

Amy Kaplan

In the name of security

Review of International American Studies 3/3-4, 15-24

2008-2009

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

IN THE NAME OF SECURITY

Amy Kaplan

University of Pennsylvania

In January 2001, the Bush administration started its reign with a neoliberal assault on the Social Security system, the last bastion of the welfare state. In his first major speech after the attacks of September 11 that year, the President announced the creation of the Office of Homeland Security. In January 2003, the White House turned it into a permanent Department, calling it 'the most significant transformation of the United States Government since 1947', the year the U.S.A National Security Act created the CIA. This governmental department was not the only significant transformation. The word 'homeland' was an unfamiliar way of referring to the American nation, an idiom not found in a traditional political vocabulary that includes national security, domestic security, and civil defense. These keywords, 'homeland security', have been changing not only the government but the contours of American nationalism and its relation to the world. The Department of Homeland Security is not only charged with protecting the nation from terrorism, but also with policing the borders of the nation, with its incorporation of the Immigration and Nationalization Service (INS). In addition, with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) under its umbrella, the Department of Homeland Security was responsible for the disastrous disaster relief in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

This essay explores the ubiquity of 'security' in contemporary American political culture, which extends far beyond the working of the state. What is the relation of homeland security to the concept of freedom and to the language of empire? How do these terms coalesce in the more recent concept of homeland security? Social Security/ National Security/ Homeland Security. How are these concepts interconnected? What is the relation between the tremendous investment in the national security today, not only monetarily and institutionally, but also linguistically and conceptually, and the evisceration and impoverishment of language and institutions for conceiving and providing for human needs and social services? My conjecture is that within the logic of homeland security that question cannot be posed, because the meaning of homeland security works to eradicate the boundaries between military and social needs and between foreign and domestic policy. As the response to Hurricane Katrina showed, the politics of homeland security has made social security in the most basic sense impossible.

AMY KAPLAN



SAFETY AND SECURITY

Dictionaries and common usage distinguish the word 'security' (etymologically from the Latin, 'without care') from the word 'safety'. The nuance lies in security having the added emphasis on protection from dangers that originate from the outside, the sense of encroachment. Security implies a triangular relationship: a protector protects someone weaker from an external threat, one which often has racial and gendered connotations in the context of the home and homeland. In this triangle some people are rendered in need of and deserving protection while others are deemed as inherently dangerous. Security, as many have noted, is unthinkable without the production of insecurity, and it is unimaginable without imaging threats that shade into one another. For policy makers and academics, to subsume international relations and foreign policy into the field of national security implicitly avoids a theory of power, because the idea of security implies that the motivation for action and policy is a reactive defense to an outside power rather than a quest for domination motivated from within.

Security does not only refer to militarism, policing, and technologies of surveillance and governance. The word does the seductive work of creating a framework for seeing and experiencing the world in a way that fuses the macro level of global and national politics with the intimate world of home and psyche, with the existential level of faith and identity. The language of security has been colonizing every arena and idiom of daily life and political culture, globally and locally, socially and psychically, from domestic to national spheres, home to the homeland, city to battlefield, prison to gated community, airport to the internet, Wall street to immigration detention centers.

Homeland security in part draws on an ideal of a middle class home, heavily guarded by gates, private security guards, high tech surveillance technology to survey one's own home from afar or one's child's daycare. There is a huge consumer industry for products that can be purchased at stores and websites like Security Depot. Sexual offenders legally restricted from neighborhoods, like enemy combatants, can be incarcerated indefinitely in the name of protecting children. In the 2004 election, 'security moms' had replaced 'soccer moms' as the key voters to court. According to one self-proclaimed security mom, there were two figures she feared the most: 'Islamic terrorists and criminal illegal aliens' (Grewal, 26).

The borders of the nation, like the home, have been securitized. Although there have always been anti-immigration movements in this country, only recently the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), which was formerly part of the Justice Department, has been folded into the DHS, and immigration is increasingly discussed in terms of border security, which implies that all aspiring immigrants are potential terrorists. Congress has given the White House a blank check for Boeing to build a security 'fence' between Mexico and the US, despite the fact that not a single terrorist has been apprehended at the southern border, although one wouldn't know that from watching the popular TV series, 24.

In addition to stationary security sites and borders, mobility has obviously been securitized—air travel, migration, tourism, visas, ports. Security is also a major concern in cyberspace. The first meaning of security to pop up on a web search is internet security: security codes, security alerts, security domains, security zones, credit card securi-

ty, security against identity threat. The U.S. Air Force has a new department dedicated to cyber security. And the web is famously a site of government surveillance abetted by the communications industry, as in the proposed 2003 Total Information Awareness (TIA) Program that was renamed the Terrorism Information Awareness Program after an adverse media reaction. The National Security Letter provision of the Patriot Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001) radically expanded the FBI's authority to demand personal records like Web site visits and e-mail addresses without prior court approval. The provision also allows the FBI to forbid or 'gag' anyone who receives an NSL from telling anyone about the demand for their records.

Homeland security rhetoric and technology that has proliferated in the 'war on terror' drew on the earlier 'war on crime,' and 'war on drugs,' from the 1980s and 90s, on the metaphors and practices of urban policing and the prison industrial complex. Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib could not exist without super maximum security prisons in the US, and the exchange of techniques of incarceration, torture, and punishment continually circulate among these penal institutions. In the development of new antiterrorist research for the military, businesses are eager to sell the same products to police departments and private security companies.

This homeland security complex has to be understood internationally, as part of what Stephen Holmes has called 'security apartheid,' the 'new normal' in the suburbs of Atlanta, and 'Johannesburg, São Paulo, New Delhi' (Holmes, 2008: 7). Gated communities have been proposed for Baghdad, with walls that divide neighborhoods and lock in certain people while keeping out others. The security fence at the US-Mexican border is being modeled on the Israel Security Wall built in the West Bank. 'Peace walls' in Belfast have been recommended as a model for policing ethnic neighborhoods in Iraq.

We are not simply living in a national security state, because all over the world, security has become a huge transnational private business, an engine of civil society as well as the state. The appeal to security contributes to the privatization of state violence and assent to being the subject of surveillance, with the tautological assumption that surveillance systems are only targeted at the 'bad guys'. A company that once would have been called mercenaries, such as the notorious Blackwater Worldwide, are now called private security companies. Wealthy enclaves all over the world rely on private security companies, rather than the public police, as they drain resources from local governments. Another newly thriving business is campus security at private and public universities, which includes not only issues of public safety, but issues of free speech as well, and is changing the physical and intellectual space of the university.

The most basic meaning of security stems from the economy. One of its earliest definitions is the object given over to guarantee the payment of debt—property pledged as a collateral for a loan. The word 'securities', accounting for most of what is traded in the financial markets, has come to encompass all financial contracts, such as bonds, shares, derivatives that grant the owner a stake in an asset. Hence, the Securities and Exchange Commission. The word 'securitization' emerged in the 1990s as an economic practice of bundling tradable debt, or future cash flow. In other words, securitization has exactly the opposite meaning of something like job security, which sounds



antiquated in contrast. It means that any debt can be made fungible and exchanged, which is at the heart of the sub prime crisis today (While home ownership has a mythic status of ultimate security in the US, mortgages are securities that mean the potential loss of security).

Security also has psychological and existential meanings. 'Insecurity' in the dictionaries is defined first as a psychic state, even an abnormal psychological diagnosis in the earlier 20th century, which assumes that insecurity as a state is generated from within. What does it mean to call someone secure in her identity, or to say, with assurance of explanation of behavior: 'he's insecure?' Is certitude about faith and religious fundamentalism related to other kinds of security?

Linguistically, security is often used redundantly—security bolts, security codes, security locks, maximum security prisons—a redundancy that refers to the double barreled quality of security that locks in and out at the same time. There is linguistic synergy among these uses. Brochures for home security system advertise 'rapid response' and use military language to show customers how to 'arm and unarm' their alarms, instead of turning them on and off. After the mass shooting at Virginia Tech University, the press kept referring to the belated 'lock down' of the campus, a term that comes from the prison system, referring to locking prisoners in their cells during a disturbance. 'Lockdown' has extended to the control of computer systems as well.

The language, practices and institutions of security contribute to a free-floating and interchangeable sense of threat and insecurity. When former Attorney General Gonzales, for example, was defending himself from the charges of political firings in the Justice Department, he pleaded in an op-ed for *The Washington Post*, that this scandal shouldn't detract from the 'great strides in securing our country from terrorism, protecting our neighborhoods from gangs and drugs, shielding our children from predators and pedophiles, and protecting the public trust by prosecuting public corruption' (Gonzales, 2007). He typically yokes terrorism and crime to the intimate violation of children, rendering the nation as both vulnerable and innocent. This linking of terrorists with sexual threats echoes earlier national security narratives: the 1915 classic film, *The Birth of a Nation*, for one, in which a free black man during Reconstruction attacks a young white girl, and the merging of the communist menace with the closeted homosexual next door in Cold War demonology.

As an alternative to the narrowly militaristic and nationalist conceptions of security, progressives and activists worldwide have expanded and transformed its meaning in the concept of human security. 'Security of person' and 'social security' are rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). In the same decade, Franklin Roosevelt spoke of a broader sense of security to accompany his four freedoms:

The one supreme objective for the future, which we discussed for each Nation individually, and for all the United Nations, can be summed up in one word: Security.

And that means not only physical security which provides safety from attacks by aggressors. It means also economic security, social security, moral security—in a family of Nations. (1944)

Nobel prize winning economist Amartya Sen and human rights activists have developed the concept of 'human security' to address issues of global justice and to redress social inequality. As opposed to the notion of security based on nation states, human

security means ensuring social needs, including protection from violence, access to food, clean water, health care and safe employment. 'Food security' means more than feeding the hungry as it refers to the right sustainable nutritional needs. Feminists have redefined security to include violence against women, care for families, the right to free clean water and health care. Using the word security can also give an issue political gravitas and urgency, for example, by talking about global warming or education as a security issue.

Thus it is important not to dismiss the language of security as merely paranoia and xenophobia mustered by the state to instill a culture of fear and further the aims of empire. It is that too, but it can only operate effectively because it appeals to desires and cravings for safety, peace, economic and psychic well being, stability, sociability, and responsibility for others.

FREEDOM THROUGH SECURITY

What is the relation between freedom and security in contemporary political discourse? These concepts have a long tangled genealogy in the history of western political thought. It is a commonplace that a degree of individual liberty has to be sacrificed, or traded, or balanced for national security. These are metaphors that need to be examined, although they are taken for granted as descriptions of reality. Enlightenment liberalism also defines security as protecting individual liberty from the tyranny of the state, rather than entrusting the state as a guarantor of freedom. (This is a position that traditional US conservatives have mobilized against their notion of 'big government'.)

Security today has become such a powerfully elastic and mobilizing term in part because it has accrued the density of meanings that the word freedom once evoked. If, the word 'freedom', as David Harvey has argued, has provided a powerful discursive engine for neoliberalism that made it seem continuous with enlightenment ideals, and progressive movements, security has come to predominate as a reaction to the ravages of neoliberalism, to compensate for the hollowness of its freedoms reduced to the liberty of unchecked capitalism and the privatization of the public sphere.

We can see this supplanting of the keyword freedom by security in national and international contexts. *New York Times* conservative commentator, David Brooks, advocates this shift in his effort to reorient the conservative movement:

Today the big threats to people's future prospects come from complex, decentralized phenomena: Islamic extremism, failed states, global competition, global warming, nuclear proliferation, a skills-based economy, economic and social segmentation. Normal, nonideological people are less concerned about the threat to their freedom from an overweening state than from the threats posed by these amorphous yet pervasive phenomena. (Brooks, 2007)

Though he ideologically places Islamic extremism at the top of the list of threats, the rest of these 'decentralized phenomena' are associated with unregulated capitalism and neoliberalism. In response, Brooks advocates a new paradigm for conservatives: away from 'liberty v. power' to 'security leads to freedom.' Brooks abandons the 18th century liberal meaning of security as the protection of the individual from the tyr-



anny of the state, to dependence on the state for protection from transnational forces. And he starts his litany with Islamic extremism—a thinly code for terrorism, to give shape to what he sees as more amorphous threats.

This approach to freedom through security can be seen in one of the downloadable ‘counterintelligence and security awareness posters’ produced by the Office of the National Counterintelligence Executive in 2002. Framing a picture of Thomas Jefferson with the text of the 1st Amendment to the Constitution, the poster adds in the same print, as though it were part of the amendment: ‘American freedom includes a responsibility to protect US security—leaking sensitive information erodes this freedom’ (Turse, 2005). Free speech guaranteed by the Constitution can only be upheld by censorship in the name of security, a logic that underlies the provisions of the PATRIOT Act, and the secrecy and illegal surveillance of the Bush administration. According to this logic security is never adequate, as it generates the need to secure security itself.

If security is advocated as the avenue to freedom, one which supports the consent to repression in the US, it has similarly replaced the rhetoric about bringing freedom and democracy to the world as the justification of war and occupation in Iraq, Afghanistan and covert actions around the world. The War in Iraq was once called Operation Iraqi Freedom. But the ‘security plan’ has been held out as the justification for so called ‘surge’ of troops in 2007. On the fourth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, Bush downplayed ‘freedom’ and stated that ‘at this point in the war, our most important mission is in helping the Iraqis secure their capital’. He added that ‘American and Iraqi forces have established joint security stations. Those stations are scattered throughout Baghdad and they’re helping Iraqis reclaim their neighborhoods from the terrorists and extremists’ (Bush, 2007). This language resonates with the discourse of urban policing in the ‘war against crime’.

Six months later Bush did not extend this search for security to the Iraqi government’s feeble effort to throw out the private security forces for shooting Iraqi civilians. Blackwater’s contract was renewed to provide security for American military, political and private projects in Iraq, and the Iraqi government has no legal jurisdiction over it or any other private contractor. The privatization of security, in this case, promotes extreme violence without oversight and with impunity. Blackwater troops are like mobile Guantánamos in their exemption from national, international, or military law.

One can see why freedom rings hollow coming from Americans in Iraq. Former Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld responded to the looting following the invasion with the quip: ‘freedom’s untidy’. Among Iraqis, reported Christian Parenti, the English phrase ‘the freedom’ had become a contemptible ironic term for the violent destruction of the occupation (Foehl, 2005). Rarely in the US media is the new ‘security plan’ ever seen as the source to the massive destruction, death, epidemics, displacement, terror, insecurities inflicted on the Iraqis by the US invasion and occupation. Indeed, in the US security serves as a euphemism for military occupation.

Safety is of course a dire need for Iraqis living under the violence of air strikes, kidnapping, car bombs, murder, rape, incarceration, the absence of basic needs, and everyday life subject to terror. We have to ask how the US narrative of security disavows its own major contribution to that violence. A Martian landing in the US today watching the news might assume that Iraq as a nation spontaneously combusted into sectarian vio-

lence, due to its uncivilized tribalism and religious hatred, and that the US intervened magnanimously to help bring order and security to internal sectarian chaos. Paternalistically, Democrats and Republicans alike have even threatened to leave if the Iraqis can't make peace among themselves. But the security plan has amounted to unreported air strikes, the invasion of private homes, and massive door to door round up of the unspecified 'enemy' of all ages, who are then tossed into overcrowded detention camps, with no access to a legal system. If the invasion of Iraq was justified by a familiar narrative of liberation—bringing freedom to the oppressed—underlying a long history of US imperial wars, the shift to the security narrative also has a history, which informs for example the 1904 Roosevelt corollary of the Monroe Doctrine for Central and South America: this narrative holds that the U.S. reluctantly and beneficently exerts force only to bring order to anarchy. Both narratives, of liberation and security, disavow the violence of military invasion as the source of the chaos that needs to be stabilized by occupation.

The US narrative of achieving security in Iraq relies on the threatened proliferation of global insecurity, which circles back narcissistically to the American homeland. As Bush claims, the specter of an unsecured Iraq would wreak havoc on America: 'I believe the consequences to American security would be devastating. If American forces were to step back from Baghdad before it is more secure, a contagion of violence could spill out across the entire country. In time this violence should engulf the region. The terrorists could emerge from the chaos with a safe haven to replace the one they had in Afghanistan, which they used to plan the attacks of September 11, 2001. For the safety of the American people we cannot allow this to happen' (Bush, 2007). Contagion and chaos imply no agency, no cause. In this narrative of security, America is both all powerful and ultimately vulnerable, and violence is legitimated ultimately in the name of homeland security.

EMPIRE AND SECURITY

In this narrative loop, terrorism threatens to crash through national borders, but the concept of homeland security already presupposes this breakdown. That is, bringing freedom and democracy to Iraq becomes a security operation upon which the security of the American nation stands or falls. This logic underlies Bush's doctrine of pre-emptive war, detailed in his National Security Statement of 2002. Historian John Lewis Gaddis has made this doctrine continuous with the origins of the American nation, since the War of 1812, as he explains in the introduction to his influential book, *Surprise, Security and the American Experience*.

Most nations seek safety in the way that most animals do: by withdrawing behind defenses, or making themselves inconspicuous, or otherwise avoiding whatever dangers there may be. Americans, in contrast, have generally responded to threats—and particularly to surprise attacks—by taking the offensive, by becoming more conspicuous, by confronting, neutralizing, and if possible overwhelming the sources of danger, rather than fleeing from them. Expansion, we have assumed, is the path to security. (Gaddis, 2004: 13)



For Gaddis, security is synonymous with empire for Americans. They follow their own exceptional nature, which is inherently different from that of other nations, who are yoked with animals. According to Gaddis, expansion has temporal as well as geographic dimensions: Americans, he claims, have always expanded into chaotic or empty space not reactively but in anticipation of threats: from other empires, Native American attacks, power vacuums, failed states. In this logic, if threats are perceived as omnipresent and imminently on the horizon then expansion must continue everywhere into the indefinite future.

The 9/11 Commission implicitly agrees with Gaddis's history as a description of the present in one of the conclusions to their report:

9/11 has taught us that terrorism against American interests 'over there' should be regarded just as we regard terrorism against American 'over here.' In this same sense, the American homeland is the planet. (National Commission, 2004: 362)

Terrorism, according to the commission, has taught a lesson Gaddis claims as second nature to Americans: global expansion and domination offers the only secure security. Historically, the National Security Act of 1947 was in part about sorting out the difference between domestic and foreign spheres to divide up the work among specific agencies in its establishment of the CIA for foreign intelligence. Bush's security statements and the idea and practice of homeland security involves eradicating this distinction. 'The American homeland is the planet'. If the homeland is everywhere, however, threats and insecurities must be omnipresent, never contained beyond a border, or kept at bay by walls or armies. Global expansion means the corresponding expansion of security systems everywhere, through surveillance, military intervention, incarceration. There are home security systems against criminals, border security against illegal aliens, and homeland security against 'terrorists' and these threats merge in the specter of racialized bodies. If the American homeland is the planet, Americans are never at home, and locations like Guantánamo all over the planet, the 'American homeland', emerge at the intersection of these movements of preemptive expansion and confinement.

FUTURITY AND SECURITY

The idea of security as expansion has a strong temporal as well as territorial dimension. According to Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century, among the objects of the law that contribute to happiness of the body politic, 'security is the only one which necessarily embraces the future: subsistence, abundance, equality, may be regarded for a moment only; but security implies extension in point of time, with respect to all the benefits to which it is applied' (Bentham, 1843). We have seen this preoccupation of security with the future in several of the quotations cited above (e.g., Franklin Roosevelt and David Brooks).

Today securing the future justifies preemptive warfare as well as indefinite detention. In the Military Order of November 13, 2001, in which the Bush declared a state of emergency, he claimed the right to incarcerate any non-citizen without due process to prevent future acts of terrorism. While Guantánamo is the best known of these

prisons, the US is holding an estimated 27,000 secret prisoners in undisclosed locations, (Goodman, 2008). Immigration detention centers in the US treat detainees as if they were criminals for indefinite periods of time while they are awaiting administrative hearings. Incarceration in the criminal justice system also marks a person's future after release, by denying felons the vote and restricting employment. 'Sexual predators' are being held in prison past sentence in the anticipation that they might continue to molest children. In these cases, people are being incarcerated—and denied their own futures—not for acts they have committed or for legal convictions, but for acts they might perform in the indefinite future, in the name of security.

If homeland security is about ensuring a national future free from threats and dangers, what kind of future does security envision? It is a future that is strangely nostalgic—for an imagined stable past—a future that militates against the possibilities of social change, because change itself becomes threatening. The language of security posits that if things don't remain the same, that if America stops expanding to encompass the planet and stops erecting barriers throughout the planet to control which people are in and out, the only alternative is catastrophe, apocalypse or the end of the world. As neoconservatives David Frum and Richard Perle write, 'There is no middle way for Americans: it is victory or holocaust' (Frum & Perle, 2003: 7). If security implies the need for protection from the lurking threat of extinction, then security thrives by generating insecurity, and it can only be pursued at the violent expense of the security of others.

In conclusion, does viewing the future through the lens of security make it impossible to address problems that urgently confront us now through visions of social change and collective action? Or can security be radically redefined in the name of change to include a broader sense of human safety, global cooperation, and collective human needs and well being?

WORKS CITED

- Bentham, J. (1843) *Principles of the Civil Code*, Part I, ch. 2. Classical utilitarianism Web Site. <http://www.la.utexas.edu/research/poltheory/bentham/pcc/index.html>.
- Brooks, D. (2007) 'No U-Turns,' *New York Times*. March 29. Op-Ed page.
- Bush, G. (2007) 'President Bush Discusses Fourth Anniversary of Operation Iraqi Freedom' The White House Web Site. March 19. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/03/20070319.html>
- Foehl, T. (2005) 'What Kind of Freedom? An Interview with Christian Parenti,' *Mother Jones* (January 26). <http://www.motherjones.com/news/qa/2005/01/parenti.html>
- Frum, D. and Perle, R. (2003) *An End To Evil: How to Win the War on Terror*. New York: Random House.
- Gaddis, J.L. (2004) *Surprise, Security and the American Experience*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Goodman, A. (2008, May 19) 'Clive Stafford Smith: US Holding 27,000 in Secret Overseas Prisons; Transporting Prisoners to Iraqi Jails to Avoid Media & Legal Scrutiny.' *Democracy Now*. http://www.democracynow.org/2008/5/19/clive_stafford_smith
- Gonzales, A.R. (2007) 'Nothing Improper,' *Washington Post*. April 15. B07.



- Grewal, I. (2006) 'Security Moms' in the early twentieth-century United States: The Gender of Security in Neo-liberalism, *Women's Studies Quarterly: The Global and the Intimate*, 34 (1/2): 25/39.
- Harvey, D. (2005) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Holmes, S. (2008) 'Free Marketeering; Review of *The Shock Doctrine* by Naomi Klein'. *London Review of Books*, 30 (9): 7/9.
- Loughlin, S. (2003), 'Rumsfeld on looting in Iraq: "Stuff happens"'. CNN Website. April 12. <http://www.cnn.com/2003/US/04/11/sprj.irq.pentagon/>
- National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (2004) *The 9/11 Commission Report*. New York: Norton.
- Roosevelt, F.D. (1944) 'State of the Union Message to Congress, January 11th, 1944, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=16518>
- Sen, A. (2000) 'Why Human Security', Text of presentation at the 'International Symposium on Human Security', Tokyo, 28 July, 2000. <http://www.humansecurity-chs.org/activities/outreach/Sen2000.pdf>
- Turse, N. (2005) 'Bringing It All Back Home: The Emergence of the Homeland Security State', *TomDispatch.Com*. http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/2152/nick_turse_on_the_homeland_security_state_part_i_