

Securitizing the Future?
A Critical Interrogation of the Pre-emptive Turn in the Theory and Practice of Contemporary Security*

Liam P.D. Stockdale¹

*Presented at the Canadian Political Science Association Annual Conference
Concordia University, Montréal, QC
1-3 June 2010*

**Please note that this paper remains a work in progress – do not cite without permission*

Abstract: This paper seeks to explore and problematize the particular logics informing contemporary security practices by proposing and subsequently unpacking the notion that their referent object is the future. I first contend that a shift from a reactive security logic to one of pre-emption conceptually informed by the precautionary principle is characteristic of contemporary security praxis, particularly among ‘liberal’ states. This generates a condition whereby the exercise of sovereign power serves to ‘take the present hostage’ in the name of securing an idealized and imagined future, as the logic of pre-emption enables the unchecked proliferation of exceptional(izing) practices rooted in discourses of risk management, opening the door for an Agambenian logic of the camp to penetrate all aspects of contemporary life. I argue that the basic premise of this security climate is fundamentally absurd, however, as what is ostensibly being secured is by definition never realizable—what was the future invariably becomes the present, whence it too is taken hostage in the name of securing what has yet to come to pass. I then explore how the extension of sovereign power to the temporal realm in this way necessitates a derogation from the normative benefits of state sovereignty—namely, the securing of those located within the sovereign boundary—in the present, and conclude by arguing that, despite these contradictions, such temporal exercises of sovereignty in fact represent the latter principle’s logical conclusion. Accordingly, Derrida’s notion of autoimmunity provides a useful lens through which to interpret (the) state (of) sovereignty in the present international security climate.

Keywords: Sovereignty; Temporality; Pre-emption; State of Exception; Autoimmunity

¹ Ph.D. candidate in International Relations, Department of Political Science, McMaster University, Hamilton, ON. The author would like to thank Peter Nyers, Barbara Falk, Mike Di Gregorio, and Karly Casha for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

“The scene is a battleground on which the forces of the past and the future clash with each other; between them we find the man...However, the fact that there is a fight at all seems due exclusively to the presence of the man, without whom the forces of the past and future, one suspects, would have neutralized or destroyed each other long ago”

-Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (2006: 10)

Introduction

Amid the cacophony of calls to reorient the theory and praxis of security that have emerged in the so-called post-Cold War period, a rather significant change in the practical logic of security’s pursuit has gone largely unconsidered. While the preponderance of academic discourse around “the subject of security” (Walker, 1997) is concerned with debates pertaining to appropriate spatio-material “referent objects”—be they the state, the individual human, some conception of society or culture, the ecosphere, or otherwise—I would argue that this way of approaching and theorizing changes in the politics of security is inadequate to fully encompass how the concept of security and the attendant logic of its pursuit have been altered in *dimensional* terms. Essentially, I wish to suggest that, with the decline of the crude, reactive state-centric logic of the Cold War, the focus of security practice has expanded to include both the spatial *and* temporal realms, such that the future itself has been securitized, and security has gone temporal.

Indeed, questions of temporality have come to inhere in the crucial practices of (international) security—particularly among the “liberal” or “Western” states at whose behest the so-called War on Terror (WOT) was enacted—as the pursuit of security is increasingly informed by the concept of pre-emption and the logic of necessary excess embodied by the precautionary principle (Ericson 2008, Aradau & van Munster 2007). It is perhaps unsurprising that such a security climate is rife with practices commensurate with the Agambenian state of exception (Agamben 2005), in that the pursuit of a securitized future necessitates extensive (exceptional) interventions in the present. However, it is worth emphasizing that, under such a logic, exceptional(izing) practices—while perhaps most consistently and insidiously applied in explicitly hierarchized ways to particular individuals and groups deemed “risky” (Bigo 2007, Amoore & de Goede 2008)—can potentially be enacted by sovereign power at any particular location and against any particular individual. Sensationalist as such a claim may initially seem, one need only consider the case of Jean Charles de Menezes—shot and killed in a pre-emptive police action carried out in a public space at the heart of a city (London) that self-identifies as the crucible of the modern liberal West—to appreciate its veracity (Vaughn-Williams 2007). The upshot is that if the future is security’s emerging referent, and the necessities of its pursuit imply precautionary thinking and pre-emptive action, violent irruptions of sovereign power’s exercise are always possible in the present. As London police commissioner Ian Blair clearly asserted following de Menezes’ death: “someone else could be shot” (quoted in *Ibid*: 177). This chillingly frank assertion is an archetypical illustration of how the emergent temporal logic of security serves not simply to normalize the state of exception, but, more explicitly, to temporalize the logic of the exception, in effect laying siege to the present in the name of securing the future.

This paper seeks to unpack and problematize this idea through a critical interrogation of the logics at play within a security climate premised upon pre-emption, precaution, and the securitization of the future. I will begin by discussing in further detail the growing preponderance of pre-emptive security practices, particularly within so-called “liberal” states,

emphasizing how the underlying precautionary logic enables—and even necessitates—the deployment of sovereign power in a myriad of violent and invasive ways. This will be followed by a discussion of the broader implications of these security logics, where I will consider in depth how the deployment of sovereign power to act in the temporal realm in pursuit of securing an imagined future results in the potential penetration of all aspects of contemporary life by what might, following Agamben, be termed the “logic of the camp” (Agamben 2000). I argue that this may be best expressed as a condition whereby sovereign power works to “take the present hostage” in the name of the future. The remainder of the paper will critically interrogate this emergent condition from a theoretical perspective, delineating and exploring the constitutive absurdities that underpin the contemporary security climate understood as such. In this capacity, the third section will unpack the problematic logic of pre-emptive security by emphasizing how this temporalization of security renders the security project itself ultimately untenable, since the apparent objective—the securing of the future—can by definition never be realized. The fourth section explores how the extension of sovereign power to the temporal realm in this way destabilizes the normative coherence of the principle of state sovereignty, particularly with regard to the “liberal” states from which these practices chiefly emanate. Here I invoke Jacques Derrida’s (2003) notion of “autoimmunity” to describe the practice of sovereignty in liberal states within the context of the WOT, as the attempt to secure an idealized future premised upon certain principles congruent with the discursive constitution a liberal society is pursued through means that necessarily violate them in the perpetual present. Finally, it is concluded that these contradictions and aporias are not merely rooted in the seemingly aberrant security practices that have emerged in the post-9/11 environment; rather, I contend that they are inherent to the logic of state sovereignty itself. Accordingly, the current temporal trend in security practice illustrates the need for a significant degree of conceptual reorientation if the pernicious consequences of pre-emptive security are to be mitigated and resisted.

The Logic of Pre-Emption and the Securitization of the Future

As mentioned above, an explicitly temporal element has underwritten the development of security practices in the post-9/11 era, and this trend is particularly evident in the activities of what are popularly termed “liberal” or “Western” states.² Indeed, empirically speaking, the majority of the pre-emptive practices with which I am here concerned take place either within

² There is inadequate space here to enter into a protracted discussion as to what constitutes a “liberal” polity, or whether such an appellation is appropriate to deploy in the present context. I will thus bracket out these questions for the present discussion, deferring instead to the general use of the term “liberal”—implying a democratic polity governed by the rule of law and premised upon the protection of fundamental human rights. This generalized use of the term need not be viewed as problematic, as similar uses can be found in extant critical scholarship, such as Didier Bigo and Anastassia Tsoukala’s edited volume *Terror, Insecurity, and Liberty: The Illiberal Practices of Liberal Regimes after 9/11* (2008). However, it is also worth emphasizing that, as this paper is written largely in general terms, the minutiae of what liberal may or may not signify is largely irrelevant for my purposes. What is of concern, rather, is how the pre-emptive security practices upon which I focus are antithetical to the political ethos by which liberal polities—however defined—self-identify as such, despite the fact that it is precisely states that consider themselves “liberal” that are the primary practitioners of pre-emptive security.

the context of the WOT—such as the indefinite detention of terror suspects without charge (Mutimer 2007)—or vis-à-vis the purported threat of large inflows of migrants—exemplified by the myriad detention centres on the periphery of the EU and by Australia’s so-called “pacific solution” of mandatory pre-emptive detention (Isin & Rygiel 2007, L. Weber 2007). These issues represent top security concerns for states that are conventionally identified as liberal democratic polities, and therefore the pre-emptive practices upon which I focus most often originate from the sovereign decisions undertaken by the governments and security agents of such states. This is important in theoretical terms because the fact that it is precisely states which are “avowedly liberal democratic states, openly committed to the rule of law” (Mutimer 2007) that are behind the types of pre-emptive practices I seek to problematize renders the logic underlying such acts—and perhaps even the concept of the liberal polity itself in the current security moment—quite problematic. This latter point will be central to the second half of the paper—and will be discussed in greater depth below in relation to Derrida’s notion of autoimmunity—and thus a more detailed discussion of pre-emption as it is practiced by contemporary liberal polities is warranted at this juncture.

While the idea of pre-emption with regard to discourses of security is perhaps most often associated with the so-called Bush Doctrine in US foreign policymaking—most clearly exemplified, of course, by the 2003 invasion of Iraq (Ehrenberg *et al.* 2010, C. Weber 2007)—it must also be stressed that the notion of taking explicit action in the present to pre-empt *potential* irruptions of “danger” in the future—what might be termed the *logic of pre-emption*—is far from limited in its deployment to the realm of interstate security relations alone. Indeed, as criminologist Richard Ericson asserts, the logic of pre-emption can be seen to permeate all aspects of the exercise of sovereign power in the current moment, to the point where the contemporary security environment might be best termed a “state of pre-emption” (Ericson 2008: 58). Under such conditions, “security” is conceived in terms of safeguarding the future from what *may* occur by undertaking precautionary measures in the present that are conceived in relation to an imagined future. Security is thus pursued by attempting to “police the future by anticipation,” with the ultimate goal being the realization of an imagined “future perfect” where the “risks” against which these present exceptional practices are deployed will no longer be of concern (Bigo 2007: 31).

Accordingly, the logic of pre-emption is innately concerned with exerting control over the temporal dimension of human existence. Sovereign power deployed in pursuit of the logic of pre-emption is thus active in both the spatial and temporal realms, as it attempts to manipulate and control the relationship between present and future through “calculations about probable futures in the present [the temporal element], followed by interventions into the present in order to control that potential future [the spatial element]” (Aradau *et al.* 2008: 149). The crucial point is that a security climate premised upon the logic of pre-emption is concerned primarily with safeguarding the future, while the present is constructed in instrumental terms as a site of intervention through which this ultimate aim might be realized. As such, to use the terminology of the Copenhagen School, under the logic of pre-emption, the future is securitized (Buzan *et al.* 1998). The result is that the proverbial door is opened for the deployment of exceptional practices “beyond the realm of normal politics” in the present, since the logic of pre-emption holds that it is through proactive/pre-emptive/precautionary measures enacted in the present that the security of the future can be ensured.

Yet the inherent unknowability of the future ensures that pre-emptive pursuits are necessarily plagued by an information deficit, thus generating “an insatiable quest for knowledge” on the part of sovereign authorities pursuing information related to potential future dangers (Aradau & Van Munster 2007: 91). Regardless of the success of such efforts, however, the idea of pre-emptive security is perpetually imbued with an innate level of uncertainty precisely because the future cannot be known for certain, no matter how detailed and precise and rigorous the collected data and subsequent risk calculations might be (de Goede 2008). This leads the imperatives of pre-emptive security to merge with a politics of risk management premised upon the so-called “precautionary principle,” whereby sovereign decisions relating to appropriate pre-emptive action to be undertaken are made solely on the basis of unsubstantiated suspicion or highly arbitrary (and often highly racialized) calculations regarding the likelihood of a future irruption of threat (Aradau & Van Munster 2007: 102). Accordingly, the pre-emptive practices of sovereign power take on a highly biopolitical character, as governmental intrusions into the everyday lives of individual subjects become an crucial component of the pursuit of security. The securitization of the future thus necessitates the deployment of an extensive array of governmental technologies—from conventional military intervention, to indefinite detention, to pervasive surveillance and biometric monitoring—in pursuit of information that *might* be relevant to preventing an irruption of danger that *may* occur in at some indefinite point in the unknown future (*Ibid.* 105). Aradau and Van Munster (2007: 97), invoking Foucault, aptly refer to these practices collectively as a precautionary “*dispositif* of risk,” capturing both the variety of techniques employed and the ultimately unified objective of securing an imagined future that underwrites their enaction.

An emergent body of work within the critical security studies literature that has catalogued and problematized the particularities of such practices in greater detail shows that the logic of pre-emption has emerged as perhaps the defining characteristic of security praxis among liberal states in the post-9/11 period (see, for example, Amoore 2008, Amoore & de Goede 2005, Aradau & van Munster 2008, Coutin 2008, Daase & Kessler 2007, de Goede 2008, Epstein 2008, Muller 2008, Salter 2008). Although an extended empirical discussion is beyond this paper’s scope, prior to proceeding further, it is worth briefly considering for illustrative purposes three diverse yet related examples of the operationalization of the logic of pre-emption. Kessler & Werner (2008), for instance, explore of how practices such as the American “targeted killing” program—which consists of the extrajudicial extermination via airstrike or assassination of suspected terrorists living beyond the sovereign American frontier—are legitimated under a logic of precautionary risk management and, while once rare, have become commonplace within the security practices of a number of Western states within the context of the WOT. Alternatively, Leanne Weber’s (2007) critical account of the Australian offshore detention regime illustrates that the latter is premised upon a logic of “punitive pre-emption,” as prospective migrants are detained indefinitely based on the potential future security threats that they are deemed to pose if not properly screened prior to entering Australia. Finally, Louise Amoore’s work on the increasing prevalence of biometric monitoring at the borders of liberal states illustrates how programs such as the “US Visit” initiative are underwritten by a logic of pre-emption in their desire to identify future threats through the *a priori* construction of risky/safe identities among mobile subjects (Amoore 2006). These three examples represent a mere sampling of both the types of practices that might be considered in terms of pre-emptive security, and the scholarly treatment that such practices have been granted. Although I will not here pursue any further exploration of other

such forms of sovereign action, the diversity of these three examples is generally illustrative of the way pre-emption has become a fundamental logical premise underlying contemporary security policy in liberal polities. From these examples it is clear that the logic of pre-emption is applied in the relations of sovereign power to a variety of typologies of subjects—be they suspected terrorists in the case of extrajudicial killing, prospective migrants in the case of pre-emptive detention, or the general populace at large in the case of biometric monitoring.

It is this last point, as stressed by Amoore, that is most important to note for present purposes, in that, although many of the governmental technologies employed by sovereign power under the pre-emptive security logic are explicitly directed at arbitrarily marginalized subjectivities such as migrants or particular racial or religious groups, it is crucial to note that no individuals are *a priori* absolved under the logic of pre-emption. Indeed, the immanent uncertainty of the future necessitates that as wide an informational net as possible be cast, while also fomenting a sovereign ethos that it is better to err on the side of action rather than inaction (de Goede 2008: 164). Moreover, such policies are enabled by the invocation of the logic of the Agambenian “state of exception,” as the contravention of civil liberties and human rights norms that are an explicit consequence of pre-emptive acts can only be legitimated within the juridical framework of the liberal states enacting them if this framework is deemed not to apply under the present “exceptional” circumstances (Agamben 2005). The securitization of the future and the logic of pre-emption that is its corollary thus necessarily produce a discourse of the exception, as the practices necessary to uphold that logic require the presence of such a state to be justifiably enacted (Muller 2008: 208). Yet, as will be seen in the following sections, the very nature of the move of securitizing the future ensures that this present state of exception can never be transcended so long as the logic of pre-emption continues to hold, as the latter is concerned only with securing a future that has yet to come to pass through exceptional interventions in the present. In this sense, we might conceive of this condition as a state in which the present is, in some ways, taken hostage in the name of the future.

Imagining the Future and Taking the Present Hostage

The preceding discussion has shown how the problem of uncertainty dictates that the logic of pre-emption and the securitization of the future that it embodies necessitate a wide and diverse deployment of sovereign power in the present. Moreover, the logic of pre-emption is premised upon the extension of sovereign control to the temporal realm, as the chief concern of security policy shifts from questions of deterrence, reactivity, and punishment toward the securing of one particular imagined iteration of the future in lieu of multiple potential others. The crucial role of imagination that results from the inherent unknowability of the future is important to consider in this respect, as the future that is being securitized—and thus in whose name exceptional interventions in the present are carried out—is always imaginary. This point has been taken up by critical security scholars, with Mark Salter (2008: 243) asserting that “[t]he logic of pre-emption prioritizes the power of imagination over the power of fact,” while Aradau *et al.* (2008: 152) contend that “the sovereign order is no longer simply that of decision, but also that of imagination.” What these observations imply is that, under the logic of pre-emptive security, exceptional practices can be (and are) enacted against an individual (or group) not on the basis of what s/he has done, or even on the basis of what

s/he has indicated through actions or declarations that s/he might do, but rather on the basis of what it is imagined that s/he might one day think about doing—what Cynthia Weber (2007: 115), invoking Philip K. Dick, terms one’s “pre-thoughts.” Indeed, this very line of reasoning provided the impetus for the development of the category of “unlawful enemy combatant”, which was employed by the US to enable the indefinite detention of prisoners at Guantánamo Bay and other exceptional spaces in archetypal acts of pre-emptive security. These individuals were condemned by sovereign power solely on the basis of “*imagined* future harm they *might* cause, rather than past crime” (Ericson 2008: 63, my emphasis).³

With the sovereign decision thus contingent upon imagined scenarios rather than explicit knowledge, a condition emerges in which no future is considered impossible and thus, by default, every individual—regardless of their particular characteristics—is a potential suspect and is placed upon a “continuum of risk” within the unlimited realm of the imaginary (*Ibid.*: 66; see also Ewald 2002). As Ericson contends, a security environment where imagination is the primary means of determining threat generates a regime of “universal suspicion that spells the end of innocence” (2008: 66.). The necessarily imaginary element inhering in the logic of pre-emption thus severs the link between factual knowledge and sovereign security practice, in that, once the accusatory imagination has been enacted, there is no way to explicitly prove a subject’s innocence since the accusation relates to an act or thought which has, by definition, not yet occurred (Aradau & Van Munster 2007). A crucial corollary of this condition is that the very basis of the juridical system of the liberal polity is fundamentally undermined, as the collection of evidence and its evaluation via the appropriate judicial procedures is rendered impossible when dealing with an imagined future offence, since the offence in question has not yet been conceived by the accused, let alone committed (*Ibid.*: 106). Thus, the pre-emptive security logics and their attendant practices operate under a condition where the established juridical order of a liberal state *cannot* apply, as the latter is simply incapable of accommodating the temporal problems that are inevitably raised. The extension of sovereign power to the temporal realm—which is the central function of the logic of pre-emption—thus serves to suspend the juridical order *by default*, as decisions regarding innocence and guilt relating to questions of security now become solely the purview of sovereign power. As the suspension of the juridical order is the central characteristic of the state of exception (Agamben 2005), it is thus clear that a security regime premised upon a

³ In discussing the importance of the imagined future in this context, it is also worth noting that particular renderings of the past also play a notable role in informing security praxis in the current moment, and thus might also be identified as a crucial intersection of security and temporality that merits further theorizing. Consider, for instance, the pervasive discourse in the prelude to both Gulf Wars that identified Saddam Hussein as the “next Hitler.” Moreover, the invocation of a particular idealized picture of the past is often crucial to constructing the picture of the “future perfect” used to legitimate exceptional pre-emptive practices in the present, as a return to a state of “normality” that is believed to have existed previously is often the purported aim underlying the enactment of the state of exception more generally (on these points, see Hoskins 2006 and Fletcher 2004). While these considerations are certainly important to note when discussing the role of temporality in the theory and praxis of security, this paper does not address them directly, as my concern is chiefly with security as pre-emption, which is always premised upon a sovereign gaze into the imagined future. Again, there can be no doubt the imaginaries informing this gaze are influenced—perhaps quite highly—by the spectre of the past; however, recognizing this does not alter the logic which I am attempting to problematize here relating to the construction of the present as an exceptional temporal space in which sovereign interventions are required in order to secure an imagined future perfect. Accordingly—and also for space reasons—I have chosen to bracket out this analytical angle within the present argument.

logic of pre-emption enacts such a state, as the reach of sovereign power becomes immense and the potential for each individual to be subject to its violences is always present.

The implications of this determination for everyday life in ostensibly liberal polities are significant. Within such a security climate—where the juridical order is no longer applicable to questions of security—it is only sovereign power itself that is immune from potential pro/persecution (Ericson 2008: 67). Accordingly, the potential necessarily exists for what Agamben (2000) terms the “logic of the camp” to be enacted at any location—be it the detention centre, the airport, the border, or a London Tube station.⁴ What this signifies is that, even within “liberal” states ostensibly committed to the rule of law and the upholding of human rights norms, a security logic of pre-emption premised upon the primacy of imagination always already embodies the potential that anyone at any time may be inscribed as “bare life” by sovereign power (Agamben 1998).⁵ Yet, returning to the question of temporality, the arbitrary violences inherent in these practices are not viewed as problematic under the logic of pre-emption precisely because they are enacted *in the present*—an ostensibly exceptional temporal space that requires sovereign intervention—in the name of that which is to be secured: the future. Moreover, as discussed above, the precautionary ethos based on the unknowability of the future that underwrites this logic necessarily favours action over inaction, thus ensuring both a high level of sovereign activity, and a concomitantly increased likelihood that mistakes will be made and violence will be done to innocent life. Indeed, as David Runciman (2004) asserts, the precautionary logic of pre-emption “does not take seriously enough the downside of getting things wrong.”

Thus, to summarize, under the logic of pre-emption, securing the future through the violent deployment of sovereign power in the present against individuals deemed guilty in a contingently imagined future is paramount, and the present consequences thereof cannot be deemed problematic if this logic’s prioritization of the future over the present is to be upheld. The potential for sovereign power to inscribe any individual as bare life in the present is thus an ineluctable feature of a pre-emptive security logic premised upon a securitized future. The present is thus constructed as an *exceptional temporal space* necessitating violent interventions and the suspension of the juridical order if this latter goal is to be pursued. Under the pre-emptive logic of contemporary security practices, then, the present is laid siege by sovereign power for the ostensible purposes of ensuring that a certain order subsequently emerges in lieu of all (risky) others at some indefinite future point.

A Logic of Absurdity

While a vast catalogue of literature has problematized states of exception akin to that which I have argued arises from pre-emptive security strategies on ethico-political terms, this

⁴ Again, consider the Menezes case in this capacity. According to Agamben, the “camp” represents the space where sovereign power most explicitly transforms an individual into a specimen of “bare life” that may be killed with impunity (1998, 2000). As Vaughn-Williams (2007: 191) contends, this is precisely what occurred with the shooting of Menezes, as he was identified by agents of sovereign power as one who could be legitimately killed for reasons of pre-emptive security. The key point is that this violent exercise of sovereign power took place not within the confines of an explicitly exceptional space or zone of indistinction such as the a concentration camp or a detention centre, but rather in a London Underground station at the public core of a liberal democratic state.

⁵ Of course, Agamben sees this as crucial to the constitutive logic of sovereignty, regardless of whether the logic of pre-emption is operational or not.

is not the route the remainder of the paper will take. Rather, I intend to focus instead upon how the seemingly inevitable emergence of a temporalized exception as a consequence of pre-emptive security practices illustrates that the broader logic upon which the latter are premised is fundamentally absurd and theoretically incoherent. As a departure point for this discussion, it is important to consider that for all the insidious violences it enables and the cynical ways in which it has been implemented practically, the *logic* of the exception is nevertheless just that: a logical theoretical premise imbued with a degree of intuitive normative coherence—namely, the idea that exceptional measures are *temporarily* required for the restoration of a particular desirable condition of existence in the present (see Agamben 2005).⁶ Yet, when the political condition in which the present is taken hostage in the name of the future that I have detailed heretofore is considered in relation to this logic, the fundamental absurdity of the idea of pre-emptive security begins to reveal itself. Indeed, the specific introduction of temporality into the concept of the exception—as is entailed by the notion of pre-emptive security—renders the underlying logic of the exception elementally incoherent, as the very nature of pre-emption ensures that the aims of its security project that are pursued through exceptional practices can never in fact be realized, thus *permanently* instantiating a state of exception in the present.

To elaborate upon this point—albeit at the risk of descending into obscure hypotheticals akin to the worst excesses of analytical philosophy—consider the claim that the pre-emptive security project is inherently unrealizable, and thus logically absurd, in terms of a metaphorical illustration consisting of a rider atop a horse. To induce the horse to run forward, the rider hangs a carrot on a string in front of the horse. Imagining the reward of eating the carrot in the future, the horse makes an intervention in the present—moving its feet—that it believes will allow it to secure possession of the carrot in accordance with the ideally imagined future scenario. However, the rider’s dangling the carrot at a specified distance from the horse ensures that there is always a separation between horse and carrot. Thus, regardless of the intensity (or violence) of the interventions that the horse undertakes in the present, it and the carrot will always remain separated and its ingestion of the latter will always exist only in the imagined future that is perpetually out of reach. Accordingly, no matter what the horse does in the present, its inexorable separation from the carrot ensures that this future will never be realized in the present. Yet the logic of its thinking continues to necessitate unending interventions in pursuit of that future, to the point where it will have done immense damage to itself (in the form of fatigue, for instance) in pursuit of a future that is by definition never achievable due to the perpetual separation between itself and the carrot. To return from this obscure digression to the specifics of this paper, then, the spatial separation between horse and carrot is analogous to the temporal separation between present and future within the context of pre-emptive security. Much like the thinking of the hypothetical horse, the logic of pre-emption is premised upon the notion that exceptional interventions are required at present to secure a particular imagined future. However, just as the perpetual spatial separation of horse and carrot ensures that the horse continues, *ad infinitum*, to vainly pursue a snack that will never be eaten, the necessary temporal separation of present and future ensures that, in a

⁶ Of course, Walter Benjamin (1978) argued that, in practice, the exception almost inevitably becomes the norm—particularly when considered from the perspective of the oppressed—thus rendering this apparent normative logic something of a non-starter. This is a compelling claim, and I make a similar argument pertaining to the inevitable permanence of the exception below. However, my point is that this is brought about by the specifically temporal dimension of the exception that is enacted by the turn to pre-emptive security.

climate of pre-emptive security, the sovereign gaze will be perpetually fixed upon a future that will never actually arrive, since what was the future inevitably becomes the present, whereby it too becomes exceptionalized as a site of violent intervention in pursuit of securing what is the new future, and so on.

The logical absurdities underwriting the idea of pre-emptive security thus become clearer, as what results from the introduction of pre-emption into security logic is the *necessary permanence* of the state of exception in the present. To reiterate, under the logic of pre-emption, the passage of time ensures that the future will become the present, whence it too will be “taken hostage” by sovereign power in an effort to secure what is now the future, which by definition can never be arrived at due to the exigencies of time. The problem is thus that, while we may seek to secure the future, we nevertheless always exist and act in what might be termed the *perpetual present*, since the present is the only temporal space in which interventions can be practically undertaken and experiences of security can occur. The corollary is that, if the logic of pre-emption holds, the imagined future that these interventions are ostensibly enacted to secure is *necessarily never realizable*, since any evaluation of whether it has been securely realized can only occur in the present, which is always already constructed as a state of exception under the logic of pre-emption. Indeed, the present can never be(come) the ideally imagined future that is ostensibly being secured, since pre-emptive security’s focus upon the future-as-referent necessitates that the present can *only ever* be conceived as the exceptional temporal space in which interventions to secure that future are to be undertaken. The experienced present thus cannot ever be seen as a manifestation of the risk-free “future prefect”, since the inherent unknowability of the future is a constant threatening spectre in the present. This ensures that, under the logic of pre-emption, the present is inevitably and perpetually subject to arbitrary and potentially violent sovereign interventions.

It may thus be concluded that the logic of pre-emption is fundamentally absurd, in that the exigencies of the temporality that it invokes actually ensure that it can never realize the aims of the security project that is implied by its enactment. What results instead is the permanence of a (temporalized) state of exception within the realm of human existence, since the logic of pre-emption always constructs the present as an exceptional temporal space, and we necessarily only exist in the perpetual present. The notion of pre-emptive security is thus revealed as a pernicious impossibility—premised upon an absurd logic, yet necessitating sovereign interventions that serve to endanger in the present the very lives whose existence in the future is ostensibly being secured. This latter point is crucial when considering the absurdity of pre-emptive logic in the context of a problematization of the security practices of “liberal” states in the current moment, which will form the basis of the final substantive section of this paper.

Autoimmunity, Pre-emptive Security, and (State) Sovereignty

The preceding sections have attempted to illustrate three key points: Firstly, that a logic of pre-emption is pervasive in contemporary practices of security, particularly among “liberal” states; secondly, that pre-emptive security operates through a process in which the present is constructed as an exceptional temporal space, enabling pervasive and potentially violent interventions by sovereign power; and thirdly, that the logical underpinnings of these

practices are fundamentally absurd, as pre-emption's very nature ensures that the aims of a security project based upon it can never be realized. By way of conclusion, this section explores some broader theoretical implications of these points. Specifically, it will be shown that further critical interrogation of the security climate constituted on the basis of a logic of pre-emption reveals significant incoherences within the logic of state sovereignty itself—particularly in relation to ostensibly “liberal” polities—thus leading to the conclusion that the Derridean notion of autoimmunity most appropriately describes both the practice of pre-emptive security in particular, and the logic of state sovereignty more generally, within the context of the current global political moment.

It has been argued in the preceding sections that a security climate premised upon the logic of pre-emption seeks to manipulate the temporal relationship between present and future through exceptional interventions in the former that are posited as necessary to secure an ideally imagined rendering of the latter in the face of its inherent unknowability. I have also argued that such interventions operate through a condition in which the juridical order is necessarily suspended, enabling them to derogate from established norms relating to the protection of civil liberties and human rights that are purportedly protected by the sovereignty of liberal states (Mythen & Walklate 2008; Vaughn-Williams 2007). In this capacity, then, the temporalization of security via the logic of pre-emption appears to inevitably compromise the purported normative “benefits” of state sovereignty—of which such protections are the archetypical example when considering liberal states—since it necessitates exceptional interventions in the perpetual present for the sake of securing a future that is always to come. Indeed, R.B.J. Walker has convincingly argued that the coherence of state sovereignty is premised upon the spatial demarcation of the secure, knowable inside from the dangerous, anarchic outside (see Walker 1993, 1991); however, with the deployment of sovereign power to the temporal realm, whatever utility this spatial distinction possessed to such ends is rendered irrelevant. It is replaced instead by a temporal distinction between present and future whereby the former—where we always exist and experience the effects of “security”—becomes an exceptional space in which the “inside” of the sovereign boundary can serve as a site where *insecurity* prevails due to the presence of an infallible sovereign power making arbitrary security decisions based upon imaginary futures. The distinction between inside and outside thus no longer serves as the basis for delineating where security is possible, as the exceptional exercise of sovereign power within the state is inherent to the practice of pre-emptive security. The fact that the future whose securitization is the purported aim of these practices is necessarily unrealizable due to the exigencies of time only further problematizes the normative coherence of state sovereignty under the logic of pre-emption; and such concerns are particularly problematic when considered with regard to liberal polities operating within a security discourse premised thereupon. One need only consider the aptly named “Kratos” shoot-to-kill policy employed by the London Metropolitan Police—of which Jean Charles de Menezes was the first victim (Vaughn-Williams 2007)—or the myriad pieces of anti-terrorism legislation enacted by liberal states in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks—under whose auspices civil liberties ostensibly protected by those states’ sovereign borders have been systematically violated within those same borders (Ericson 2008)—to comprehend the immanent contradictions that a temporalized security climate premised upon the notion of pre-emption brings into being in ostensibly liberal states.

In this capacity, Derrida’s notion of “autoimmunity” provides an instructive lens through which to theorize this condition. Derrida defines the autoimmune process as “the

strange behaviour where a living being, in quasi-*suicidal* fashion, ‘itself’ works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself *against* its ‘own’ immunity” (Derrida 2003: 94 emphasis original). He applies this concept to the political realm in the specific context of the War on Terror, likening the pre-emptive sovereign interventions addressed in this paper to the manifestation of an autoimmune crisis that “ends up producing, reproducing, and regenerating the very thing it seeks to disarm,” thus, in fact, perpetuating the very problems it seeks to eradicate (Derrida 2003: 99-100).

It is clear how this concept might apply to liberal regimes that, under the logic of pre-emption, undertake practices that necessarily contradict the very characteristics that might identify them as liberal in the first place. The autoimmunitary nature of these practices stems from the fact that it is the very norms and principles that are necessarily transgressed in the present under the logic of pre-emption that are invoked as fundamental elements of the “future perfect” that pre-emptive sovereign acts are deployed to secure. In this sense, then, the privileging of the future over the present that is central to the logic of pre-emption works to engender a condition in the *present* that is strikingly analogous to that which is ostensibly being secured *against* in the future. To return to Derrida’s definition of autoimmunity, the very politico-juridical elements that apparently “immunize” liberal states and those political subjects located within them against such pernicious irruptions as arbitrary interventions by unchallenged sovereign power are transgressed and suspended in the present by practices of pre-emption enacted for the purpose of securing a future order premised upon those very elements. Thus, when liberal states engage in pre-emptive security practices, they are, in Derrida’s terminology, working to “immunize [themselves] against their own immunity.” Accordingly, under a security climate premised upon a logic of pre-emption that necessarily enables violent sovereign interventions in the perpetual present by permanently constructing the latter as an exceptional temporal space, the very notion of a “liberal” state retains little coherence, since the inherent unrealizability of the future purportedly being secured necessitates that the very principles upon whose protection the entire edifice of pre-emptive security is based will be perpetually transgressed within a permanently instantiated state of exception.

However, this argument can be taken a step further in relation to the autoimmunitary nature of the contemporary politics of security, as it can be reasonably argued that the turn to pre-emption that characterizes the latter—and thus also the resultant contradictions discussed heretofore—is not the mere product of knee-jerk reactions to the aberrant event of 9/11, but, in fact, is inherent in the logic of state sovereignty itself. In this regard, recall that sovereignty’s normative conceptual coherence is premised upon the “protection” of the knowable, controllable inside from the unknowable, contingent outside (Walker 1993, 1991). Accordingly, it can be reasoned that the scope of the protection purportedly provided by state sovereignty—if taken to its logical conclusion—should extend to include not only security from present dangers, but also from potential *future* irruptions of threat. Indeed, the spatial logic of state sovereignty translates quite readily to the temporal dimension, as the radical contingency associated with the future can be seen to represent the ultimate unknown against which the practice of sovereignty ought to secure if its normative ends are to be fully realized. From this perspective, then, the taming of the future toward which pre-emptive security aspires would represent the ultimate success of the security project embodied by the concept of state sovereignty itself, as two of the crucial unknowns of modern political subjectivity—namely, the spatial “outside” and the temporal future—would be adequately secured against.

It follows that securing the future through pre-emptive interventions in the present represents not an irregular idiosyncrasy of the practice of sovereignty in an age of international terrorism, but rather the ultimate act of sovereignty that in fact represents the concept's logical conclusion.

The implications of such a reading of the relationship between state sovereignty and pre-emptive security are profound. The arguments of this paper have shown that the focus upon the future in the pre-emptive practice of security is rife with immanent contradiction, as it results in an enduring state of exception in the perpetual present. This condition compromises the purported benefits of sovereignty, particularly within the context of self-identified liberal states, since, in context of this temporalized exception, those within the sovereign boundary are no safer from the arbitrary exercise of sovereign violence than those without. Thus, if the logic of sovereignty, when taken to its ultimate conclusion, necessarily presupposes the very temporalization of security and attendant turn to pre-emption that compromises its own normative coherence, the concept of state sovereignty becomes highly problematic as the basis for thinking about either security or the political in the contemporary context. In this regard, while it is clear that Derrida's notion of autoimmunity is applicable to self-identified liberal states in relation to their pre-emptive security practices, it would seem that this idea also provides a useful lens through which to theorize *the concept of state sovereignty itself*, in light of the seemingly inexorable relationship between its own normative logic and the turn to pre-emptive security. Indeed, if sovereignty's logical conclusion entails the securitization of the future, and the means through which this must be pursued necessarily compromise its conceptual validity, the logic of state sovereignty can be seen to embody its own incoherence in an archetypically autoimmune fashion. The upshot is that the pernicious consequences engendered by the prevalence of pre-emptive security practices are, in fact, the result of systemic aporias immanent to the constitution of a global order premised upon state sovereignty, rather than a mere aberration in state security praxis wrought by the terroristic intervention of 9/11.

Conclusion

The latter discussion only further illustrates the degree of absurdity operating at the core of the logic of pre-emption that is so central to contemporary security practices. To recapitulate briefly, not only is the ultimate aim of securing the future something of a fool's errand that is by definition unachievable due to the exigencies of time, but the means through which this absurd goal is pursued actually serve to reproduce in the perpetual present the very type of condition they are ostensibly securing the imagined future against. Moreover, it is possible that this constitutive absurdity of the contemporary security environment is, in fact, embedded within and ultimately traceable to the very logic of state sovereignty itself.

The normative upshot of these conclusions is that resisting and remedying the problematic political conditions wrought by the immanent contradictions of the pre-emptive turn in security praxis will necessarily require more than a simple critical reconsideration of sovereign security policy among liberal states. Indeed, it must also involve a fundamental rethinking of what is understood to be at stake in relation to questions of, and claims to, state sovereignty, as the latter remains the fundamental discursive frame through which late modern subjects think about the meaning of both security and the political.

References:

- Agamben, Giorgio (2005) *State of Exception*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Agamben, Giorgio (2000) "What is a Camp?" in V. Binetti & C. Casarino (trans.) *Means Without Ends: Notes on Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Agamben Giorgio (1998) *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press.
- Amoore, Louise (2008) "Consulting, Culture, the Camp: On the Economies of the Exception" in M. de Goede & L. Amoore (eds) *Risk and the War on Terror*. London: Routledge, pp. 112-130
- Amoore, Louise (2006) "Biometric Borders: Governing Mobilities in the War on Terror" *Political Geography* Vol. 25, pp. 336-351
- Amoore, Louis & Marieke de Goede (2005) "Governance, Risk, and Dataveillance in the War on Terror" *Crime, Law & Social Change*, Vol. 43, pp. 149-173
- Amoore, Louise & Marieke de Goede (2008) "Introduction: Governing by Risk in the War on Terror" in M. de Goede & L. Amoore (eds) *Risk and the War on Terror*. London: Routledge, pp. 5-19
- Aradau, Claudia, Luis Lobo-Guerrero & Rens Van Munster (2008) "Security, Technologies of Risk, and the Political: Guest Editors' Introduction" *Security Dialogue* Vol. 39:2-3, pp. 147-154
- Aradau, Claudia and Rens Van Munster (2008) "Taming the future: The *Dispositif* of Risk in the War on Terror" in M. de Goede & L. Amoore (eds) *Risk and the War on Terror*. London: Routledge, pp. 23-40
- Aradau, Claudia and Rens Van Munster (2007) "Governing Terrorism Through Risk: Taking Precautions, (un)Knowing the Future" *EJIR*, Vol. 13:3 pp. 89-115.
- Arendt, Hannah (2006) *Between Past and Future*. New York: Penguin
- Benjamin, Walter (1978) "Critique of Violence" in E. Jephcott (trans.) *Reflections*. New York: Schocken Books
- Bigo, Didier (2007) "Detention of Foreigners, States of Exception, and the Social Practices of Control of the Banopticon" in P. K. Rajaram & C. Gundy-Warr (eds.) *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 3-33

- Bigo, Didier & Anastassia Tsoukala (eds.) (2008) *Terror, Insecurity, and Liberty: The Illiberal Practices of Liberal Regimes after 9/11*. London: Routledge
- Buzan, Barry, Ole Waever and Japp de Wilde (1998) *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Coutin, Susan Bibler (2008) "Subverting Discourses of Risk in the War on Terror" in M. de Goede & L. Amoore (eds) *Risk and the War on Terror*. London: Routledge, pp. 218-232
- Daasse, Christopher & Oliver Kessler (2007) "Knowns and Unknowns in the War on Terror: Uncertainty and the Political Construction of Danger" *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 38:4, pp. 411-434
- Derrida, Jacques (2003) "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides" in G. Borradori (ed.) *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 85-136.
- de Goede, Marieke (2008) "The Politics of Pre-emption and the War on Terror in Europe" *EJIR* Vol. 14:1, pp. 161-185.
- Ehrenberg, John, J. Patrice McSherry, José Ramón Sánchez, & Caroleen Marji Sayej (eds.) (2010) *The Iraq Papers*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Epstein, Charlotte (2008) "Embodying Risk: Using Biometrics to Protect the Borders" in M. de Goede & L. Amoore (eds) *Risk and the War on Terror*. London: Routledge, pp. 178-193
- Ericson, Richard V. (2008) "The State of Pre-emption: Managing Terrorism through Counter Law" in M. de Goede & L. Amoore (eds) *Risk and the War on Terror*. London: Routledge, pp. 57-76.
- Ewald, François (2002) "The Return of Descartes' Malicious Demon: An Outline of a Philosophy of Precaution" in T. Baker & J. Simon (eds.) *Embracing Risk: The Changing Culture of Insurance and Responsibility*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 273-301
- Fletcher, Paul (2004) "The Political Theology of the Empire to Come" *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* Vol. 17:1, pp. 49-61
- Hoskins, Andrew (2006) "Temporality, Proximity, and Security: Terror in a Media-Drenched Age" *International Relations* Vol. 20:4, pp. 453-566
- Isin, Engin and Kim Rygiel (2007) "Abject Spaces: Frontiers, Zones, Camps" in E. Dauphinée & C. Masters (eds.) *The Logics of Biopower and the War on Terror: Living, Dying Surviving*. Houndmills: Palgrave, pp. 181-203

- Kessler, Oliver & Wouter Werner (2008) "Extrajudicial Killing as Risk Management" *Security Dialogue* Vol. 39:2-3, pp. 289-308
- Muller, Benjamin (2008) "Securing the Political Imagination: Popular Culture, the Security Dispositif, and the Biometric State" *Security Dialogue* Vol. 39:2-3, pp.199-220
- Mutimer, David (2007) "Sovereign Contradictions: Maher Arar and the Indefinite Future" in E. Dauphinée & C. Masters (eds.) *The Logics of Biopower and the War on Terror: Living, Dying Surviving*. Houndmills: Palgrave, pp. 159-179
- Mythen, Gabe & Sandra Walklate (2008) "Terrorism, Risk, and International Security: The Perils of Asking 'What If'" *Security Dialogue* Vol. 39:2-3, pp. 221-242
- Runciman, David (2004) "The Precautionary Principle", *London Review of Books* Vol. 26:7, 1 April; Online: <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v26/n07/david-runciman/the-precautionary-principle>
- Salter, Mark B. (2008) "Risk and Imagination in the War on Terror" in M. de Goede & L. Amoore (eds) *Risk and the War on Terror*. London: Routledge, pp. 233-247
- Vaughn-Williams, Nick. (2007) "The Shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes: New Border Politics?" *Alternatives* Vol. 32:2, pp. 177-195
- Walker, R.B.J. (1997) "The Subject of Security." in K. Krause & M. Williams. (eds.) *Critical Security Studies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 61-81
- Walker, R.B.J. (1993) *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Walker, R.B.J. (1991) "State Sovereignty and the Articulation of Political Space/Time" *Millennium*, Vol. 20:3, pp. 445-461
- Weber, Cynthia (2007) "Securitizing the Unconscious: The Bush Doctrine of Pre-emption and *Minority Report*" in E. Dauphinée & C. Masters (eds.) *The Logics of Biopower and the War on Terror: Living, Dying Surviving*. Houndmills: Palgrave, pp. 109-128.
- Weber, Leanne (2007) "Policing the Virtual Border: Punitive Pre-emption in Australian Offshore Migration Control" *Social Justice* Vol. 34:2, pp. 77-93