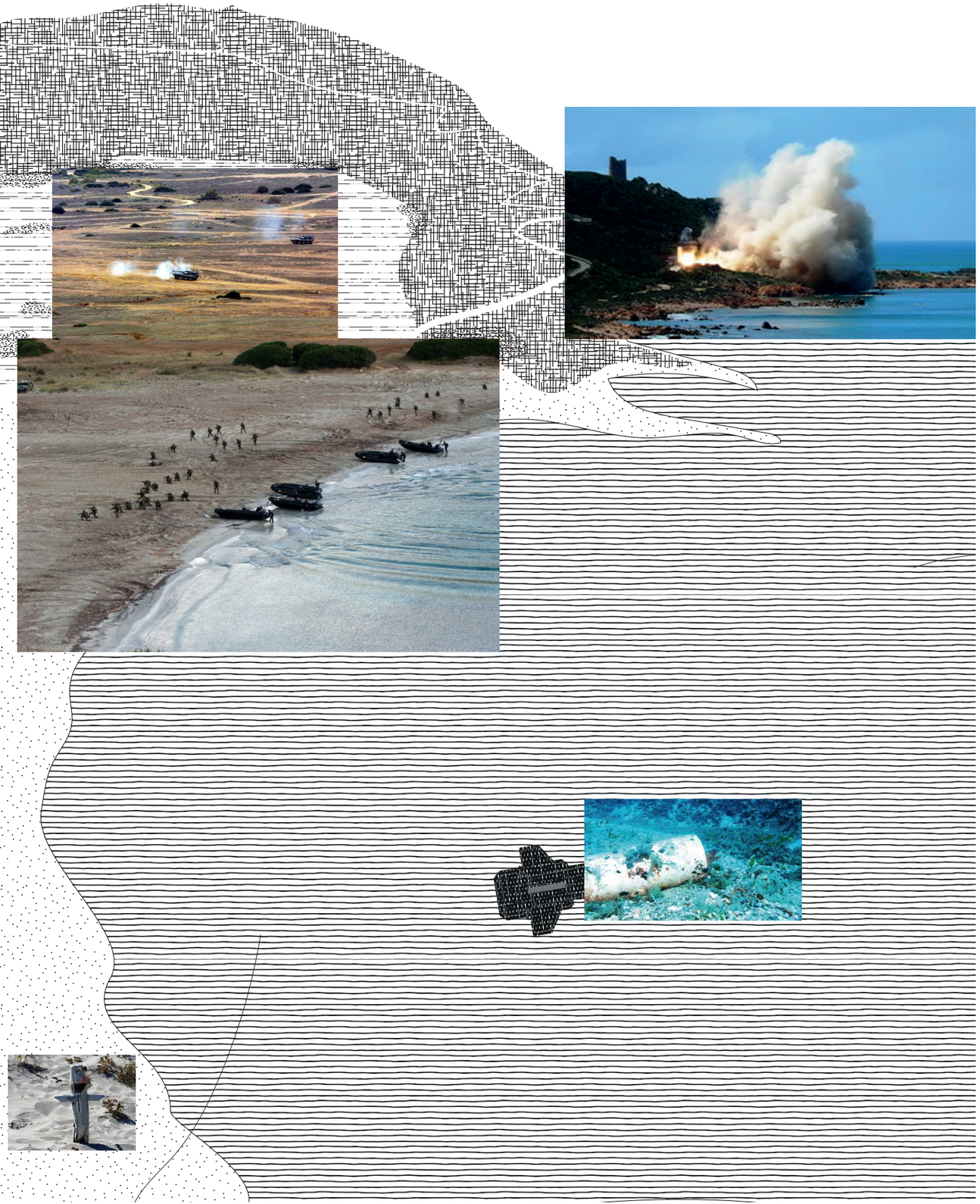
- Photo
- Archaeological site
- Demanio
- Road network
- Highly polluted area
- Built area
- Pasture
- Green area
- Barrier
- Military area

030
Maturi, 2016, p. 49

031
Camillo, 2019, p. 25

032
Ibid, p. 37

033
A Foras, 2017, p. 10



sacrificed territory.

Capo Teulada represents a paradigmatic case of what scholars have called a sacrifice zone, meaning a territory rendered expendable in the service of broader geopolitical calculations. What makes Teulada particularly significant as a geographical object of study is the layering of exclusions it produces. There is the primary exclusion: the expropriation of land that removed entire communities from their territory. There is a secondary, ongoing exclusion: the periodic interdiction of surrounding sea areas during exercises, cutting off fishing grounds. And there is a third, more insidious exclusion: the slow chemical contamination of the soil itself, which has rendered parts of the range inaccessible even to the military.

Much like in Quirra, scientific investigations have detected high concentrations of heavy metals and toxic substances throughout the range. Analyses of pastures within the polygon have found antimony and lead concentrations exceeding legal limits, brass, steel, tungsten, and aluminium; but these are the obvious result of decades of weapons discharge accumulating in the soil that still lead to rising cases of sicknesses and pathologies for the neighboring communities. Particularly significant is the presence of thorium capsules forming part of the guidance system for MILAN anti-tank missiles. Documents confirm that 4.200 MILAN missiles containing thorium were detonated at Teulada, with only 19 subsequently recovered and most of the rest still present on the sea bed. The range functions,[034] in this sense, as a depot of radioactive residue buried across thousands of hectares of Sardinian soil.

The most extreme case is the Penisola Delta: 400-hectare peninsula within the range that, after fifty years of bombardment from land and sea, has been declared by the military itself to be beyond remediation by conventional means. To decontaminate, it would be necessary to excavate at least one meter deep across the entire area, removing approximately 4 million cubic meters of soil. Calculations by researcher Fernando Codonesu estimate the cost of remediating this single sub-section alone at 800 million euros that nor the Italian state, nor any of NATO's partner countries and the companies that manufactured and used the weapons, have shown intention of paying.[035]

The contamination crisis at Capo Teulada does not exist in a legal vacuum. The persistence of live-fire exercises within this regulatory framework is only possible through what environmental associations have described as "preemptive amnesties":[036] requests for Environmental Impact Assessments submitted after the fact, for exercises already planned and sometimes already conducted, with the aim of legitimizing activities that would otherwise be incompatible with conservation legislation.
This practice reveals a regulatory hierarchy in which military interests systematically take precedence over environmental ones. The result is a structural contradiction at the heart of Italian land-use governance: the same state that has committed to the protection of biodiversity simultaneously authorizes the destruction of that biodiversity through military exercises. The two logics coexist without resolution, producing a form of legal fiction in which the environmental framework formally applies but is operationally suspended wherever military necessity intervenes.

The absence of any comprehensive remediation plan compounds this contradiction. Despite confirmed contamination, there is no binding hydrogeological survey, no epidemiological assessment program, and no ecological restoration project in place. In July 2025, the Prefecture of Cagliari issued a precautionary closure order for areas of the polygon not exclusively used for military purposes targeting lands that had been formally granted for agricultural and pastoral activities, citing soil contamination levels exceeding legal thresholds.[037] For activists, the order was a vindication of decades of de-

034
A Foras, 2017, p. 17

035
Codonesu, 2013, p. 81

036
A Foras, 13 August 2025

037
Ibid,



nunciation, but also a bitter irony: the partial civilian use that had been permitted as a concession to local communities was now itself being revoked because the land had become too contaminated even for that.

Capo Teulada has been a sustained focal point for Sardinian antimilitarist politics. The Spiaggia degli Americani, named after the American soldiers who used it during the Cold War decades (even though I should say that when I went there to take pictures of the range, the only people on the beach were Americans. I assumed they were relatives of the soldiers working in the rage, as it wasn't tourist period) has become a site of recurring symbolic occupation, with activists claiming presence on the shore during the brief summer windows when access is technically permitted. In this framework, Teulada is not an unfortunate side effect of national defense policy but a symptom of a deeper spatial asymmetry: the systematic concentration of risk, contamination, and sacrifice in a periphery that has historically lacked the political weight to refuse.

7.500
hectares of range

4.200 MILAN
missiles launched in the area

30 km
of coast inaccessible to the public

450 km²
of occupied sea

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Satellite image Capo Teulada and the signs caused by tracks, targets, and explosion marks that interrupt the natural continuity.
The result is a permanent territorial infrastructure, capable of influencing the organization and imagery of southwestern Sardinia.






ZONA MILITARE
VIETATO













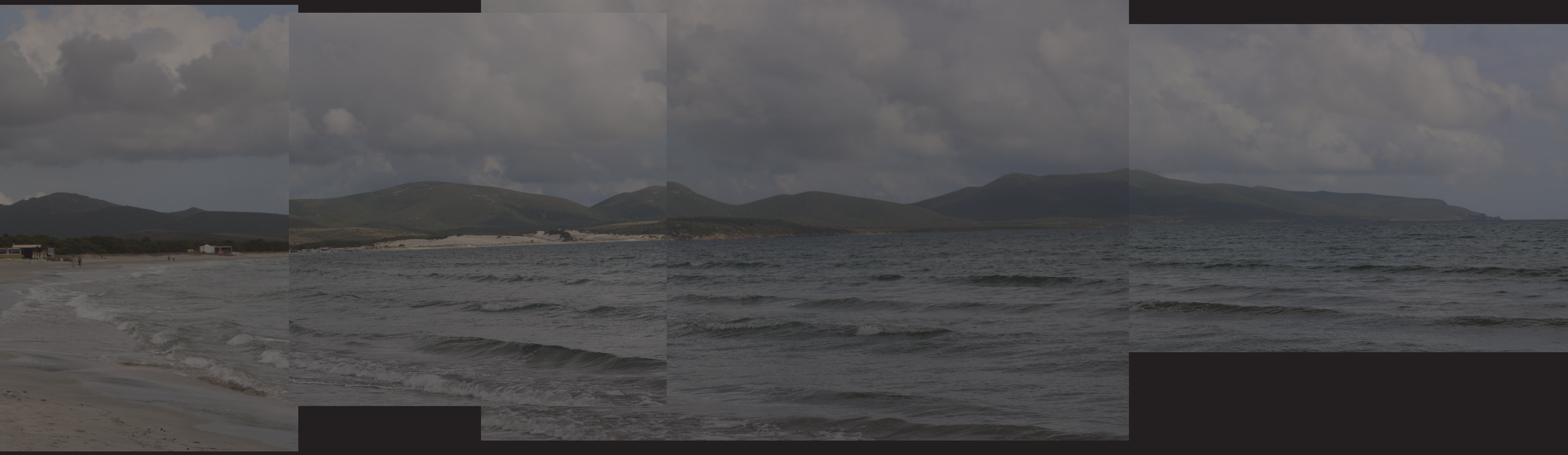


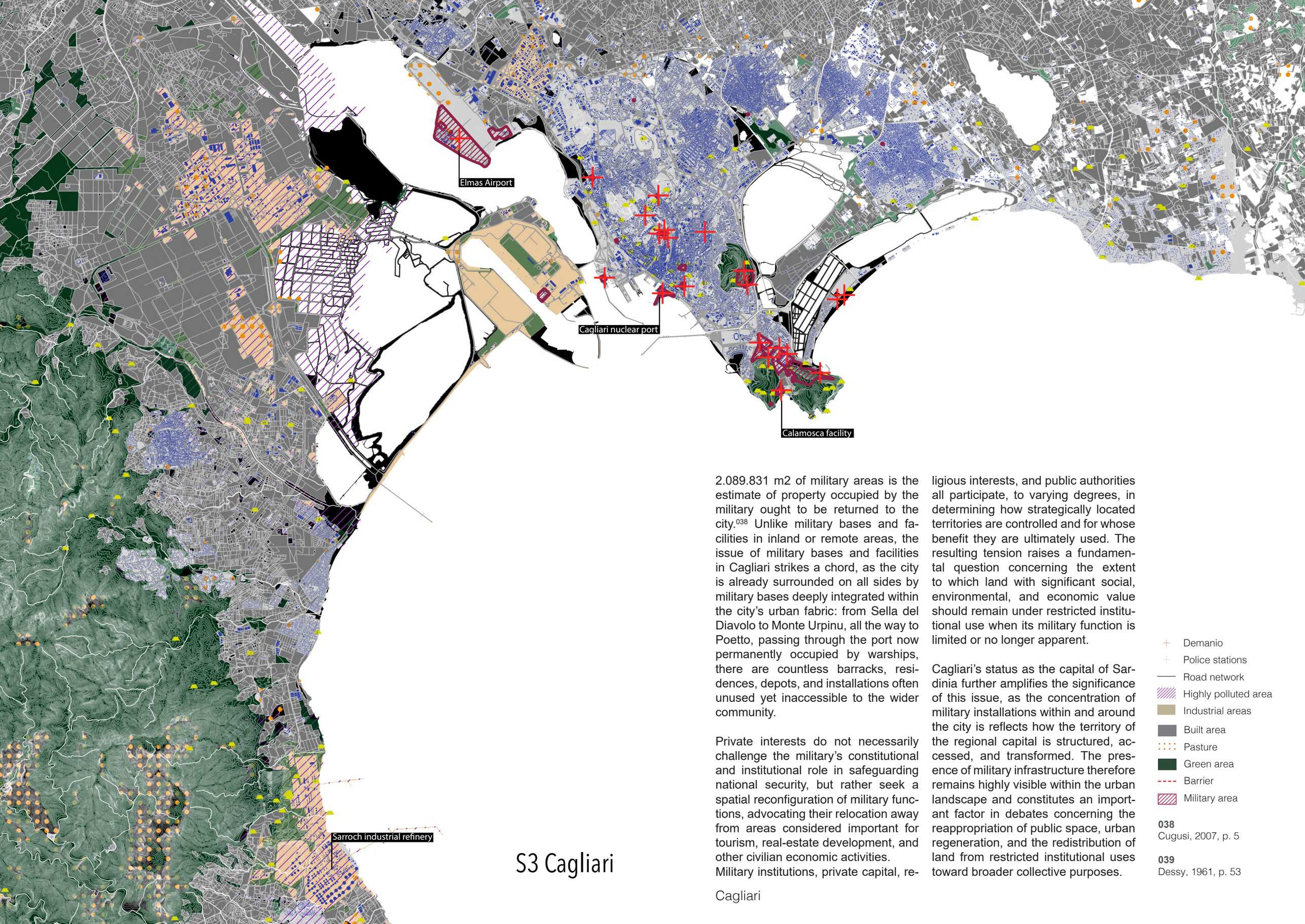




At the beach of Porto Pino, on the portion of coast where an explicit division between civilian and military zones should be, a stick sprouting from the sand seems to be the only element suggesting the passage from one part to the other.







S3 Cagliari

Cagliari

2.089.831 m2 of military areas is the estimate of property occupied by the military ought to be returned to the city.[038] Unlike military bases and facilities in inland or remote areas, the issue of military bases and facilities in Cagliari strikes a chord, as the city is already surrounded on all sides by military bases deeply integrated within the city's urban fabric: from Sella del Diavolo to Monte Urpinu, all the way to Poetto, passing through the port now permanently occupied by warships, there are countless barracks, residences, depots, and installations often unused yet inaccessible to the wider community.

Private interests do not necessarily challenge the military's constitutional and institutional role in safeguarding national security, but rather seek a spatial reconfiguration of military functions, advocating their relocation away from areas considered important for tourism, real-estate development, and other civilian economic activities.
Military institutions, private capital, religious interests, and public authorities all participate, to varying degrees, in determining how strategically located territories are controlled and for whose benefit they are ultimately used. The resulting tension raises a fundamental question concerning the extent to which land with significant social, environmental, and economic value should remain under restricted institutional use when its military function is limited or no longer apparent.

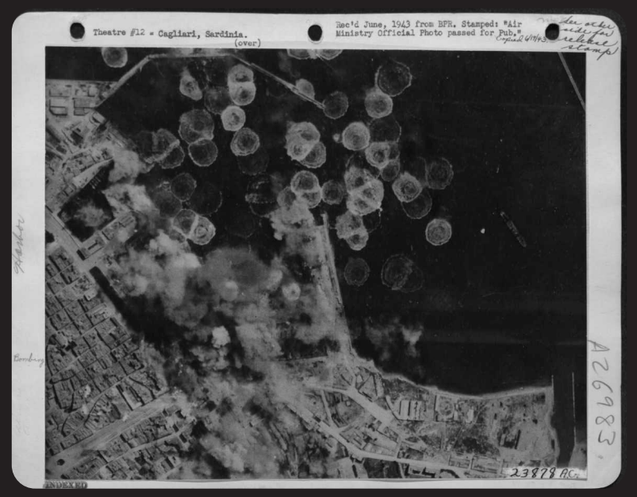
Cagliari's status as the capital of Sardinia further amplifies the significance of this issue, as the concentration of military installations within and around the city is reflects how the territory of the regional capital is structured, accessed, and transformed. The presence of military infrastructure therefore remains highly visible within the urban landscape and constitutes an important factor in debates concerning the reappropriation of public space, urban regeneration, and the redistribution of land from restricted institutional uses toward broader collective purposes.

- Demanio
- Police stations
- Road network
- Highly polluted area
- Industrial areas
- Built area
- Pasture
- Green area
- Barrier
- Military area

038
Cugusi, 2007, p. 5

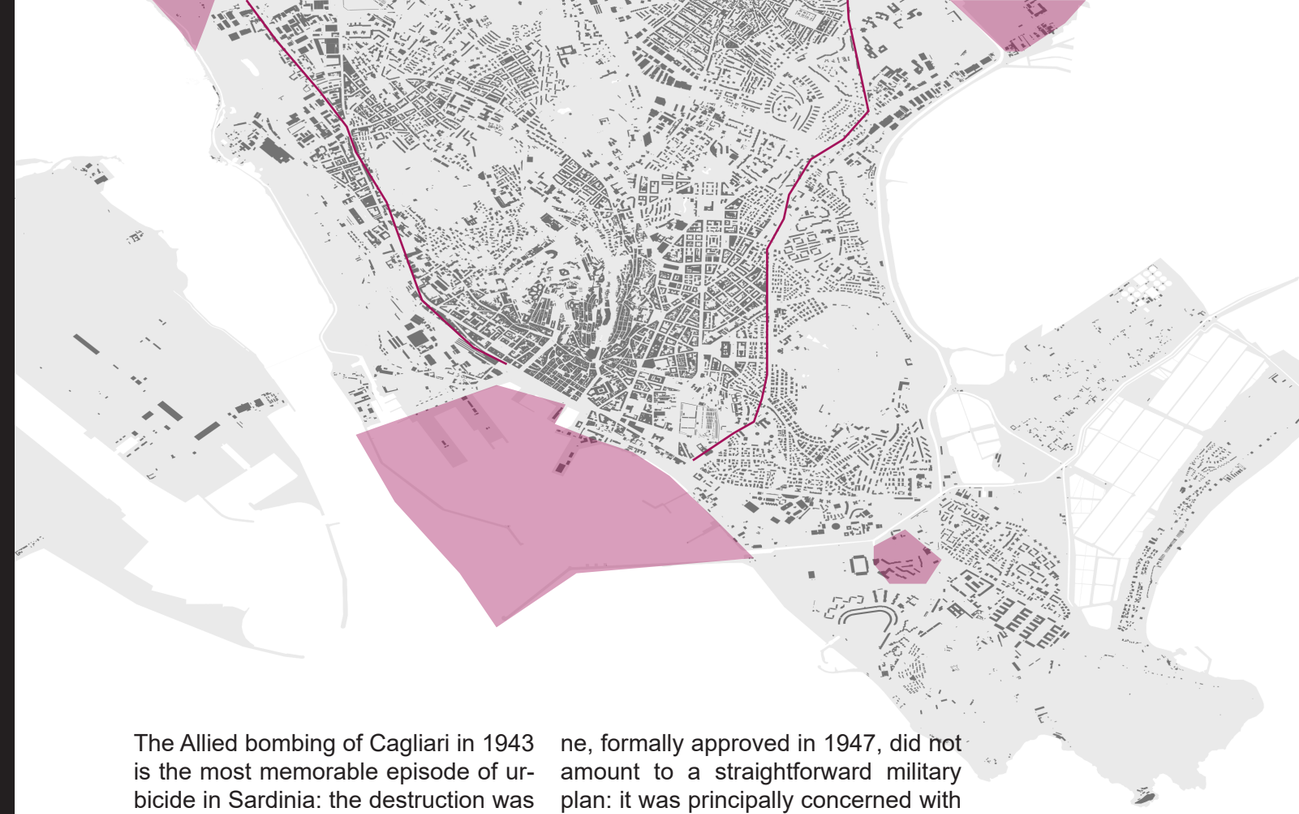
039
Dessy, 1961, p. 53







Sardinia



The Allied bombing of Cagliari in 1943 is the most memorable episode of urbicide in Sardinia: the destruction was not limited to individual military targets but profoundly damaged the material, social and historical fabric of the city. Between February and May 1943, repeated air raids devastated large parts of Cagliari, with particularly severe effects on the historic districts of Marina, Stampace, Castello and Villanova. Contemporary and subsequent assessments indicate that thousands of buildings were damaged, while the destruction of churches, monuments, housing and public buildings disrupted both the physical continuity of the city and the everyday life of its inhabitants.[038] The violence was nevertheless spatially selective: Cagliari's strategic position as a Mediterranean port and its proximity to military installations, including the Elmas airfield and naval facilities, contributed to its exposure to aerial warfare. In this sense, the destruction of the urban fabric demonstrates the close relationship between the military geography of the city and the vulnerability of civilian space to strategic violence.

The subsequent reconstruction raises a more nuanced question about the militarisation of urban planning. Cagliari's 1945 Piano di Ricostruzione, formally approved in 1947, did not amount to a straightforward military plan: it was principally concerned with repairing war damage, reorganising circulation and accommodating post-war urban growth. Yet reconstruction did provide an opportunity to implement spatial transformations that had affinities with the rationalising logic of military urbanism. The plan substantially reproduced the principles of the pre-war 1941 plan, particularly its emphasis on the reorganisation, widening and straightening of roads and the creation of more legible axes through the historic city.

The destruction therefore functioned as a form of tabula rasa, making interventions in the existing urban fabric politically and materially easier.[039] The subsequent reconstruction can be interpreted as a moment in which the spatial rationalities associated with circulation, visibility, accessibility and territorial control intersected with civilian planning objectives. This interpretation becomes particularly significant when considered alongside the continuing presence of military property within Cagliari, where military areas subsequently formed a fragmented but substantial component of the urban territory.

Cagliari

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Carpet bombings in Cagliari in 1943. In pink the most effected strategic areas of infrastructure

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Historical photos of the bombings

038
Coni & Serra, 1982, p. 61

039
Coward, 2009, p. 13





Nuclear port

The government announced that nuclear-powered submarines and ships are permitted to transit through and dock at the port of Cagliari through the Prefecture of Cagliari. Moreover, the at-the-time Defense Minister Martino had stated this in June 2005, in response to a parliamentary question submitted by Rep. Mauro Bulgarelli, with also the Navy confirming that in Cagliari, as in La Maddalena and 11 other Italian ports, nuclear-powered warships operate freely. It is unclear for how long this has been the case, as the public is kept completely in the dark about the dangers they might face, and the evacuation plans for Cagliari are unknown to the public. In 1999, new “Emergency Plans for Nuclear-Powered Military Ships at Anchor” were adopted. The “Civil Protection Plans” drawn up by the prefecture remain secret. The so-called “Ronchi Decree,” No. 230/95, (the legislation that mandates the right and duty to inform citizens about risk situations, planned emergency measures, and related operational procedures) is a dead letter.

For the authorities, there are no concrete risks: for this reason, it is not necessary to make the population’s evacuation plans known in the event of a nuclear accident, yet since 1987, Italy has banned the use of nuclear power through a repeal referendum. Not only that: originally the old Mayor of Cagliari, through Ordinance No. 109 of June 5, 2003, prohibited throughout the municipal territory “the transit, parking, stopover, and docking of any vehicle, aircraft, or vessel” carrying radioactive waste. The regional referendum office recently denied Sardinians the right to at least express their own opinion on the presence of military nuclear facilities on the island. The official response is that the matter of defense falls under the exclusive jurisdiction of the State and is therefore beyond the Region’s authority.

It also remains a fact that the port of Cagliari where said submarines and nuclear-powered ships are allowed to dock, joins the vast swaths of Sardinian territory that are subject to restrictions or otherwise subordinated to the needs of military activities. Not to mention, of course, the airspace and maritime space taken away from civilian navigation for the needs of the armed forces.[040]

<< Photo by the author

Elmas “civil” airport

The historical relationships to the military of the Elmas airport make it so that still today, the facility operates in an hybrid and ambiguous way between military and civilian spheres. One of its main purposes is the one of stopover during the transit of bellic material, which concerns activists groups like A Foras, that rightfully point out how close the Decimomannu airport is to Cagliari and how already that area is completely devoted to military use, highlighting the insatiability of military systems to invade spaces as much as they could. Additionally, they raise an important concern over the fact that if necessary, the armed forces are able designate the facility entirely for military use, and thus temporarily erasing its civic function.

The frequency at which weapons transit through civilian space raises concerns on the airport being one of the main nodes for the vectors of the economy of death, like just a couple of years ago, when the Elmas airfield was completely militarized on the night of the Iranian counterattack on April 13-14 2024, with the launch of hundreds of missiles from Tehran toward Israel and the airport becoming a hub for Israeli soldiers and the transit of bombs destined at Israel.[041] Another instance was November 2015, when a shipment of bombs was being loaded onto a cargo ship bound for Azerbaijan, then to Saudi Arabia and subsequently Yemen, where a war was raging. In the background of the photograph, a Ryanair plane is boarding civilians. Criticism has come from Amnesty International, the Disarmament Network, and members of parliament. At the time, Defense Minister Roberta Pinotti said “Everything is in order; we operate in accordance with the law” [042] as if the legality of an action completely erases its moral implications and is enough to lower the safety concerns of civilians involved.

<< Bombs being shipped in front of civil airport in 2015

040 Cugusi, 2007, p.62-63

041 Unione Sarda, 31 May 2024

042 Camillo, 2019,p. 48





Calamosca

Among Cagliari's many military installations, the largest is the former NATO POL, which prevents the public from fully accessing a vast area of exceptional scenic and natural beauty within the city. The Sella del Diavolo, the city's main headland, overlooks the beaches of Poretto and Calamosca, home to archaeological sites and hiking trails.[043] At its foot lies a large military complex, partially hidden by the military zones of other barracks. The POL NATO buildings are located within the military zone, enclosed by fences and barbed wire, which encompasses about half of the large limestone hill. These buildings are used to monitor a system of enormous underground tunnels that run through the Sella promontory and contain fuel storage tanks with a total capacity of approximately 280.000 cubic meters. Although the fences have recently been moved a few dozen meters and hidden among the vegetation, they continue to effectively prevent access to the hill from the Poetto side.

The underground tanks are connected via a pipeline to the Radice del Molo di Levante, at the mouth of the Terramaini Canal, where there is another military zone that prevents full access to the city's waterfront, which would otherwise extend uninterrupted from Via Roma to the old village of Sant'Elia. NATO-POL (an acronym standing for Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricant) is a supply system used by the NATO armed forces, comprising networks of oil pipelines, marine terminals, underground storage facilities, and pumping stations. This infrastructure network was built in the 1960s as part of the NATO Infrastructure Program and was managed for over forty years by the U.S. Navy, serving as the primary resource for fuel storage and distribution for naval units operating in the Mediterranean. Only later the facility became the property of the Italian Navy, which manages and maintains the immense underground storage tanks, currently utilizing only a very small portion of the fuel storage capacity.

In 2021, the Navy, through Difesa Servizi S.p.A., issued a public notice to grant a concession for the entire facility to a private company wishing to make it operational again, on the condition that a fuel storage tank with a capacity of up to 10,000 cubic meters be left for the Navy's use. The only companies that could have participated were large multinational corporations operating in the oil sector, but clearly, no interest was shown from private companies, which are unlikely to find it appealing to invest in a facility within a servitù, with a dual civilian/military use.[044] Consequently, the former NATO POL remains there, serving as a reminder to the people of Cagliari that they must endure such an intrusive structure, currently unused but always reusable for military purposes should NATO need it due to a possivle international conflict, in which case would make Cagliari a potential hostile target for the presence of this tactical infrastructure.

Sarroch

Sarroch, a small town in the Cagliari municipality, is immersed in a context rich in culture, but cut off from the tourism industry because it is home to one of the six "supersites", referencing the large industrial installments of SARAS, a publicly invested petrochemical refinery owned by Moratti. The presence of the refinery is a forced coexistence with Sarroch dating back to the 1960s, whose residents keep on suffering from the fumes emitted by the smokestacks, with serious respiratory health effects.

This refinery has open-air recovery tanks where fumes can be carried by the wind, and when it rains, the liquids are discharged into the sea since they are at the same level. Despite all the efforts from Moratti to paint the refinery as industrial paradise, the facts speak much louder, with many workers and residents suffering from cancer and Sarroch being protagonist of an Oxford study published on Mutagenesis about the genetic mutations related to the activity.

On top of this, the relationships between military bases and chemical industries are kept tight by a series of agreements of mutual support, both in terms of supply of material, but also in terms of guaranteeing accessibility to the infrastructure that the other can give.[045]

<< Tunnels of NATO-POL

<< Photo by the author

043 Maturi, 2016,p. 14 Cugusi, 2007, p. 8

044 A Foras, 2 June 2023

045 Camillo, 2019, 105-107

[...] “It’s true that before SARAS people went hungry in Sarroch, there was real poverty. But there was also ignorance, perhaps more ignorance than hunger. A person of culture was rare, someone... who knew anything about cancer, and what caused it. No-one knew about the problems caused by pollution because no-one knew what pollution was either. My grandparents, who were also genuine Sarroch folk, told me we gave our best land for the plant to be built on. And my grandparents died of cancer, all four of them. And they weren’t the only ones, my grandparents, to call it RUINERY instead of the REFINERY.”









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Oil Interview

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Estratti da Oil documentary 2009

Demilitarisation practices

Within critical military geography, demilitarisation and disarmament have connotations of both technical or institutional processes of reducing military capabilities, but also political and spatial transformations that challenge the social relations through which militarism is produced and reproduced. Theory production has consequently shifted attention away from understanding military geography primarily as the application of geographical knowledge to military problems, towards an examination of how militarism and military activities are themselves geographically constituted,[046] and thus how demilitarisation involves more than removing military hardware, but raises questions about who controls territory, how space is organised, which forms of security are privileged, and what kinds of social and political relations become possible when military functions are withdrawn.

A useful starting point is therefore to distinguish between disarmament and demilitarisation. Disarmament conventionally refers to the reduction, limitation or elimination alltogether of weapons and military capabilities. It can operate at different scales, from multilateral arms-control agreements to unilateral reductions in national arsenals. Demilitarisation, on the other hand, is a broader concept. It may encompass the withdrawal of armed forces, the closure or conversion of military installations, the removal of military restrictions from territory, and transformations in political cultures and institutions that have normalised military approaches to security. The distinction is significant as a reduction in weapons does not necessarily produce a demilitarised society or landscape.[047] Conversely, territories can undergo forms of demilitarisation even when wider national military capabilities remain intact.

This broader understanding is consistent with the critical turn in military geography. Woodward argues for moving from a narrowly defined "military geography" towards what she terms the "geographies of militarism,"[xxx1] thereby directing attention towards the social, cultural, political and economic processes through which militarism is constituted. More recent work similarly defines military geography as concerned with the geographical constitution and expression of militarism and military activities, emphasising that these are outcomes of social relations and political contestation rather than fixed or self-evident categories.[048] Demilitarisation is then interpreted as a process that interrupts or transforms these relations rather than reversing a quantitative measure of military power, which becomes extremely relevant considering that militarisation is fundamentally spatial. Military institutions require territory: bases, training areas, firing ranges, ports, airfields, communication infrastructure, housing and logistical networks, but these spaces are also actively produced through military practices and, in turn, shape the possibilities available to civilian populations.

The spatiality of militarisation can be understood through three geographical concepts in particular: landscape, representation and scale, where landscapes may be materially altered; representations of territory and security may change; and conflicts over military land can connect local struggles to national and international political processes.[049] From these definitions, military landscapes for example are not necessarily permanent manifestations of military power, mainly because of the historical and geographical diversity of military landscapes, including landscapes associated with military activity, commemoration, environmental transformation and post-military use. A demilitarised landscape may consequently retain traces of previous military activity long after formal military withdrawal.[050] The closure of a military installation may mark a formal institutional change without necessarily transforming the landscape or the social relations associated with it: buildings, roads, fences, unexploded ordnance, contamination, place names and collective memories can all constitute material or symbolic remnants of militarisation, former military territories can remain contaminated, inaccessible or economically dependent upon military activities. Likewise, military infrastructures can be converted to civilian purposes while retaining forms of ownership and governance that limit local participation. Demilitarisation must therefore be treated as a process rather than an event, as a practice of negotiating the material, political and cultural legacies of their presence, as well as removing military institutions.

Disarmament presents a related but distinct set of geographical questions. Weapons may appear to be mobile objects whose significance is independent of particular territories, yet their production, circulation, storage and deployment depend upon extensive spatial networks. Weapons are embedded within industrial infrastructures, military alliances, logistical systems, research institutions and political economies, thus disarmament involves the transformation of the networks and institutions through which military capabilities are produced and sustained. A critical approach must also ask whose security is being produced through disarmament and demilitarisation. Conventional security discourse frequently equates security with the military capacity of the state, but critical approaches instead challenge the assumption that the state constitutes the sole or self-evident referent of security. From a geographical perspective, this opens analytical space for considering communities, environments and everyday life as legitimate objects of security analysis.[051] This perspective changes how resistance to militarisation can be interpreted. Opposition to military installations is often propagandised as a local response to an otherwise necessary national-security infrastructure, but a critical reading challenges this framing by asking how the category of "national security" is produced, whose interests it represents, and whose territorial claims are subordinated to it. If military landscapes are socially and politically produced, then opposition to them can also be understood as a struggle over the production and (self)governance of space. Demilitarisation becomes then a process of territorial re-politicisation, trying to contrast the tendency of military territories to often remove particular decisions from ordinary democratic processes, like restriced access, land use determined by military requirements, and how the state can invoke national security to justify exceptional forms of governance.

The concept of conversion is therefore central to a critical understanding of demilitarisation: military conversion involves transforming military infrastructures, land and economic resources towards civilian purpose, both in terms of economic development strategy, and of redistribution of spatial power. A military training ground converted into agricultural, communal or conservation land, for example, does more than change land use: it potentially alters the relationship between state authority and local communities. The territory moves from a space organised around violence towards one organised around other social priorities. Yet, conversion is not inherently emancipatory, as former military land can become the object of commercial redevelopment, privatisation or speculative investment. Demilitarisation may therefore replace one form of territorial control with another rather than producing genuine local autonomy. This suggests that the critical question is not simply whether military land has been "converted," but how, by whom and for whose benefit conversion takes place.

An architectural response

About this last point, military facilities, installations and structures represent the most tangible aspect of militarisation of a territory through the altering of the built environment; the architectural language remains encoded in territory and urban fabric as pinpoint of the intended military purposes of a determined area. Decisions on how this architectural language can be altered and rewritten during processes of de-

046
Woodward, 2005, p. 33
Rech et al., 2015, p. 48

047
Levy, 2024, p. 306

048
Woodward, 2026, p. 5

049
Rech et al., 2015, p. 49

050
Woodward, 2014, p. 43

051
Rech et al., 2015, p. 52

militarisation are crucial to the ability of democratically determining what space can look like. Taking inspiration from a series of projects undertaken by DAAR (Decolonizing Architecture Art Research), some architectural practices on how to deal with military structures after their intended function terminated.

Reuse of Material

The first approach is the reuse of the material remains of the military base. In the case of Oush Grab, the evacuation of the Israeli military installation was immediately followed by the local population entering the abandoned site and removing elements and materials that could be recycled or reused. Rather than treating the military base as an intact monument whose meaning and material integrity should necessarily be preserved, this approach begins with the physical disassembly of the military landscape. Materials that had previously served military purposes are detached from their original function and returned to civilian circulation. This can be understood as a form of material demilitarisation: the concrete, metal, infrastructure and other components of the military apparatus lose their specifically military function and become resources for other forms of inhabitation. In this sense, reuse challenges the permanence of military architecture by demonstrating that its material components are not inherently military. The base can be dismantled materially without necessarily erasing the history of militarisation; instead, its materials are redistributed into other social and spatial relations. At Oush Grab, this process began almost immediately after evacuation, when local residents entered the former camp and removed recyclable elements.

Repurposing and Reappropriation

A second strategy is repurposing the military site for civilian and collective uses. Rather than demolishing the entire installation, repurposing retains elements of the existing landscape while fundamentally altering their function and meaning. At Oush Grab, an agreement made during the Oslo period established that, in the event of an Israeli withdrawal, the site would not be transferred to the Palestinian police but would instead be managed by the municipality as a public space. Following the evacuation, a municipal plan proposed new public functions, including a neighbourhood, a hospital and a public park, while parts of the former military landscape were already being transformed into a children's play area, a restaurant and an open garden for public events. Repurposing therefore involves more than architectural adaptation: it constitutes a political reappropriation of space. A territory previously organised around surveillance, military control and the projection of force becomes a space of public access, social reproduction and collective life. From a critical military-geographical perspective, this transformation is significant because it changes the relationship between architecture and power. The same physical territory can support radically different political and social relations depending on who controls it and what purposes it serves. Demilitarisation thus becomes a process of transforming not only the function of military infrastructure but also the territorial relations embodied in it.

Letting Nature Claim the Structure

The third approach is perhaps the most radical: allowing nature to reclaim the military structure. Rather than immediately demolishing, preserving or conventionally converting military architecture, the "Return to Nature" approach allows the material remains of the military landscape to deteriorate and become progressively incorporated into ecological processes. DAAR explicitly identifies "Project: Return to Nature" as one of its approaches to military bases, alongside access and reappropriation, evacuation and forms of revolving-door occupation. In this strategy, abandonment itself becomes a form of transformation. Vegetation, weathering, erosion and time gradually undermine the architectural order imposed by military occupation. This can be read as a reversal of the military landscape: a space once maintained through constant surveillance, control and technical intervention is gradually subjected to processes that exceed human control. The approach therefore refuses the assumption that every abandoned military structure must immediately be given a new productive function. Instead, it creates the possibility of non-use, ecological succession and temporal transformation. In critical terms, allowing nature to reclaim the military base can challenge the imperative to make abandoned military land economically productive, while also creating a different relationship between memory and materiality: the ruins remain as traces of militarisation, but their gradual transformation prevents them from becoming fixed monuments to military power.

From Military Infrastructure to Post-Military Landscape

Taken together, these three approaches suggest that the demilitarisation of a military base is not necessarily a single process with a predetermined outcome. Reuse, repurposing and return to nature represent three different ways of transforming the material and political relations embodied in military space. Reuse breaks the military landscape down into its constituent materials; repurposing retains and redirects parts of its infrastructure towards civilian and collective purposes; and return to nature allows the site to escape both military function and conventional redevelopment. The significance of the Oush Grab case therefore lies in the fact that demilitarisation is approached as a process of reappropriating, transforming and sometimes refusing the inherited spatial order of militarisation. The former base does not simply disappear when the army leaves. Instead, its materials, structures, memories and landscape become available for competing forms of post-military futures. This makes Oush Grab particularly relevant to critical military geography, where the question is not only how military power occupies space, but also how that space might be remade once military power has been withdrawn.

Demilitarisation should also be understood as a multi-scalar process. At the international scale, disarmament agreements regulate weapons and military capabilities; at the national scale, governments determine defence policy and military expenditure; at the regional scale, military installations shape economies and territorial planning; while at the local and embodied scales, militarisation affects mobility, livelihoods, environmental conditions, memory and relationships to place. [xxx] The scalar dimension also demonstrates why demilitarisation should not be treated as a simple process of decentralisation. Local struggles against military installations can challenge national-level authority, but they are themselves embedded within wider political and economic structures.[052] A local community may demand the removal of a military base while simultaneously confronting national defence policy, international military alliances, arms industries and global security discourses. Allowing these scales to be analysed relationally rather than separately is fundomental in understanding these phenomena.

In the end, while disarmament can be understood as a reduction in the material means of organised violence, demilitarisation concerns the wider transformation of the spatial, political, economic and cultural relations that sustain military power. While both are fundamental to the production of material and dialectical spaces that exclude violence as a shaping factor, demilitarisation directs attention towards the remaking of territories and social relations; it asks what happens to military landscapes after military power is withdrawn, how communities participate in decisions about former military territories, how environmental and material legacies are addressed, and whether alternative forms of security can emerge, dealing with the redistribution of access, authority and resources, redefinition of security, the possibility of producing landscapes organised around purposes other than preparation for violence, new forms of territorial governance, environmental repair, collective memory and civilian control over spaces previously organised around military power.

Finally, demilitarisation has an important representational and cultural dimension. The military presence operates through material infrastructures, but also through connotations about territory, threat, security and legitimate authority, making representation one of the key geographical lenses through which military power can be examined. A territory can be represented as strategically essential, economically marginal, environmentally expendable or insecure, and these definitions can help legitimise military intervention or restricted access. Demilitarisation consequently requires more than the removal of military materialities; it can also involve challenging the representations that have justified military presence in the first place, especially in territories where military activity has become normalised over generations. The transformation of such territories may require not only physical remediation but also the construction of alternative narratives about land, community and security, which is why analyzing both the state of military presence and future demilitarisation implies a coherent and respectful study on place-specific local situations and struggles, as the demilitarisation of territory will never be a universal protocol that can be applied the same everywhere.

052
Rech et al., 2015, p. 37

Disarming Sardinia

Any serious engagement with the question of demilitarization must begin with the cultural and political subjectivity from which resistance has historically drawn its force, and Sardinia is no different. In Sardinia, the figures of resistance are personified by concept of ***balentes***[053] (literally “fighters”), meaning those who do not bow their heads before oppressive forces. It names a disposition of non-submission that has animated the island’s relationship with successive external powers, from earlier Spanish and Piedmontese domination to the post-war Italian state and contemporary’s international pressures. In the context of military occupation, this tradition of refusal has taken organized form: in community assemblies, in legal challenges, in symbolic occupations of interdicted beaches, and in a political discourse that increasingly frames the presence of firing ranges not as a national defense necessity but as a colonial imposition.

How do we imagine a Sardinia free from military and colonial oppression though? Because the issue is that if the political compass of *balentes* points toward demilitarization as a horizon, the economic reality of the territories surrounding Sardinia’s firing ranges presents an unfair dilemma. Decades of military presence have not only contaminated the soil, but have restructured the local economy around the ranges themselves. Employment in security, logistics, maintenance, and services tied to the military has become, in many of these communities, among the few stable sources of income available (this applies also to the sphere of the industries in the island, but that’s another topic in itself). The socioeconomic fabric of zones adjacent to the polygons has become so thoroughly saturated by this dependency that an immediate closure, that erasing the bases out of the blue would risk condemning thousands of people to poverty.[054]

This is the structural trap at the heart of the demilitarization question: military presence was never just imposed on an existing economy; it gradually displaced and replaced one, expelling from the occupied territories secular activities of pastoralism, fishing, agriculture. The result is a form of imposed dependency that operates as its own argument against change: in the face of economic uncertainty, the temptation is to bow one’s head and accept what seems to be the best option, yet the illusion of stability defeats the desire to fight for alternatives.
Yet what are these alternatives? Although a reconfiguration of the amount of territories given to the military was attempted in the past,[055] in todays framework it wouldn’t be enough to simply reduce the official area occupied by the military, since as have we seen, military activity always tends to bleed out consequences from what would be their containments. Many had theorized possible realities of a Sardinia able to thrive from different sources, but we’ll see how some of these possibilities are still deeply rooted in a system of colonial dependence that replicates the dynamics of military oppression.

The tourism alternative

The most commonly proposed alternative to military land use in Sardinia is tourism. The argument seems intuitive: the island possesses some of the most ecologically and scenically valuable areas in the Mediterranean and is already one of the most saturated tourist destinations of Europe. Returning the militarized territories to civilian life would, in theory, open them to an economic model less destructive and more compatible with local identity, but the reality is considerably more complicated.

The contamination problem alone presents an enormous obstacle: much of the land within and adjacent to the firing ranges cannot simply be handed over to tourists, or to anyone else, without prior remediation that is tech-

053
Camillo, 2019, p. 103

054
Ibid, p. 97

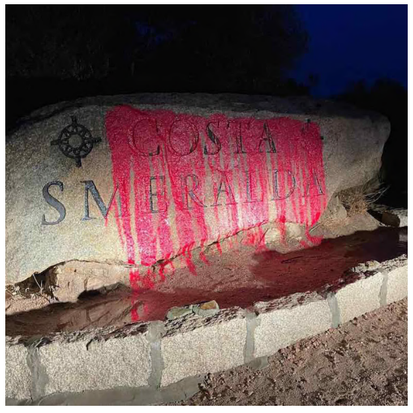
055
Pinna, 1985, p. 29

nically complex, financially vast, and politically unresolved. The Penisola Delta at Teulada is too polluted even for soldiers and too far gone for a simple cleanup, and is not a coastline that can be used by Sardinians themselves, much less can be reimagined as a tourist attraction in any near future.[056]

There are also less-mainstream but politically significant objections especially from locals to the tourism model: on one hand the amount of tourists and whether they actually benefit economically the island, and on the other who the tourists are. The first instance criticizes the overwhelming presence of seasonal tourists that, much like everywhere else the same problem exists, implies a change to the economy of the island that makes it harder for locals to comfortably uphold. This repeating pattern shows how despite the third sector might represent on the island the best form of income on paper with 9 billion euros, the struggles of the single individuals show how the question of tourism might just be yet another money machine for Italy, rather than for Sardinia. Thus, a tourism economy dominated by external capital would risk reproducing precisely this structure.

The other issue though, regards skepticism over the types of tourists that come to Sardinia. Reports have noted that as early as 2024, groups of Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers have come to Italy on a regular basis to "unwind", that is, to "recover their mental health" after perpetrating the genocide in Gaza. These groups are reportedly protected by the General Investigations and Special Operations Division (Digos) considered sensitive targets "in light of the war in Gaza and the pro-Palestine protests." The preferred destinations that have emerged for these holidays from genocide are the Marche and Sardinia regions, which made opposition politicians and activists ask themselves whether there are there agreements in place between the Israeli and Italian governments Demilitarization, in this framing, cannot mean simply replacing one form of military use with a civilian economy that reproduces equivalent geopolitical entanglements.





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IDF soldiers in Costa Smeralds and subsequent protest from antimilitarist and propalestinian groups

056
Camillo, 2019, p.142

Energy sovereignty

One of the persistent questions in the literature on Sardinia's political economy is why models of development rooted in the island's own productive traditions have never been meaningfully supported by institutional actors. Why did projects oriented toward valorising local practices, even like the one Olivetti tried to invest into in the last century, based on community-centred economic planning, never come to fruition, while the option of heavy industrialisation (and later military lease) was consistently favoured? The answer points directly to the role of what Sardinians call the *borghesia compradora*:[xxx] local intermediaries at the regional level whose personal enrichment depended on facilitating the arrival of external capital and power, and who consequently had no interest in models of development that would have strengthened the autonomy and productive capacity of local communities, ultimately selling off the island to external exploitative actors.

Much like for the military, Sardinia has undergone a process of intrusive industrial development that deeply conditions the island still today. Among the possivle scenarios of an alternative way for Sardinians to thrive, the concept of energy sovereignty has emerged in this context as a parallel demand to territorial liberation from the military. More fundamentally, the history of Sardinia's economic development raises a deeper question about how the energetic model has been managed so far. Maria Antonietta Mongiu argues that the pattern of externally driven economic development in Sardinia, whether through military presence, petrochemical industry, coastal cementification, or the exploitation of renewable energy resources, has systematically transferred value out of the island while leaving environmental and social costs behind. Multinationals exploit and monetize the sun, the wind, and the land, taking them from communities just as the military does, perpetrating a dispossession of land from local communities.[057]

What has been happening for the last years in a very similar fashion to what the military did when they were insidiating on the island, is an overwhelming process of reconfiguration of the landscape through the erection of multiple industrial fields for the production of renewable energies. Driven by the ecological transition, industrial wind and solar farms are being built in areas that risk destroying local ecosystems and landscapes, all for the benefit of large multinational corporations shielding themselves by propagandas of greenwashing.

The critical issues here are the ones of land use and extractivist practices: while on one hand the way these farms acquire land is through often immoral subtraction of natural heritage, the alternative is the displacement of locals from their private property through forced eviction, a situation where often the singe individual has no chance to legally contrast the large companies. The other side of the coin though, is the extractivist connotation of renewable energies in Sardinia, since all of the energy produced from these occupied lands is for the majority re-imported to mainland. The matter of energy sovereignty,[058] just as the demand for demilitarization is not only about removing bases but about restoring the community's right to determine land use, means that decisions about what is built on Sardinian land, by whom, and for whose benefit, must be made by and with the Sardinian people. The two struggles share a common analytical structure: both contest the right of external powers to treat Sardinian territory as available space for their own purposes.



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Wind turbines field outside of Cagliari, taken by author

057
Camillo, 2019, p. 141

058
Codonesu, 2013, p. 186





S4 Sa lotta 'e Pratobello (prevention)

The events at Pratobello in June 1969 occupy a distinctive place in the history of Sardinian social movements. What began as a dispute over the use of communal grazing land in the territory of Orgosolo, in central Sardinia, rapidly developed into a broader confrontation between a local community and the Italian state over the militarisation of territory. The importance of Pratobello lies not only in the withdrawal of the army, but also in the political form taken by the resistance, making Pratobello revolt what some have called the last successful act of resistance on Sardinian soil: a mass mobilisation based on public assemblies, collective occupation and predominantly non-violent direct action. In its impact, Pratobello can be understood as a foundational episode in the development of Sardinian antimilitarism, while also revealing the tensions between state power, local autonomy and the defence of the commons.

The immediate context was the decision of the Italian military authorities in 1969 to use the area around Pratobello as a firing and training ground. On the 27th of May, notices signed by the Trieste Brigade appeared in Orgosolo instructing shepherds to remove their livestock from the area. Pratobello was not simply an empty or marginal landscape: communal grazing areas formed part of the material basis of life in Orgosolo, and the proposed military exercises threatened land that was economically significant to the local pastoral economy. The military proposal therefore represented, from the perspective of the local population, a fundamentally altering intervention into an existing relationship between community, land and livelihood. The common preoccupation and struggle resulted in the people unionizing through public assemblies and involved the population across generations and social categories.

This distinction is crucial for understanding the antimilitarist dimension of the struggle. Pratobello was not initially articulated exclusively in the language of pacifism. Many of the immediate demands concerned access to land, grazing rights and the defence of the local economy. Yet the community's response transformed these material grievances into a direct challenge to military authority. The issue became whether the state could impose a military use upon territory without the consent of those who lived and worked there, linking the revolt's antimilitarist desires at Pratobello inseparable from a political connotation of territorial autonomy.

The mobilisation gathered momentum during the first weeks of June. Attempts at mediation by state officials and agricultural organisations failed, while the youth circle of Orgosolo played an important role in disseminating information and encouraging political discussion. The decisive moment came on June 19th, when residents moved towards Pratobello and occupied the area in order to prevent the military exercises from taking place. Contemporary and retrospective accounts emphasise the breadth of participation: shepherds were joined by workers, students, women, children and other residents in a peaceful occupation of resistance that, after several days, lead to the army abandoning the planned exercises and withdrew.

The significance of this mobilisation was therefore partly organisational. Rather than relying upon a single political leader, the movement was conducted through assemblies in which different positions were debated. One account of the struggle emphasises that Pratobello was ultimately a "victory of the people" rather than the achievement of a particular party or individual.[xxx] This collective character matters because it challenges a conventional understanding of political resistance as something organised primarily by established institutions. At Pratobello, political authority emerged

<< Pictures from the 1969 Pratobello insurrection

059 Menneas, 2019, p. 13

060 Camillo, 2019, p. 176-177









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Graffiti in Orgosolo, taken by author

horizontally from the community itself. Women were particularly important to this process, as their participation demonstrates that the movement cannot be reduced to a conflict between male shepherds and male soldiers. Women confronted police and military forces and helped sustain the non-violent character of the mobilisation. Their presence also expanded the meaning of territorial defence: the struggle concerned not simply the economic interests of individual pastoralists but the future of the community as a whole, reason as to why social divisions of age, occupation and gender were temporarily reorganised around a shared defence of territory.

The state response reveals why the episode became such a memorable antimilitarist struggle. Military exercises were presented as part of a wider strategy for controlling the territory and confronting the problem of banditry in Sardinia. The militarisation of the island as mentioned before had a longer history, however. By the late 1960s, military installations and training areas had become an important feature of the Sardinian landscape. Later research on Sardinian resistance movements identifies Pratobello as an early example of collective opposition to military occupation and connects it to subsequent struggles around installations at places such as La Maddalena, Teulada and Perdasdefogu.[061]

This wider context allows Pratobello to be interpreted through the concept of military territorialisation. The political conflict is therefore simultaneously about land and sovereignty, as Pratobello demonstrated that local communities could contest this transformation by occupying the very space whose meaning the state sought to redefine. The episode also complicates the distinction between environmentalism and antimilitarism. The original protesters were defending land because it was socially and economically valuable, rather than because they were acting according to a modern environmentalist programme. Nevertheless, their struggle anticipated later forms of environmental and territorial activism in Sardinia. Contemporary scholarship on Sardinian resistance describes Pratobello as part of a longer history in which communities have challenged military occupation, environmental damage and decisions imposed without meaningful local participation. The continued political use of the name “Pratobello” demonstrates how the 1969 mobilisation has become a symbol of territorial self-determination.

The legacy of Pratobello is particularly important because the victory was limited but politically significant. The immediate objective was achieved: the planned permanent military occupation did not take place, and the army withdrew following the mobilisation. Yet the struggle did not end the militarisation of Sardinia. Military installations continued to occupy substantial areas of the island, and later antimilitarist movements confronted questions concerning military bases, environmental consequences and restrictions on civilian access to land. One of the most important messages that came out of the event was the refusal to accept militarisation as inevitable. The community did not possess the institutional or military power of the Italian state; its strength instead came from numbers, solidarity and the occupation of territory.[062] This asymmetry makes the episode particularly significant within the history of non-violent resistance. The protesters transformed their numerical disadvantage into a political advantage by making military exercises practically and politically impossible. The occupation demonstrated that the state’s formal ownership or authority over territory did not necessarily translate into uncontested control over its use.

Pratobello also raises questions about the relationship between Sardinian autonomy and Italian state power. On the occasion of the Orgosolo uprising over Pratobello, the “Città-Campagna” circle directly addressed the issue in a mimeographed leaflet dated June 23rd, 1969: “As far as Sardinia is concerned, a military and police regime is nothing more than a means of keeping the population locked into their colonial conditions... In particular, colonisation entails the complete elimination of every form of work that is still autonomous, that has not yet been totally subjugated to the capitalist system. In other words, it entails the elimination of pastoralism and agriculture as activities carried out directly by herders and farmers; it entails the elimination of shepherds and peasants.”[063] The conflict was not simply between civilians and soldiers; it was also between different conceptions of who should have the authority to determine the future of Sardinian land. The military authorities approached the landscape primarily through national strategic interests, while the population approached it through communal rights, pastoral practice and local knowledge. The resulting confrontation exposed a persistent problem in Sardinian political history: decisions affecting the island have frequently been formulated at a level distant from the communities that experience their consequences. For this reason, research on contemporary Sardinian activism explicitly places the 1969 occupation at the beginning of a longer trajectory extending to movements such as A Foras, which emerged in the twenty-first century to challenge military bases and demand environmental justice, decontamination and greater territorial autonomy. The continuity should not, however, be overstated.[064] Contemporary movements operate within different political, ecological and social circumstances. What connects them to Pratobello is less a single ideology than a recurring political question: who has the right to decide how Sardinian territory is used?

Ultimately, the historical importance of Pratobello lies in the way it brought together several forms of political struggle that are often treated separately. It was a defence of pastoral livelihoods, a defence of communal land, a challenge to state authority, an example of participatory democracy and an antimilitarist mobilisation. Its success came from the convergence of these dimensions rather than from any one of them. The people of Orgosolo and their experience of the military occupation of their land produced an embodied and territorial form of antimilitarism, birthing a foundational moment in the Sardinian struggle against militarisation not because it permanently resolved the question, but because it established a political precedent. It showed that a community could oppose the transformation of its territory into military space and that resistance could be organised collectively, through assemblies and direct occupation, rather than through dependence upon established political institutions. More than half a century later, the name Pratobello continues to evoke this possibility of antimilitarism, democracy and the defence of the commons became inseparable.

Today, Orgosolo repesents a town that embeds itself through graffiti with the memory and commemoration of local, national and international struggles and fights of people that fought for their rights with the same desire for autonomy and dignity as the inhabitants of Pratobello, transforming the built space in a social and political vector.[065]





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“What happens in Pratobello against pastoralism and agriculture is colonialist provocation, just like during the fascist period. Therfore, I express uncoditional solidarity with the sheperds and farmers of Orgosolo that haven’t surrendered. If my health conditions were better, I’d be amongst them”
Letter by Emilio Lussu

□■
“Fertilizers, not bullets”

061
Camillo, 2019, p. 178

062
Menneas, 2019, p. 36

063
Menneas, 2019, p. 14

064
Camillo, 2019, p. 194

065
Ivenson, 2010, p. 115

Towards an incomplete conclusion

Since starting to write this thesis in March, by now I can't even remember how many times I've been asked why I chose to write so extensively about the military, and to be fair even today I wouldn't be able to give a different answer other than "because I despise it". Dealing with this topic in a historical moment in which the escalation of conflicts and dialectics of war are always more prominent in all aspects of our lives (university for me as well), I felt the need to try to go against that, especially coming out of these last five years in architecture, in which I've learned more than anything else that architecture is one of the most political things there possibly is. By extension, the architect in a way holds (or at least should) an enormous responsibility when he's tasked to design and alter spaces, even though, as I hope I've been able to show well enough in this research, not always end up being for the better. Architecture as a practice shapes lives and places, it can protect, but also exclude; it can connect, but it can also segregate; it can provide shelter, or negate it

Writing the last pages of this thesis makes me both proud and disappointed: the work I've done has been for sure substantial and fulfilling, but at the same time it remains an incomplete work. Not incomplete because I couldn't make a point, but rather impossible to complete, as the amount of topics, case studies and literature that are missing from the totality of my discourse is endless. In the first part of the thesis, I stripped down the military presence to it's most elemental components in an attempt to build up from them a way to organize the manifestations of the military. The intent wasn't to make a historical recollection of events of the military, but rather analyze the space in which these events took place. I organized a series of case studies under categories and subcategories that in a way helped me forge a theoretical framework in order to approach more linearly the topic; yet while I wouldn't say that it has been useless to create these thematic families, at the end I needed to strip them down once again to demonstrate that enclosing real life events and scenarios in rigid groups is basically impossible and incoherent with the way I approached the topic of military manifestations. It was clear after a while that military presence is so deeply embedded within our material and dialectical spaces, that the walls between categories soon crumbled to show the complex nexus through which technique, control, violence, and power operate and are perpetrated in space. What emerged instead was a much more complex picture: military presence possesses an almost liquid quality, moving between categories and scales, between the physical and the symbolic, infrastructure and ideology. Its manifestations overlap and contaminate one another, revealing a broader set of scenarios that are unique and unrepeatable.

This realization became particularly significant in the second part of the thesis, where the analysis moved from the broader theoretical framework toward the specific condition on Sardinian soil. Here, military presence could no longer be contextualized as an isolated collection of categories. Instead, it appeared as a force deeply embedded within the island's territorial organization, with consequences extending into its economy, ecology, health, everyday life, and political imagination. The complexity of military relations in Sardinia (but like in everywhere else after all) was reflected also when dealing with the topic of demilitarization: an imaginative future in which the military has been eradicated from all institutions and spaces it previously occupied and influenced, for sure a future one would have to fight for.

The role of architecture

If architecture is inherently political, then the architect cannot be considered politically neutral simply because their work begins after a political decision has already been made. Drawing a boundary, designing an road, erecting a wall, abandoning a building, are all decisions that hold strong political and social value for the ones that are going to benefit or be harmed by them. The architect may not determine the political system within which they operate, but they inevitably participate in materializing it. But even then, when we are tasked to do our job, do we not have a moral choice?

Undoubtedly, the architect must have the ability to recognize architecture's responsibility to question the conditions he's asked to reproduce. Throughout this thesis the topic of the "other" was always present as a core driving mechanism for military presence. Questions started emerging:

Who is a friend?
Who is an enemy?
Who is a target?
Who is a terrorist?
Who is a combatant?
Who is innocent?
Who is "high risk"?
Who is "illegal"?
Who is free?
Who serves?
Who belongs?
Who Decides?

These are only some of the questions more inherent with my research, but many more could be asked about how bodies are rendered and politicized in different ways. Can I, through the architectural practice, give an answer to even one of these questions? If yes, how can I make sure that I make always the best decision and remedy for past mistakes? I do not think this thesis provides a definitive answer to this last question. Nor do I think it should. Perhaps its purpose has instead been to make the question impossible to ignore.

Given that I don't posses the definitive answer, the project that follows reflects this, as I didn't believe I would have been true to myself in pretending that I could possibly have a resolutive vision to the issues that were dealt with in this research. The following pages close the thesis with an imaginative project aimed at provoking a reaction to the materialization of the invisible effects of the military. I arrogantly use the medium of the architectural project as an excuse to be challenging and polemical about the responsibilities and irreversible effects in the places where military activity has endured and been abusive to the point of no return. In an attempt to criticize immoral use of power against a territory and its inhabitants, I render visible the inhospitability in Capo Teulada.

A provocation

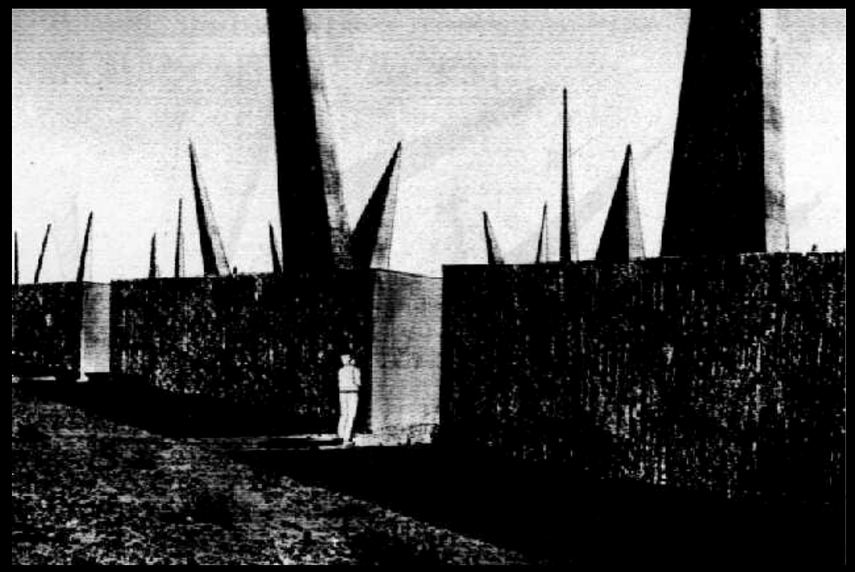
What will it be of what is left? While dealing with demilitarisation at the dialectic, political, and architectural level, as hard as the process might be, we can still imagine a future where spaces are freed from military presence and its dynamics; but what about the incurable fragments that are left? When putting everything together, the evidence points towards the fact that the politics of war are not solely aimed at direct death of human bodies for profit, but are carrying a long trail of health and environmental hazards to obtain said objectives. At this point, the question can't even be about whether the ends justify the means, because could both the ends and the means ever be justified? The environmental dimension reinforces this argument. Military practices transform landscapes through construction, restricted access, training exercises, weapons testing, pollution and other forms of environmental disturbance. The environmental impacts of military practices, both materially and discursively, are an enormous concern within contemporary discourse on ecology and war,[xxx] especially when transparency about the topic is extremely limited: were the ecological and material consequences of military presence ever addressed? Had the territory genuinely been restored available for alternative forms of use?

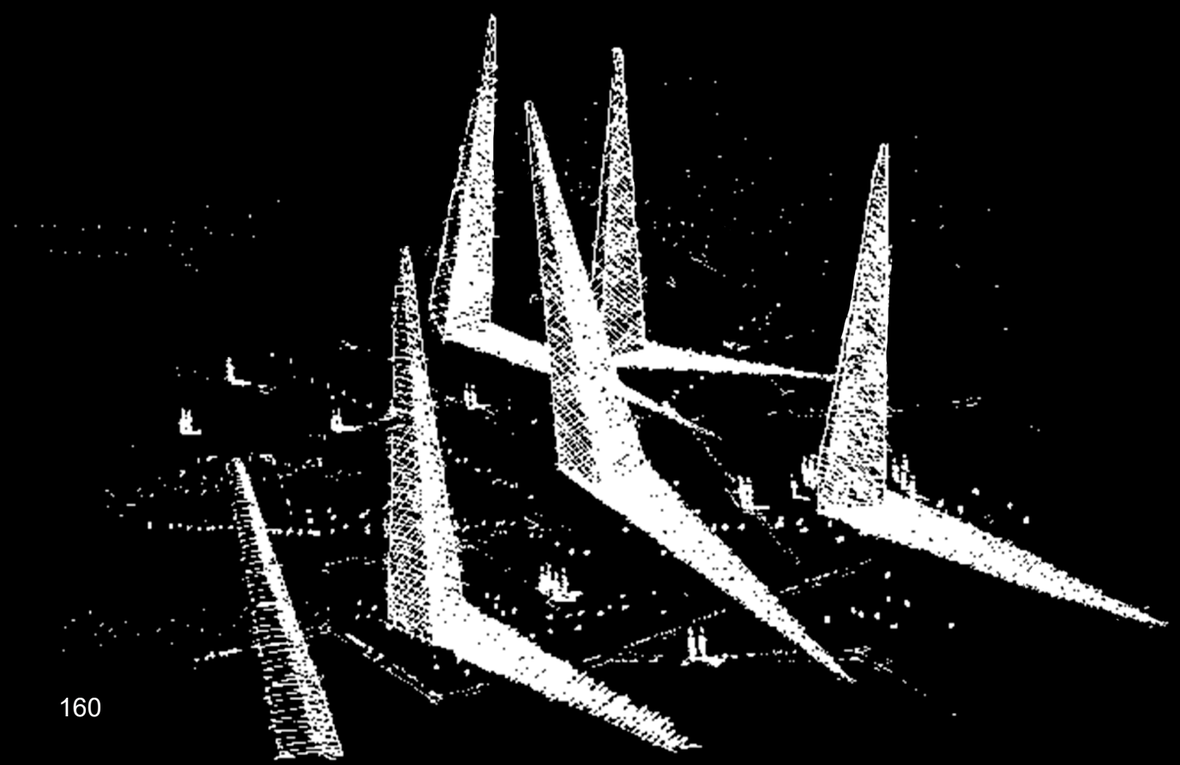
These questions unfortunately find negative answers in Sardinia, where as mentioned previously, the land, water and wind have been poisoned by the extensive and intensive testing of military weaponry and industrial activity. The results of this ongoing immoral and unsupervised type of conduct have had devastating and irreparable consequences to the health of the landscape and its inhabitants. Even in a future when land would be given back, the soil would still retain harmful substances that would make it ultimately inhabitable and unsuitable for any type of activity, whether habitation or farming.[066]

These last pages codify through the architectural project a way to express this hostility of the land that would have to keep people away, rather them drawing them close, very reminiscent of contemporary hostile architecture. For this project, which is really a provocation rather than an actual proposal, I draw a parallelism between the Sardinian situation and a 90s concept for nuclear semiotics. The "Landscape of Thorns" or "Spike Field" is a conceptual design by Michael Brill and illustrator Safdar Abidi for a 1992 report by Sandia National Laboratories for the US Department of Energy for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) which imagined a way to signal nuclear contamination of land through signals that could be universally understandable even thousands of years in the future.[066] Contrary to typical approaches to semiotics that opt for signs and graphics to convey meanings, this idea of conveying a message through the architectural language was in the end never applied, even though its official illustrations are already evocative of the intimidation and isolation. The project consisted of a mass of many irregularly-sized stone spikes protruding from the ground in all directions that could ideally stand eternally as a series of obelisks that shouldn't be commemorated.

I conclude this thesis applying the same logic of this concept to the area of Capo Teulada thorugh a brief site analysis and altering pictures I personally took when visiting the area. Currently the base is still being operated and an enormous portion of land is cut out from the rest of the island through a wall that delimits the perimeter of the military-operated territory. In a future where military activities will cease and this *limes* were to be removed, the land within would still be forever contaminated by the deadly substances used for military practices. Representing Capo Teulada as a landscape of thorns is an instigation to understand how much of the territory is ultimately deadly, as while the current wall is a line from where you can see the opposite side, the landscape of thorns removes the line and fills the surface.

Although the landscape of thorns is a dystopian proposal on how architecture can influence the perception of space and remains a philosophical provocation rather than anything else, the reasons for which it would be built are already a concerning but tangible reality, showing how in a fight to dismantle the system of military oppression that shaped our society, it has already left a wound that won't heal.





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Landscape of thorns concept drawings, 1991

066
Camillo, 2019, p. 54

067
Trauth et al., 1993

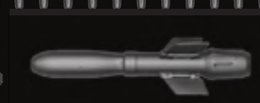




While the built structure cover a rather minimal part of the plot occupied by the military, the entirety of the dashed area is the one officially recognized as polluted beyond reparation because of all the testing with radioactive thorium, heavy metals (including lead, cadmium, thallium, arsenic), and white phosphorus.

Military buildings

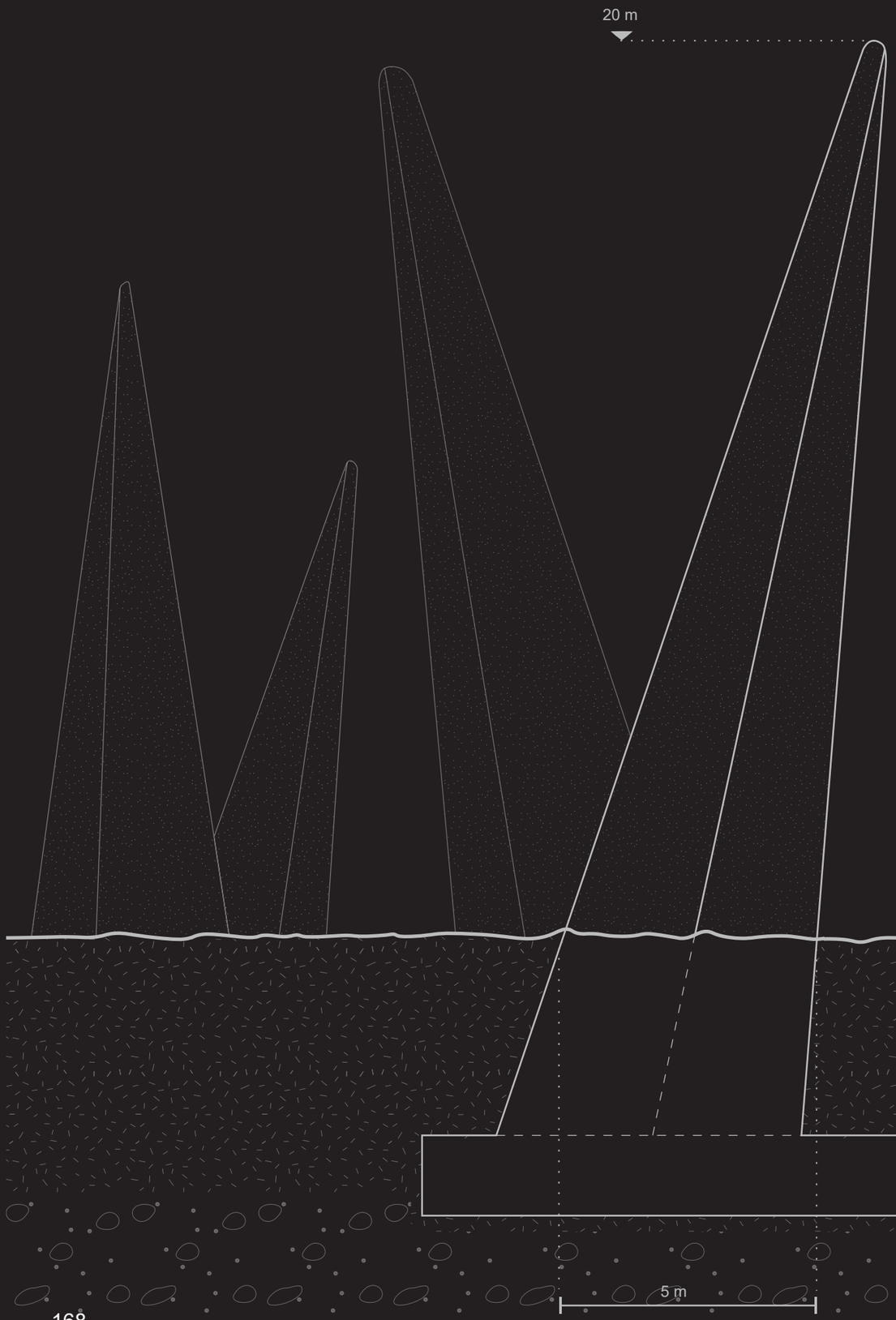
Perimetrary wall

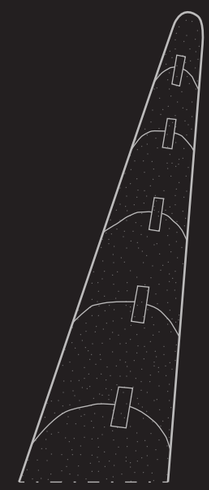


=

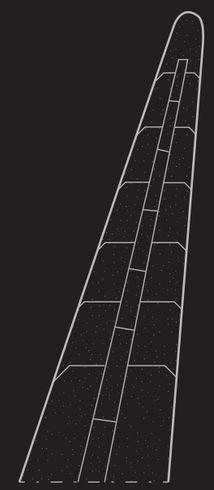
4 missiles with thorium launched in Teulada



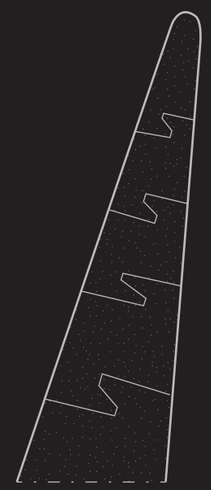




Stone cylinder
“keys”



Stone core
“keys”



Keyed joint,
single direction



Keyed joint,
single direction

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This thesis investigates military manifestations and their influences on space in a genealogy of the various shapes and sizes of military forms. Starting by stripping down military practices to variables of time, space, technique and control, the intersections of these variables represent substantial turning points in the ways the military personifies in space. The first part of the research gives these intersections temporal and geographical coordinates, identifying actual material instances of such manifestations at different scales and instants. Realizing the reoccurring and replicative nature of spatial practices across space and time, the case studies are organised in thematic categories like the panopticon cities, dromological infrastructures, and so on. This is done as a way to highlight patterns and connections in order to blur boundaries between Global North-South binarism and imperial-colonial trends, that along with terror and security discourse are very much the basis for today's justification of military presence in cities. The following chapter applies the same categories to military presence in Sardinia as an example of greatly affected territories on national and European level, analyzing the ways in which the island has been and continues to be used as a key node within the military machine. In the last pages of the thesis, I try to imagine possible outcomes aimed at de-militarisation, mainly applied to the Sardinian territory, ending everything with a provocative design proposal. At its core, this thesis wants to represent nothing more than a peek behind the veil of Maya, somewhat helping recognize the links of the complex system of military power and its occupation of social and built spaces.