

‘OPERATION ATLAS’: A CASE IN THE GROWING FUSION BETWEEN NATIONAL SECURITY AND LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examines the NYPD's ‘Operation Atlas,’ an operation of heightened security for the duration of the United State’s War in Iraq. I explore Operation Atlas as an example of the nation-wide trend towards the blurring of the boundaries between national security and local law enforcement. Further, I examine Operation Atlas within the social geography of New York City itself and argue that the neo-liberal character of the city and its revanchist social order are quick to absorb the re-definition of national security encompassed by the blurring boundaries between national security and local law enforcement.*

In Greek mythology Atlas, the leader of the Titans, was punished by Zeus for his role in the war against the Olympians. Zeus condemned Atlas to bear the heavens upon his shoulders. Though Atlas is indeed very strong he moans as he holds the weight of the world on his back. Is New York City undergoing the same predicament?

Upon the commencement of the United States invasion of Iraq, the New York City Police Department (NYPD) launched what it calls ‘Operation Atlas.’ The official web site of the NYPD indicates that “Operation Atlas is a comprehensive security package to protect New York City from possible reprisal attacks by terrorist groups and others” (Police Department, 2003). Thus, in the event that the invasion of Iraq would bring reprisal to New York City, the NYPD would be ready in a “coordinated defense of the city.” A central part of Operation Atlas, underway since March 2003, is the deployment of large numbers of not only “regular” police but also “police officers equipped with heavy weapons” (Police Department, 2003). In a typical Operation Atlas shift up to fifty policemen (sometimes heavily armed) “will hit several high profile spots...from ‘obvious’ potential targets such as Penn Station and Grand Central to less obvious ones like the Daily News offices...Chase and Citibank” branches. While Operation Atlas is officially an NYPD operation, it includes the participation of a whole range of agencies from the

National Guard to the Federal Aviation Administration.

In this paper I will analyze Operation Atlas at a number of different scales. On a national level, I will examine Operation Atlas in regards to the national trend towards the militarization of the police and the growing fusion between law enforcement and national security. On a local level, I will examine Operation Atlas within the politics and social geography of both revanchism and neo-liberalism. The paper is broken up into four parts. The first section further introduces Operation Atlas and it introduces the subjects of analysis for my paper. The second and third sections provide in depth analysis and discussion in terms of national trends and local trends accordingly. The fourth and concluding section, offers a discussion of the funding of Operation Atlas with insight as to the rhetoric of victimization surrounding ‘Operation Atlas.’

OPERATION ATLAS: CAUSE FOR ALARM?

The significance of Operation Atlas, I believe, should be truly alarming. Not only is it an example of militarization of local law enforcement, including a blurring of the boundaries between

national security and law enforcement, it is case in point regarding the re-definition of national security that these blurring boundaries encompass. In this section I hope to quickly flesh out these issues so I can then put them in historical perspective and analyze them from a political economy framework in the next section.

Operation Atlas has meant a tremendous 'co-operation' across various levels of government. The NYPD, local law enforcement, is not going at it alone; rather it has the support both monetarily and in terms of personnel of several branches of the federal government. The Department of Defense has assigned combat aircraft to protect NYC airspace, the office of Homeland Security is sharing intelligence with the NYPD, the Federal Aviation Administration has restricted air traffic over Manhattan and the National Guard is assisting in patrolling the subway system. Not only the co-operation of the local and the federal, but also the mere presence of army personnel in an urban setting, are symbols of the blurring of boundaries between internal policing and national security. As this paper will describe, this blurring of boundaries is brought about by particular historical processes.

Furthermore, Operation Atlas is an example of the growing degree of militarization of police not only in New York City but in cities across the nation. Local police are using techniques and methods that were before only used by the military. For example, the Operation Atlas relies on 'HERCULES' teams that are "deployed *randomly* throughout the city" (Police Department, 2003). HERCULES teams are "Emergency Service Unit cops that are equipped with armored gear and carry submachine guns" (O'Shaughnessy, 2003). The NYPD also deploys other types of heavily armored military style police teams with names such as ARCHANGEL (specializing in bombs), HAMMER (experts in hazardous material) COBRA (focus on the chemical, biological or radiological) and finally SAMPSON (suspiciously enough there is no explanation to be found) (Police Department, 2003). A second aspect of militarization is a great emphasis on intelligence in a manner that increasingly resembles military intelligence gathering. The police have a great number of personnel, often in shared agencies with the state or the feds, a great deal of equipment, and a lot of technology that it uses for a *daily* assessment of intelligence go far beyond crime-related operations

(Police Department, 2003). Thus, Operation Atlas involves a highly militarized police force not only in terms of militarized tactics and personnel, but also in terms of the way intelligence is utilized.

Operation Atlas then should be alarming for two reasons, first because of the blurring of boundaries between law enforcement and national security (which has embedded in it a re-definition of national security) and second because of the degree of militarization of the police due in fact to this blurring of boundaries between the inner and outer functions of the nation-state. However, Operation Atlas has not been alarming to the average New Yorker, at least not in these regards. I believe that the reason Operation Atlas fails to alarm is because both the militarization of the police and the re-definition of national security have been thoroughly naturalized. The purpose of the following section then is to show that these processes are *not* natural. In fact, as we shall see, they have come along in close connection to very specific needs of the political economy of the state.

THE MILITARIZATION OF THE POLICE AND THE RE-DEFINITION OF NATIONAL SECURITY

Historically the military has been prohibited from engaging in domestic police work. This separation was "codified in the Posse Comitatus Act following the American civil war." (Andreas and Price, 2001 p.43). However the separation of police and military matters has been loosened steadily. A major turning point was the end of the Cold War, which led to large geo-political changes and a major vacuum in U.S. foreign policy. The end of the Cold War meant the end of an external enemy – communism- to organize against. Faced with a deep economic recession and 'armed' with a giant war-complex infrastructure, the United States then turned its attention to an inner enemy. As quoted by Peter Kraska in *Militarizing Criminal Justice: Exploring the Possibilities*, E.A. Nadelman says that "where once anti-communism represented the principal moral imperative of U.S. foreign policy; drug enforcement and other criminal justice objectives have emerged as the new moral imperatives"

(Kraska, 1999A p.206). Thus, the vacuum created by the lack of an 'enemy' following the end of the Cold War, was filled up by criminalizing the poor and the dispossessed internally.

Furthermore there was also pressure on the military to become more "socially useful." This created the setting for "the military's extensive involvement in drug law enforcement" (Kraska, 1999B p.141). Most people are familiar with the increased use of Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams and paramilitary police units (PPU's) throughout the 1980 as "the nation" in conjunction with local law enforcement fought the War on Drugs. This was a major step in terms militarizing local police departments. Further, it served as a 'socially useful' way to occupy army personnel and a way to maintain the war economy. The end of the Cold War then meant "a blurring of external and internal security functions leading to a more subtle targeting of civilian populations, internal "security" threats, and a focus on aggregate populations as potential internal 'insurgents'" (Kraska, 1999A p.206).

The blurring of boundaries between the inner and outer functions of the nation state, coupled with a "targeting of civilian populations," continues to this day. Significant examples are the Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTFs) which have become greatly multiplied since September 11 (Lee, 2003). JTTFs are partnerships between local police departments and federal agencies such as the FBI and the CIA. Whereas before federal investigations may have been limited in terms of access and personnel, currently local police officers have become "important force multipliers" for federal agencies (Lee, 2003). The police act as foot soldiers for federal investigations, a relationship facilitated under the U.S.A. Patriot Act. The sharing of information between local police and federal agencies is highly problematic due to the "increased coupling of arrest-driven agencies" (like the FBI and local police), with agencies "intended solely to gather and analyze information" like the CIA. The problems arise because if intelligence is supposed to lead to some sort of prosecution, "there is incentive and opportunity for agents to misuse information" (Lee, 2003 pg.3). Thus the roles and functions of the local police have been expanded to include the concerns of national 'security' often leading to new militarized activities and new forms of surveillance.

However, in order to account for new roles and activities of police, national security and national security 'threats' must continue to be re-scripted. Similar to the 'paradigm shift' that occurred following the end of the Cold War, today an ever increasing number of people, institutions and activities have been labeled as national security threats or potential insurgent. Most appalling has been a targeting of Arab and Muslim communities, associations and places of prayer in gross violation of civil liberties and human dignity (see CAIR, 2003). In addition a wide range of activists are increasingly labeled as security threats facilitating police justification to stymie their activities. For example, in New York City a proposed peace march on Feb. 15th was deemed an "unacceptable risk" by the Bloomberg administration and turned into a stationary march by a local court ruling that upheld a city ban on marching (Ferguson, 2003 pg.1). The intrusion into and surveillance of various organizations and person as national security threats is a central aspect of the militarization of the police and rising militarism more generally.

The growing fusion between law enforcement and national security is also tied to global and local economic factors. In his book The New Imperialism geographer David Harvey argues that rising militarism in the United States is tied to the imposition of neo-liberalism abroad. The imposition of neo-liberal economic structures through military actions such as the war on Iraq tends "to produce chronic insecurity at home" (Harvey, 2003 p.168). Thus we see a clamp down on society as part of a neo-conservative political agenda focused on maintaining order and control. Harvey argues that "military activity abroad requires military-like discipline at home" (Harvey, 2003 p.173) such as the Patriot Act for example. Therefore, internal repression is intricately tied to efforts at shaping the global economy in favor of neo-liberal structures. Furthermore, the militarization of the police and the redefinitions of national security have also had implications for national and local economies. For example, in the 80's and 90's "recycling Cold War technologies for drug war and other law enforcement functions... provided a new growth area for defense contractors, who [were] struggling to adapt to the new security environment" (Andreas and Price, 1999 p.40). Today (though it is hard to measure it at this point), militarism and the militarization of the police

will likely continue to fuel otherwise struggling local economies.

The militarization of the police and the re-scripting of national security were therefore brought about by a very specific political economy initially encompassing the end of the Cold War and continuing to evolve today in the context of neo-liberal economic structures and neo-conservative national policy. In the following section then I will bring back Operation Atlas against this backdrop. In particular, I will look at the way in which Operation Atlas fits so well into the political economy of New York City that it fails to be cause for alarm.

OPERATION ATLAS: FIT FOR NEO-LIBERALISM, FIT FOR REVANSHIVISM

Following the fiscal crises of the 1970's New York City underwent tremendous changes in its political economy. Most notable were the severe cut backs in social services, welfare and the generally progressive infrastructure of the city. As Neil Smith argues the change in New York City has emerged as part of a "broader [national] retreat from liberal urban policy" (Smith, 2001 p.71). Today's New York City is far from the liberal heaven it once was. Not only has there been tremendous structural adjustment in line with a political economy of neo-liberalism, there is also an outright attack on services provided to the poor and on people of color. Today's repressive and militarized New York, is "the product of a deliberate and explicitly spatial and environmental strategy," that Smith calls revanchism. A central aspect of revanchism is a "terror felt by middle and ruling-class whites" that believe the city has been 'stolen' from them (Smith, 1996 p.212). I want to argue that Operation Atlas fits easily into the forms of social control that have arisen in New York City to support both a neo-liberal structure and a revanchist character.

Neo-liberal Space

A central component of the neo-liberal city is the reconfiguration of space. In his piece, *The Annihilation of Space by Law*, Don Mitchell dispels

the popular belief that globalization has led to the annihilation of space by time. Rather, he argues that globalization has led to "the constant production and reproduction of certain kinds of spaces" (Mitchell, 1997 p. 304). This can be seen in New York, a city which has been in constant struggle to fight against the devaluation of its assets and to ward off re-occurring fiscal crises. "The very unevenness of capital mobility," argues Mitchell (1997), "lends to places an increasing degree of uncertainty" making things tough for cities (p. 304). New York City must attract capital in order not to render useless its overbuilt office space, its transportation hubs, its convention centers, its hotels, etc. According to Mitchell, the flightiness of capital "allows local officials, along with local business people and property owners, to argue that they have no choice but to prostrate themselves before the god Capital" (Mitchell, 1997 p. 304). As such, New York City elites and politicians have been busy at work offering a whole range of 'geo-bribes' to attract capital to the city. As Mitchell (1997) argues "[i]mage becomes everything" (p. 304) and the "regulation of public space" (p. 320) becomes a central aspect of a capital centered growth strategy.

In fact, central to the neo-liberal nature of New York City is that it increasingly defines itself not in terms of its people, but in terms of its economy and its landmarks. In this vision, New York City is about finance and the World Trade Center, about business and the Trump Towers, about real estate and the Lower East Side; it is not about work and workers, communities and diversity nor people and their livelihood. The city's focus on the economy and its institutions rather than on its people is mirrored in the geography of Operation Atlas. As described in the New York Times amongst other sources, Operation Atlas deploys personnel "[with a] focus on government buildings, tourist attractions, financial institutions, hotels...and in the subways, on the waterways and in the harbor. It... also strengthen[s] checkpoints at bridges and tunnels and on the streets, including southbound avenues in Manhattan at 96th Street" (Rashbaum, 2003). From the physical layout of Operation Atlas we can observe a clear prioritization of the assets of the city. For instance, the nature of the police deployment seems to indicate that there is nothing of importance above 96th Street. While Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly says that through Operation Atlas

“we are tightening the protective net around New York City.” (in Rashbaum, 2003) this net only seems to cover very specific areas. The geography of Operation Atlas exemplifies this ‘new’ city as it is re-defined through a political economy of neo-liberalism.

Revanchist Space

A central feature of revanchist New York City has been fear. In his article *The Flames of New York*, Mike Davis explains that fear has been part of a national trend: “the quest for the bourgeois utopia of a totally calculable and safe environment,” such as gentrified New York City, “has paradoxically generated radical insecurity” (Davis, 2001 p.41). Likewise, in the mid- nineties Ruth Wilson Gilmore argued that crime was the central source of anxiety in major cities. She explained that “crime surpasses health care and ‘the economy’ as current public anxiety number one” (Gilmore in Smith, 1996 p.213). In New York City, anxious fear of crime coupled with a failing economy, has meant a style of policing that focuses on social control and improving ‘quality of life.’ A central component of this strategy is “reclaiming” the city from the most visceral elements of urban decay including homeless people, squeegee men, panhandles, etc (see Smith 1996 and 2001). It is common then and well accepted, that police should spend their time moving kids along in public spaces, harassing street vendors or watching a plaza to make sure no-one lies down.

In a post-September 11th atmosphere fear of crime has not been replaced but often complemented by fear of terrorism. So while in the 1990’s the city sought to show a police force that focused on “reclaiming” the city from the poor and the homeless, today there is a focus on “reclaiming” the city away from terrorist and potential ‘insurgents.’ A great example of this has been the NYPD’s recent bid to increase the scope of its surveillance powers. In February of 2003, a federal district judge agreed with NYPD Deputy Commissioner of Intelligence David Cohen (recent NYPD hire and former CIA operations director) that the Handschu Agreement was a grave restriction on police powers. The 1986 Handschu agreement, which earns its name from a high profile case of abuse filed by local activists, restricts the police from investigating political groups if there is no evidence of a crime (Levitt, 2003). The National

Lawyers Guild had characterized the 1986 Handschu agreement as part of a national trend of fights against federal surveillance on a local level (National Lawyers Guild, 2002). Today however, these trends are quickly being reversed. Citing the fight against ‘terror,’ NYPD Commissioner Cohen argued for a lifting of the surveillance restrictions in Handschu in order to investigate not only of political groups but places of worship as well (Levitt, 2003). This type of policing is a major break from the old ‘cop on the beat.’ As in the 1990’s when an NYPD focus on ‘quality of life’ became the norm, likewise today NYPD activities and surveillance surrounding ‘national security’ become naturalized as well.

As argued above the re-definition of national security is intimately tied to militarization of the police and this becomes very visible in New York City. According to anthropologist Catherine Lutz there are direct links between the government’s response to the September 11 events (such as Operation Atlas) and the historical process of militarization in the country. She believes that these links rely on a discursive dimension that serves to legitimize the use of force and the organizational structures needed to deploy a militarized police force (Lutz, 2002). The power of the discursive element can be seen in an examination of local news sources that echo the created ‘need’ for a militarized police and a militarized society. For example, in *The Gotham Gazette*, a generally left leaning Internet news source, Julia Vitullo-Martin argues for increasing the power held by the NYPD. In a subsection of her article entitled (*Not*) *Patrolling the Skies*, Vitullo-Martin is indignant about the limits imposed on the police since it is the Federal Aviation Administration not the NYPD “which controls the skies” over Manhattan. She sees the FAA as a “business promotion agency” that therefore has no real interest in protecting New Yorkers. She believes rather that “aviation security is a law enforcement function” and that “the Office of Homeland Security [should] delegate authority over the air space to the New York Police Department.” This way, the NYPD “could be just as capable in the air as it is on the ground” (Vitullo-Martin, 2003 pgs. 3-4). Vitullo-Martin seeks an increasingly militarized police force as part of the “reclaiming” of the city. Fear and terror throughout the city has served to legitimize the ‘need’ for Operation Atlas in line with the re-definitions of national security.

Operation Atlas then, fails to be alarming to New Yorkers because in many ways it is more of the same. The city's neo-liberal focus on keeping the economy running, as opposed to keeping people employed and healthy, requires the sort of 'protection' that Operation Atlas provides. That is a "protective net" around the *economic* assets of the city. Furthermore, Operation Atlas fits easily with revanchist police strategies which revolve around "reclaiming" the city and expanding the roles played by the NYPD. Increasingly fearful sectors of the population have no objection to a militarized police for it is embedded in the re-definition of national security.

NEW YORK CITY: BEARING THE WEIGHT OF THE NATION ON ITS SHOULDERS

One of the leading points of contention prior to the launching of Operation Atlas was the question of who would fund it. Mayor Bloomberg initially set the figure at about \$13 million a week, including \$5 million per week for police overtime alone (Edozien, 2003). The mayor heavily lobbied Washington to seek funding for heightened security as the nation went to war with Iraq. The debates that ensued encapsulate, not only the re-definition of terrorism as a national security threat, but also the 'nationalization' of the attacks on the World Trade Center. I would like to conclude this paper then by quickly examining these debates for they shed light on the rhetoric of victimization as exemplified by the name 'Operation Atlas.'

According to The New York Times, "the 2003 [federal] budget plan recently approved by Congress and signed by President Bush, provides the city about \$30 million" in security funds (Hernandez, 2003). This is only a fraction of what Bloomberg sought; therefore he went to Washington to lobby for more money. After meeting with both President Bush and with Tom Ridge, the head of the newly formed Homeland Security Office, Bloomberg was able to get Congress to agree to an 80/20 split in the Homeland Security funding designated for New York State, leaving the state with 20% as the mayor took home the other 80% of the funds.

New York State spends from its own budget about 7.5 million a week on security much of it on New York City (Edozien, 2003). Governor Pataki then, felt that Mayor Bloomberg was undermining the New York State's security efforts by going directly to Congress. "I don't understand why he would disparage our security efforts to help the people of the city," exclaimed Pataki, "I don't think on September 11, when somebody was in the [World Trade Center] towers and rescued, they looked to see whether the patch was a New York City police officer's patch or a Port Authority police officer's patch" (Edozien, 2003). While the governor may feel undermined, the congressional budgetary decision to award NYC the money reflects the national sentiment that New York City deserves a bigger than 'fair' share of the nation's resources. But why is New York City's 'protection' an issue of *national* concern?

According to Neil Smith in *Scales of Terror: The Manufacturing of Nationalism and the War for U.S. Globalism*, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center (WTC) and the Pentagon led to a quick and "very practical hardening of national geographies and identities" (Smith, 2002 p.100). Smith explains that there was nothing particularly *national* about the attack: the WTC was a center for *global* finance; and the victims of the attack were from various nationalities as were the perpetrators of the attack. However, Smith argues, the attack on the World Trade Center was quickly re-scripted as an attack on the nation as a whole (Smith, 2001). In nationalizing the attacks, the U.S. government sought to legitimate its war on Afghanistan, its war on Iraq and more generally it's 'War on Terror.' As I have argued above, in response to an enemy void left by the end of the Cold War, the United States has been busily redefining national security and the 'nationalization' of the WTC terrorist attacks can be seen a continuation of this effort.

Therefore, in securing money for Operation Atlas, business-savvy Mayor Bloomberg *capitalized* on the nationalization of the September 11th attacks as they relate to the re-definition of national security and the re-scripting of security threats. Furthermore neo-liberal New York City, entrenched in a revanchist social order was not alarmed by a militarized and increasingly intrusive police force central to the blurring boundaries between law

enforcement and national security; a fusion which has been increasingly naturalized.

So, is New York City like Titan Atlas? Maybe New York City is not quite bearing the weight of the *world* on its shoulders; but the Mayor could certainly convince Congress that New York City does bear the weight of the *nation* on its shoulders.

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