Geopolitics

ISSN: 1465-0045 (Print) 1557-3028 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fgeo20

From Sovereignty to Imperium: Borders, Frontiers and the Specter of Neo-Imperialism

Matthew Longo

To cite this article: Matthew Longo (2017) From Sovereignty to Imperium: Borders, Frontiers and the Specter of Neo-Imperialism, Geopolitics, 22:4, 757-771, DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2017.1355785

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2017.1355785

GEOPOLITICS
2017, VOL. 22, NO. 4, 757–771
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2017.1355785

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

From Sovereignty to *Imperium*: Borders, Frontiers and the Specter of Neo-Imperialism

Matthew Longo

St. Anne's College, Oxford University, Oxford, UK

ABSTRACT

Borders are changing in myriad and multifaceted ways. After 9/11, states redoubled efforts at shoring up their perimeters and building walls. But borders are not merely increasingly securitized, they are also becoming thicker and bi-national. This new 'zonal' border emerging worldwide radically shifts the debate about borders and sovereignty. If sovereignty is indivisible, unitary and final, how can it be shared between states at their mutual perimeters? Is this really evidence of sovereignty waning? In this article, I suggest we are stuck at this conceptual impasse because of two conflations. The first one involves two aspects of sovereignty: authority and control. Looking at borders as thin jurisdictional lines, we observe only their legal authority (de jure); instead, by examining changing modes of control, we can see how new securitized borders actually reinforce state strength. The second conflation revolves around the conceptual linking of borders, states and sovereignty. This article argues that as borders thicken, they start to resemble frontiers, and sovereignty starts to resemble *imperium* – a Roman designation for political authority that is territorially unbounded. This disrupts the border/state dyad and situates borders (lines) and frontiers (zones) on a continuum. In doing so, it reveals how sovereignty is not waning, but changing shape – a worrisome geopolitical conclusion given the possibilities of neo-Imperialism due to power asymmetries between neighbouring states.

Borders are changing in myriad and multifaceted ways. Scholars of *globalisation* have long noted that borders have become increasingly porous, unable to forestall transnational mobilities.[1] More recently, scholars of *securitisation* have noted that after 9/11, states have redoubled efforts in shoring up their perimeters, including through the building of walls.[2] In the United States, for example, the post-9/11 strategy entailed building a hi-tech fence and placing thousands of additional law enforcement personnel at the border with Mexico. This literature on changing borders is well developed, but also unsatisfying – focusing on whether borders are more or less porous, and whether the state has been successful in stemming globalised mobility. Consequently, we are forced into a narrow position on how this challenges sovereignty: as borders erode, sovereignty wanes.[3]

CONTACT Matthew Longo matthew.longo@st-annes.ox.ac.uk St Anne's College, Oxford University, Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6HS, UK.

However, something more complicated is afoot. After all, borders are not merely increasingly porous, they are also becoming *thicker* and *bi-national*. This trend towards co-bordering is something I have established in my own work on the US borders with Mexico and Canada, but is also endemic globally – from the EU's external peripheries to parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East.[4] Driven largely by security initiatives, states are beginning to widen their border spaces – here focusing on perimeters[5] – projecting surveillance far from the border itself in both directions, and creating thick webs of infrastructure and law-enforcement that extend many miles inland. As my research in the US reveals, this move embodies the thinking that rather than more walls, what is needed is a 'layered approach', such that the border becomes 'our last line of defense, not our first line of defense.'[6] In addition, states are beginning to co-locate forces on either side of the line, creating a set of *de facto* overlapping jurisdictions. This is because insofar as border security is concerned, success requires a joint effort between states – as one American official explains, in today's world one 'cannot go it alone.'[7]

The new type of 'zonal' perimeter emerging worldwide radically shifts the terms of debate about borders and sovereignty. Sovereignty in our classic rendering is indivisible, unitary and final. How can it be shared between states at their mutual perimeters? Moreover, is this really evidence of sovereignty *waning*? After all, security measures are designed to reinforce sovereignty, not give it away. We need a new concept to explain what is happening. I suggest that we are stuck in a cognitive impasse because of two conflations. First, between two aspects of sovereignty: *authority* and *control*. Looking as we do at borders as jurisdictional lines, we observe only their legal authority (*de jure*) – more akin to classic Westphalian sovereignty, which has indeed been challenged in the contemporary period. But what about changes occurring at the institutional level, pertaining to control (*de facto*)? By examining changing modes of state control, we can see how new securitised borders actually reinforce state strength. Thus, it is unhelpful to think of sovereignty as waxing (control; *de facto*) or waning (authority; *de jure*); rather it is *changing*. This suggests that the term *sovereignty* as we classically use it is insufficient for explaining the type of power being projected in these thick, bi-national border zones.

Second, the debate is stunted because of a conceptual linking of borders, states and sovereignty – i.e. that sovereign states have borders. As borders move away from thin jurisdictional lines, they also stop acting like borders; instead they start to resemble *frontiers*, thereby rendering states more akin to empires – vis-à-vis the management of their periphery. As such, the new landscapes of *control* brought upon by thick, bi-nationally managed borders may ultimately engender new forms of *authority*. As the border comes to resemble a frontier, sovereignty starts to resemble *imperium* – a Roman designation for authority, including over the frontier. The basic difference

between sovereignty and *imperium* is that the latter is not territorially circumscribed.

Taken together, these points amount to a call for a new conceptual vocabulary. Drawing on the idea of *de facto* sovereignty, we might first think of sovereignty not as binary – a state either is or isn't sovereign over a jurisdiction – but rather as *spectral*, [8] with states more or less able to control their territories vis-à-vis neighbouring states such that there are *degrees of sovereignty*. In this rendering, sovereignty would not be understood as territorial, a bounded notion, but rather as *spatial*, an unbounded one, with the sovereign having power over as much space as it has capacity to control.

To establish this point, this article begins by looking more carefully at the relationship between sovereignty and territoriality, and introduces the notion of *imperium*. Thereafter, it provides an in-depth look at the logic of peripheral management in the Roman Empire, forging a comparison between ancient and present-day policies, and situating borders (lines) and frontiers (zones) on a continuum, as part of a comprehensive *frontier-system*. In conclusion, it considers the significance of this move in contemporary geopolitics. While the idea of jointly managed borders might on face seem to be normatively promising, thick, bi-national borders include in them the seeds of a devastating form of neo-Imperialism due to power asymmetries between neighbouring states.

Sovereignty, Security and Territoriality

Decoupling Sovereignty and Territoriality

States have borders. This is part of their definition: a state is a territorially-defined, bounded political unit, a 'bordered power container,'[9] in which 'mutually recognized borders delimit spheres of jurisdiction.'[10] The border is here defined as 'the precise line at which jurisdictions meet, usually demarcated and controlled by customs, police and military personnel.'[11] The border is a *defining* space; it is definitive of sovereignty. The border – in particular, the *perimeter* – delimits the territory over which sovereignty has dominion. It also provides the basis for the classic distinction between interiority (i.e. internal authority, or autonomy) and exteriority (external authority, or independence). These three attributes – territory, autonomy and independence – together comprise what we commonly call sovereignty.[12] Internally, or within a sovereign jurisdiction, the rule of the sovereign is absolute vis-à-vis competing powers. Externally, a sovereign jurisdiction is impermeable, such that other sovereigns recognise the principle of non-interference in each other's affairs. This definition of sovereignty, and especially its external component defines the international state system, formed on the basis

of the mutual sovereign recognition of (formal) juridical equivalence of units. In any internal/external division, the border plays a defining role.

It is immediately clear that the co-bordering described above – i.e. regimes of dual-sovereign management at the border – is deeply destabilising to this classic conception of sovereignty. In particular, it creates a type of sovereignty that is heterogeneous, with joint or overlapping domains over a single territory. Of course, these challenges to sovereignty are familiar.[13] But for the most part, the unity of sovereignty and territory has persisted even in the face of border porosity. As Christopher K. Ansell explains, 'the *organizing principle* of territoriality remains intact.'[14] Arguments about de-territorialised sovereignty in the EU are equally unsatisfying,[15] as the EU 'might be better described as a 'rebundling' of territorialities than an 'un-bundling'.'[16]

The point is that while territoriality is perhaps the most embattled tenet of sovereignty, it has nonetheless largely remained intact through globalisation. After all, even supranational organisations (like the EU) and international organisations (like the UN) are composed of member states that retain territorial authority. But the co-bordering scheme detailed above shows how sovereignty can be *horizontally* overlapping, not merely *vertically* overlapping as we see in most examples of global institutions. To be clear, 'horizontal sovereignty' is not a new concept. We are familiar, for example, with the ''horizontal' or 'nonterritorial' dispersal of sovereign powers over branches of government, agencies.'[17] Yet, this usage of 'horizontal authority' is by definition 'nonterritorial' – it is simply stating that powers are spread across government branches. By contrast, the more radical move suggested here neither entails the spread of power within a state (horizontal) or a higher authority that transcends the state (vertical), but rather a territorial form of horizontality in which there is horizontal overlap *without any corollary vertical extent*. This notion of what we might call *divisible horizontality* is greatly destabilising to the logic of the territorially-ordained Westphalian system, in which external sovereignty cannot be disaggregated.

This question about territoriality and whether it is changing warrants further clarity. Here *territoriality* is understood as the ultimate, indivisible sovereign rule over a particular territory. It must be one-to-one in nature; it cannot be two-to-one or n-to-one. *Territoriality* is at its root a negative conception: it modifies where sovereigns cannot intervene, rather than indicate any particular set of competences internally. On face, at least, co-bordering appears to directly challenge this notion: creating overlapping jurisdictions in which two sovereigns can exercise authority over the same stretch of territory. To determine whether this is meaningful, it is important to disaggregate sovereignty according to its *de jure* and *de facto* components. On a *de jure* level, this critique remains fairly weak. After all, while there may be overlapping controls, in fact the two states remain identifiably discrete. For example, while a territory might have overlapping authorities (two-to-one territorial relations), this does not mean that the jurisdictions themselves are

not clear. In the case of US-Canada, in the borderlands, there are American and Canadian law enforcement officials both with bilateral capacities. However, at no point do the states become mutually unrecognisable. In short, on US soil, Canadian and American law enforcement officials enforce American law – they don't mutually enforce Canadian-American law. Thus, there is still a clear link between law and territory; what appears to have blurred is authority to *enforce* the law and territory.

Scepticism that the types of changes chronicled here will ever amount to a full challenge to *de jure* sovereignty is warranted; however, this conclusion is not foregone. As these institutions take hold and establish a legal basis in national legislatures, they could come to engender a system of legal pluralism in the border zones – i.e. spaces in which more than one legal regime presides over a given territory.[18] At its weakest, such pluralism could mean vertically overlapping legal systems, as is now common in transnational or cosmopolitan law, in which there are potential legal conflicts between types of law. But what is being discussed on these pages is of a different sort: here pluralism refers to overlapping authorities *within* the same type of law (in this case, two equally sovereign states). These trends are inchoate, but there is a lot of momentum towards more robust forms of integrated border management. Indeed, right now Canada and the US are discussing *aligning their laws* in the border areas.[19]

On a *de facto* level, the challenge to sovereignty is considerably stronger – and potentially radical. After all, co-location is already under way: in select sites along the border, a citizen of X can be held to a law enforced both by the officials of X, and of Y. This is a radical departure from classic notions of state power, or the state's ability to control the activities of its own population. While the laws have not changed, decisions are increasingly made in tandem, and infrastructure is being used in tandem. All information being used and generated is under this system shared – a remarkable point in its own right, as such *information cannot be un-learned*. Matters of border security, central to state sovereignty by any measure, are now governed by joint decision making and a great deal of trust.

Certainly, the lack of *de jure* challenges to sovereignty, diminish these *de facto* shifts. But concerns of this sort are overblown, and arise from a penchant for scholars to overstate the legal aspects of sovereignty and understate the political ones: i.e. to emphasise questions of *authority* (and jurisdiction) over *control*. But matters of control are as integral to sovereignty – if a state cannot control its borders, it is not sovereign over them. This point is well established. For example, scholars have variously remarked that 'sovereignty refers not merely to the right to regulate various aspects of life within a territory, but also … *the capacity to exclude other political agents from control of the territory*,' and that 'a state is sovereign if it exercises *effective control* over its territorial boundaries and population through a governing apparatus

able to maintain law and order.'[20] Just as ought implies can, authority implies capacity

Indeed, the main thrust of writings on globalisation detailed how the sovereign state was losing *control*, due to mobilities it could not contain. Malcolm Anderson wrote:

> The policies and practices of governments are constrained by the degree of *de facto* control which they have over the state frontier … The incapacity of governments in the contemporary world to control much of the traffic of persons, goods and information across their frontiers is changing the nature of states.[21]

From Sovereignty to Imperium

How do we understand sovereignty without territoriality? We need a new conceptual vocabulary. Drawing on the idea of *de facto* sovereignty, we might first think of sovereignty not as binary – a state either is or isn't sovereign over a jurisdiction – but rather as *spectral*, with states more or less able to control their territories vis-à-vis neighbouring states. In this way there would be *degrees of sovereignty*. Allen Buchanan makes this point:

> [A common] assumption equates 'state' with 'sovereign political unit,' and then makes the mistake of thinking that sovereignty is an all-or-nothing affair … This is a mistake because there are no such political entities. Sovereignty is a matter of degree … A political unit can have much control over some matters but lesser control over others.[22]

Another way to render sovereignty is *spatial*, such that the sovereign has power over as much space as it has capacity to control (which is not necessarily bounded).

Going a step further, if we take this notion of sovereignty that is *spectral* and *spatial*, we start to see a resemblance between the kind of authority we expect in sovereign states and *imperium* (the basic difference being that the former is territorially bounded and the latter is not). The reason we would not ordinarily describe Rome as sovereign, is because its frontiers were zonal, and thus there could be no clear logic of interiority/exteriority. This bears out in scholarly treatments. By one account, the scope of 'military action' that might fit under the umbrella of *imperium* was broad enough to include any kind of rule or administrations of territories outside the metropole:

> When we come to examine [*imperium*] in a *militiae* context, it is immediately apparent that there is a whole gamut of meanings from the most abstract (that is 'power' with little or no territorial implication) to the most concrete ('empire' in the sense of a sharply delimited area) … When Cicero, his contemporaries, and predecessors used imperium to describe a national or political structure, they had in mind something less well-defined. A similar usage might be found in the English word 'power', which since the eighteenth century has also had the meaning, 'a state or nation from the point of view of its having international authority or influence'.[23]

In this way, *imperium*, refers to a broad sense of power that is not necessarily territorially delimited, and thus the kind of authority that would be projected over swaths of the periphery. This is echoed here: 'The *imperium populi Romani* was the power Romans exercised over other peoples, viewed in its widest sense … If the limits to the *imperium* of a Roman magistrate on the boundaries of Roman power were not strictly defined, this implies that the boundaries of the *imperium Romanum* itself were uncertain'.[24]

A more careful examination of the logic of boundaries in the Roman imperial system is offered below.

Imperium: A Look at Empires and Frontiers

Following Michael Doyle, 'Empires are relationships of political control imposed by some political societies over the effective sovereignty of other political societies.'[25] Empires have frontiers, frequently taken to be *zonal* in nature; by one account, 'the frontier zone is a space of osmotic communication.'[26] While broadly true, this definition masks a great amount of variety and purpose. Was the frontier populated or empty? Was it established for defense or taxation? What kinds of threat did it anticipate? This section unpacks this complicated institution, focusing on Rome. Here I follow, Edward Luttwak's tripartite classification of Roman imperial strategy: the 'Julio-Claudian' system (27 B.C. to 68 A.D.), a period of hegemonic expansion; the 'Antonine' system (70 to 180 A.D.), which focused on territorial security; and the 'Diocletian' system (180 to 305 A.D.), a period of decline.

Caesar Augustus (27 B.C.–14 A.D.) oversaw massive imperial advance, which brought Roman troops out of the centre, and towards the periphery. This was a period of expansion, consolidation of the interior, and the cultivation of client states in the periphery. The frontier in this period was not clearly demarcated. In fact, because of internal troubles, the border was maintained only with small auxiliary units, rather than the larger legions. Far from being placed on the frontier, at this point, the legions were situated on roads between the frontier and the interior as 'mobile striking forces' and were 'not tied down to territorial defense'.[27]

During this window, the central diplomatic means of peripheral management came through the manipulation of the so-called client states that amounted to a soft edge of empire, an 'invisible frontier'.[28] These client states share affinity with what today might be called 'buffer states', but they were more active than this. They granted depth to the frontier, and a cushion against attacks, assuming the burden of incursions until Roman defences could arrive. This is a feature common to most empires. For example, the Chinese empires formed extensive tributary systems to co-opt nomadic

peoples at their frontiers, creating a buffer force against the 'real' barbarians outside:

> The method [of neutralization] that worked best was one of enlisting the services of the very tribes that were supposedly excluded by the boundary, thus turning them about so that they faced away from the boundary instead of toward it.[29]

Broadly, these concepts of the 'invisible frontier' and 'depth' recur in contemporary discussions about co-bordering.

The complexity of frontier management in this period is brought forth in the writings of Machiavelli, who comments in his *Discourses on Livy* on the importance of co-opting the periphery: 'in a new province [the Roman authorities] always sought for some friend who should be to them as a ladder whereby to climb, a door through which to pass, or an instrument wherewith to keep their hold.'[30] In the *Prince*, Machiavelli repeatedly lauds Roman tactics in their outer provinces, as when they 'sent out colonies, indulged the lesser powers without increasing their power, put down the powerful, and did not allow foreign powers to gain reputation there.'[31] Also in the *Prince*, he remarks on Rome's strategy for conquered territories:

> When those states that are acquired … are accustomed to living by their own laws and in liberty, there are three modes for those who want to hold them: first, ruin them; second, go there to live personally; third, let them live by their laws, taking tribute from them and creating within them an oligarchical state which keeps them friendly to you.[32]

Such co-optation is a central aspect of contemporary co-bordering strategies too.

So what can we say about frontiers in this window? Certainly they have both *zonal* and *linear* attributes – although zonal aspects were predominant. This is a direct outgrowth of the Roman notion of territory, which was based more on radii of control emanating from the centre, than a logic of circumference. Rome measured its extent by way of the roads that emanated from the capital. The importance of the road to establishing control is evident in the meaning of the term *limes*, which originally derives from the highway that reaches out from the centre to the periphery. It only later came to embody fortifications along this line:

> [In this early period *limes* referred to the] access road *perpendicular* to the border of secured imperial territory; *limes* thus described a route of penetration cut through hostile territory rather than a 'horizontal' frontier, and certainly not a fortified defensive perimeter … It is the *absence* of a perimeter defense that is the key to the entire system.[33]

The idea of limes being definitive of the extent of the empire, measured by the reach of these roads, accords precisely with our idea of frontiers as zones. Unlike a perimeter – lines of definition – roads represent an extent of control

that reaches as far as it can, but loses strength as it does. Thus, empire fades into its extremity – into a space of non-definition. Otherwise put, there was no sense that the frontier behaved like a container, enclosing the polity within its perimeter. Even where the perimeter was defined it was not continuous, with long swaths of land simply without designation. Being non-continuous made frontiers eminently permeable. Thus, while they had a juridical purpose, distinguishing citizen from non-citizen, there was no expectation of enforcement.

Stemming from this point, asserting frontiers also didn't necessarily mean that the area contained within them was actually under control. By one account, 'control of enclosed areas seems to have been a second-stage of each expansionary thrust … First came the roads and march routes radiating from settled regions, then gradually the fortified lines of enclosure.'[34] That Rome did not define itself by area is unimaginable in the contemporary context – driving home the difference between states as bounded political units, and empires as expansionary ones. This is a common feature of empires. For example, in the Mughal empire, frontiers were not a 'defensive line keeping people out, but lines of communication penetrating deeply into areas beyond direct imperial control.'[35] In this way, empires are not too different from cities. More generally, for most of human history, political units were just walled centres, and long marches of empty land and nominally loyal peoples.[36]

The second period of imperial strategy is the 'Antonine' System, roughly 70 A.D. to 180 A.D. This period was dominated by the principle of territorial security, and it is considered to have given birth to the idea of the 'scientific' frontiers and preclusive defence. This meant having more clearly defined perimeter areas, defended by more stable troops. It also meant the phasing out of the client system – which had become a liability. Weak client states could not contain strong incursions, and strong ones had become a threat to the empire. The solution was to move troops from the interior towards the frontier – towards the ideal of a perfectly rationalised, 'scientific' perimeter:

> The major feature [of this period was] the deliberate choice of optimal regional perimeters, chosen not merely for their tactical and topographical convenience but also for strategic reasons in the broadest sense – in other words, 'scientific' frontiers … Scientific frontiers are designed not to encompass as much territory as possible, but to encompass the *optimal* amount of territory – in other words, the area that it is profitable to enclose on political, economic, or strategic grounds.[37]

The meaning of *limes* also shifted at this point to accommodate the fixed perimeter.

The most famous delineation during this period was Hadrian's Wall, in Britain. But even these frontiers were not strictly linear. They were part of a complicated system, predicated on a thick network of forts and roads, as well as watchtowers and outpost forts, designed to provide surveillance

throughout the whole region. Importantly these posts extended not merely up to the barrier, but past it. In one case, in the *Fossatum Africae* in modern Algeria, 'an outer zone of surveillance' is understood to have extended 'to a depth of sixty to eighty kilometers beyond the border line'.[38] Furthermore, these linear elements were not strictly defensive: when they wanted to launch off beyond the line, they could.

> Putting up one's forts or walls and garrisoning a continuous string of outposts usually has suggested a desire to stabilize acquisitions already made … This seems logical, but the frontiers in fact were often jumping-off lines … Defensive these *limites* may be; nonetheless some military outposts also serve as springboards for further expansion.[39]

Rather than the edge of a container, a more appropriate metaphor for the frontier might be the system of steps on a ladder. With each advance, another rung is added, making the ladder longer. Rome is not alone in these regards; these are common aspects of empire. Indeed, the Great Wall was part of a layered system of defence against nomadic tribes. Like the Romans, the Qin Empire (221–206 BCE) saw the wall as a launching-off point: 'Build and move on was the principle of the wall, not setting up a fixed border for all time.'[40]

Further to this point, even when the *limes* did look like lines, this was based on an elaborate scheme of coordination on both sides. This is most clearly captured in the case where the *limes* were rivers:

> The *limes* are not simple lines of zero width, but areas or zones … The Romans secured the land on both sides of these notional lines: the far banks of rivers or lands beyond fortifications. It was therefore more a case of controlling, rather than preventing, passage. But in this way they were able to force passage through specific sites, and to extract taxes.[41]

As such, even with linear boundaries, Rome settled and performed operations on both sides – precisely what we see with co-bordering today.

In sum, the main purchase of linear defences was to provide a trip-wire to slow down invasion, and enable a thick region of surveillance to better inform the Roman legions. The challenge was to try and resolve the two types of security threats at the frontier – large-scale ones that threatened the centre, and small-scale ones that ravaged the peripheral lands. How do you protect both? By placing linear fortifications within a zonal defence: a preclusive defence against low-intensity threats and mobile forces deployed against high-intensity threats. The main purchase of the new system was that it protected civil security, even in frontier zones. But, the cost of this system is readily apparent – with 'scientific frontiers' came fixed boundaries, after which the possibility of new tax revenue derived from expansion was gone.

The third imperial system was roughly A.D. 180–305. This was a period of extreme vulnerability and conflict. The elastic defences of preceding eras were replaced by defence-in-depth – a purely defensive version of the system

above, incapable of engaging enemies beyond the periphery. The logic behind defence-in-depth is simple: like a spider, ensnare the enemy into your web. The synthesising point is that Roman strategy went from being offensive (forward) to defensive (rearward):

> Meeting only static guardposts and weak patrol forces on the frontier, the enemy could frequently cross the line virtually unopposed, but in the context of defense-in -depth, this no longer meant that the defense system had been 'turned' and overrun. Instead, the enemy would find itself in a peripheral combat zone of varying depth, within which strongholds large and small as well as walled cities, fortified farmhouses, fortified granaries, and fortified refugees would remain … The general character of Roman defense-in-depth strategies was that of a 'rearward' defense, as opposed to the 'forward' defense' characteristic of the earlier frontier strategy. In both, the enemy must ultimately be intercepted, but while forward defense demands that he be intercepted *in advance* of the frontier so that peaceful life may continue unimpaired within, rearward defense provides for his interception only inside imperial territory.[42]

This system was also not without cost. Defence-in-depth was adept militarily, but was a hazard for citizens, especially peripheral ones, as the borderlands became protracted sites of battle. This point is important, as the connection between the defence of some citizens (especially those in the centre) and all citizens is not obvious. Given these problems, where it could, Roman strategy attempted a compromise, with a shallow defence-in-depth, basically a thick border:

> [Diocletian's] goal was to reestablish a *territorial* defense. This defense was certainly not to be *preclusive*, but was to be at least a *shallow* defense-in-depth, in which only the outer frontier zones, not the imperial territory as a whole, would be ordinarily exposed to the ebb and flow of warfare.[43]

This amounted to a system with broad frontier zones that went deep into Roman soil that required new and enduring form of physical infrastructure. This thick, refortified line shares tremendous affinity with the system being designed at the present. Our contemporary model is an attempt once again to merge the purchase of a preclusive frontier (for civilians) and defence-in-depth (for security).

Conclusion

This article offers some conceptual innovations. Regarding sovereignty, we might start thinking not in binary terms, but *spectral* ones, with states more or less able to control their territories vis-à-vis neighbouring states, such that there are areas of joint control, and thus *degrees of sovereignty*. Sovereignty in this rendering would be understood as *spatial*, rather than territorial, as the sovereign has power over as much space as it has capacity to control. A kind of rule that is *spectral* and *spatial*, starts to resemble *imperium*. Increasingly we are trading off the former logic for the latter. Furthermore, we can say

that in all kinds of polities – ancient empires as much as present-day states – linear and zonal attributes of boundary-making contribute to a *frontier-system*. Thus, linear borders are simply *minimal* renderings of the frontier system; built-up borders that extend inland are more *maximal* renderings of the same. In this way, boundaries exist on a continuum, starting from a line (i.e. a boundary with no horizontal extent), or what we call a border, to a wider area, or what we think of as a frontier.

With this in mind, we can look more critically at some of the developments afoot today. As brought forth in the introduction, there has been a shift in consciousness about what the '21st Century Border' should look like, driven by the realisation that in today's world, governments *cannot administer their borders alone*. States increasingly realise that borders must be bilaterally managed and administered – here looking specifically at perimeters – going so far as to co-locate forces on either side of the line, creating a set of *de facto* overlapping jurisdictions. To better contain globalised flows, states have to work together – co-border – paradoxically for the sake of the sovereignty and security of each state independently. Thus, this co-bordering system unfolding globally greatly changes the way we understand borders within the international state system. In this rubric, borders are no longer simply marks of *division* between states but rather spaces of *joint maintenance* (such that borders are still *defining*, but not necessarily *unitary*). In this re-modelling, political borders come to resemble more closely economic and cultural boundaries (and, historically, frontiers); they also reflect the new geo-political realities of globalised mobility. Whereas in previous geo-political eras, states used to be concerned with each other, today they are primarily concerned with the flow of people – frequently a problem that neighbouring states share.

So what does this mean for contemporary geopolitics? It is worth closing with a word of caution. The reworked concept of *imperium* offered here – driven by contemporary borders adopting certain aspects of the frontier – may be benign, but it is not necessarily so. Indeed, if left to its own course, this evolution in bordering practice might foretell great harm, akin to a form of neo-Imperialism with asymmetrical powers dominating their peripheries. Indeed, this potential for asymmetrical domination is clearly present in the case of the US and Mexico, in which co-bordering could easily metastasise into a form of hierarchical rule. Certainly collaborative US-Mexican efforts at stemming the drug war frequently appear to be US-driven policies that Mexico has been bullied into adopting. The same possibilities exist on the EU external frontier with Africa. For example, the cooperation between Italy and Libya, has led to the scorn of the United Nations High Commission of Refugees (UNHCR) due to collaboration between Italian and Libyan forces that have led to forced re-foulements at sea.

We should take these developments with cautious eyes, lest new securitised borders become neo-Imperial spaces in which states use their power to dominate migrants, and strong states overwhelm weak ones. It is up to scholars and policymakers to ensure that new borders become areas of human rights protection and power-sharing, rather than a return to more coercive aspects of empire.

Notes

1. See, for example, Kenichi Ohmae, *The End of the Nation State: The Rise of Regional Economies* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks 1995); Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Malden: Blackwell 2000); Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (New York: Columbia University Press 1998).
2. Peter Andreas, 'The Mexicanization of the Us-Canada Border: Asymmetric Interdependence in a Changing Security Context', *International Journal* 60/2 (2008) pp. 449–62; Didier Bigo, 'Frontier Controls in the European Union: Who is in Control?', in Didier Bigo and Elspeth Guild (eds.), *Controlling Frontiers: Free Movement into and within Europe* (Chippenham: Ashgate Publishing Company 2005) pp. 49–99; Barry Buzan, and Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009).
3. Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Zone Books 2010).
4. See, for example, Matthew Longo, *The Politics of Borders: Sovereignty, Security, and the Citizen after 9/11* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2017) and Matthew Longo, 'A 21st Century Border? Cooperative Border Controls in the US and EU after 9/11', *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 31/2 (2016) pp. 187–202. Other accounts include Christina Boswell, 'Migration Control in Europe after 9/11: Explaining the Absence of Securitization', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 45/3 (2007) pp. 589–610; Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, 'Introduction: Borders, Borderlands, and Porosity', in Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly (ed.), *Borderlands: Comparing Border Security in North America and Europe* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press 2007) pp. 1–17; Sarah Leonard, 'The Creation of Frontex and the Politics of Institutionalisation in the EU External Borders Policy', *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 5/3 (2009) pp. 371–88; Andrew W. Neal, 'Securitization and Risk at the EU Border: The Origins of Frontex', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 47/2 (2009) pp. 333–56.
5. Borders are multifaceted spaces – for example, they contain both perimeters and ports of entry – thus to refer to them monolithically is imprecise. Given space constraints, this article looks only at perimeters (with a focus on land perimeters), although many of the same points can be extended to ports as well.
6. Nelson Balido, 2012, 'Investing in Our Ability to Compete in a Global Economy', Remarks by Balido, President, Border Trade Alliance. Border Management Conference & Technology Expo, El Paso, Texas, 16 Oct.; Ralph Basham, 'Perspectives on Border Security: Past, Present, Future', Remarks by Basham, Former Head of CBP, Border Security Expo, Phoenix, AZ, 13 March 2013.
7. Gary M. Shiffman, 'Patrolling the Border: The New National Strategy', Remarks by Shiffman, former CBP Chief of Staff, Managing Director, Chertoff Group. Counter Terror Expo Conference, Washington DC, 16 May 2012.
8. In this sense, spectral is taken to mean a gradation between two poles, akin to a 'left-right' spectrum in politics (as opposed to a range or set of categorical distinctions, like

a spectrum of colors). The two 'poles' in this context would be neighboring countries, with gradations of heterogeneous control between the two. Such a sovereignty is also 'gradual' in that it captures the intersection of two sovereignties that diminish at their mutually overlapping peripheries. However, I prefer the term spectral, as it signifies a graduated differentiation between X and Y, whereas gradual indicates a scale of X. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing the concept of gradual sovereignty to my attention.

9. Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence: Volume Two of a Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1987) p. 120.
10. Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994) p. 35.
11. Malcolm Anderson, *Frontiers: Territory and State Formation in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1996) p. 9.
12. For a definition of *territory*, see Allen Buchanan and Margaret Moore, 'The Making and Unmaking of Boundaries: What Liberalism Has to Say', in Allen Buchanan and Margaret Moore (eds.), *States, Nations, and Borders: The Ethics of Making Boundaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003) pp. 232–33. For a definition of internal/external sovereignty, see Eric Cavallero, 'Global Federative Democracy', *Metaphilosophy* 40/1 (2009) pp. 43–64.
13. John Gerard Ruggie, 'Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations', *International Organization* 47/1 (1993) pp. 139–74; Stephen D. Krasner, 'Problematic Sovereignty', in Stephen D. Krasner (ed.), *Problematic Sovereignty: Contested Rules and Political Possibilities* (New York: Columbia University Press 2001), pp. 1–23.
14. Christopher K. Ansell, 'Territoriality, Authority and Democracy', in Christopher K. Ansell and Giuseppe Di Palma (eds.), *Restructuring Territoriality: Europe and the United States Compared* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2004) pp. 225–45.
15. While there is indeed supra-national sovereign control, the basic units of that sovereign order are still territorially defined member states. As Di Palma explains: 'Even a strong regional regime is not a regime that thereby marginalizes states … even as it builds its institutions, a regional regime may continue to rely on the authenticity conferred by member states as these share jurisdictions with and within the regime … the logic of territoriality, while significantly repositioned, is not easily discarded.' Giuseppe Di Palma, 'Postscript: What Inefficient History and Malleable Practices Say About Nation-States and Supranational Democracy When Territoriality Is No Longer Exclusive', in *Restructuring Territoriality*, p. 259.
16. Christopher K. Ansell, 'Restructuring Authority and Territoriality', in *Restructuring Territoriality* (note 14) p. 5.
17. Cavallero, 'Global Federative Democracy', p. 45.
18. See, e.g., Neil Walker, 'Beyond Boundary Disputes and Basic Grids: Mapping the Global Disorder of Normative Orders', *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 6/3–4 (2008) pp. 378–96.
19. Warren Coons, 'Cooperative Efforts between Mexico, Canada and the U.S. in Law Enforcement and Prosecution', Remarks by Coons, Superintendent of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Border Security Expo, Phoenix, AZ, 6 March 2012.
20. Allen Buchanan and Margaret Moore, 'Introduction: The Making and Unmaking of Boundaries', in *States, Nations, and Borders* (note 28) p. 28, italics mine.
21. Anderson, *Frontiers* (note 11) p. 2.

22. Buchanan and Moore, 'The Making and Unmaking of Boundaries' (note 20) p. 236.
23. J. S. Richardson, 'Imperium Romanum: Empire and the Language of Power', *The Journal of Roman Studies* 81 (1991) pp. 1–9.
24. Andrew Lintott, 'What Was the 'Imperium Romanum?' *Greece & Rome* 28/1 (1981) pp. 53–67.
25. Michael Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1986) p. 19.
26. Charles S. Maier, 'Once Within Borders: The Space of Empires and the Space of States', Talk delivered at Yale University.
27. Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century A.D. to the Third* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson 1976) pp. 18.
28. Ibid., p. 19.
29. Owen Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (Boston: Beacon Press 1951 [1940]) pp. 245–46.
30. Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, translated by Ninian Hill (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2007 [1531]) [II:I], p. 151.
31. Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1996 [1513]), [III] p. 12.
32. Ibid., [V] p. 20.
33. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* (note 27) p. 19.
34. Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and its Predecessors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2006) pp. 85–6.
35. Jos Gommans, cited in Maier, *Among Empires* (note 34) p. 92.
36. James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2009) p. 8.
37. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* (note 27) pp. 86–8.
38. Ibid., p. 66.
39. Maier, *Among Empires* (note 34) pp. 84–5.
40. Jane Burbank, and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) pp. 43–5.
41. Stuart Elden, *The Birth of Territory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2013) pp. 88–9, 92.
42. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* (note 27) p. 132, 136.
43. Ibid., pp. 176–8.