

# ***Thinking Through Pre-emptive Security: Catastrophe, Imagination, Temporality, Affect\****

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**Abstract:** Beginning with the basic proposition that the pre-emptive turn in the governance of security poses significant challenges for established analytical frameworks, this paper develops an in-depth critical reading of the pre-emptive sovereign security decision. Several conceptual claims are interwoven throughout this account. Firstly, it is asserted that, by de-linking the sovereign decision from established fact, pre-emptive security greatly empowers what is termed the 'sovereign imagination', thus conferring upon sovereign authorities an enhanced degree of arbitrary decisional subjectivity. Secondly, it is argued that the pre-emptive security decision manipulates political time and inscribes its own political temporality characterized by both a re-articulation of the relationship between present and future, and a compression of the decisional moment leading to an evacuation of deliberation in favour of gut feeling. This highlights the need to begin to take the question of time seriously in theorizing the governance of security. The third key argument emphasizes the importance of affect to the pre-emptive security decision by illustrating that the latter's focus on the future and reliance on the imagination replaces verifiable knowledge with the play of affect as the informational/evidentiary basis for the decision. Greater attention must thus also be paid to affect in the analysis of contemporary security issues and practices. The paper then moves on to consider some further consequences of the rise of pre-emptive security - namely, the facilitation of 'exceptional' sovereign practices, the evacuation of democratic debate from security governance, and the re-articulation of the very meaning of the idea of security as a condition that is always to-come - and concludes with a brief consideration of how some of the more pernicious aspects of the rise of pre-emption might be discursively resisted.

**Keywords:** Pre-emption; Temporality; Affect; Security; Imagination; Sovereignty

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“Everything is happening as though the future could no longer be imagined except as the memory of a disaster which we only have a foreboding of right now.”  
--*Marc Augé*

“Nothing is so wretched or foolish as to anticipate misfortunes. What madness it is to be expecting evil before it comes.”  
--*Seneca*

### ***Introduction: The Securitized Future and Emergence of Pre-emption***

In the post-9/11 era, the governmental logics of global security have taken a decidedly temporal turn. The rise of risk-based tactics, technologies, and strategies of security in the wake of the proclamation of a global War on Terror has reconfigured the temporal orientation of security practices, fixing the sovereign gaze firmly upon an indefinite and potentially catastrophic future in apparently urgent need of taming through pre-emptive intervention in the present. In a way, this shift can be understood to have fundamentally challenged the cacophonous post-Cold War debates concerning appropriate spatio-material “referent objects” of security (Buzan *et al.* 1998, Krause & Williams 1997) by inscribing the *future itself* as that which must be secured above all else. Indeed, from the Bush Administration’s now (in)famous declaration that allowing threats to “fully materialize” is to have “waited too long” (Ehrenberg *et al.* 2010: 66), through the emergence of such exceptional practices as indefinite detention (Butler 2006, Ericson 2008), extraordinary rendition (Mutimer 2007), and extrajudicial assassination (Kessler & Werner 2008) deployed against individuals merely *suspected* of ties to terrorism, to the widespread freezing of mobile monies only *speculated* to be destined for use in the financing of terrorist activity (de Goede 2008b, forthcoming), the exercise of sovereign power in the current global security moment is increasingly concerned with taking pre-emptive interventionary action in the present for the purpose of staving off a catastrophic irruption in the indefinite future. The emerging aim of security governance is thus, as Didier Bigo puts it, to “police the future by anticipation” so as to bring about a “future perfect” liberated from the ominous spectre of always-imminent catastrophe (Bigo 2007: 31). The conceptual lens through which the idea of security is understood has thus been, for lack of a better term, ‘temporalized,’ as this ideally imagined future is inscribed as the *telos* of sovereign action in the name of security, while the present is cast in instrumental terms as the site of the interventions that constitute this action. Thus, in a political epoch infused with what Paul Virilio (2010: 7) has termed “a culture of the imminence of disaster,” it appears that, to use the language of the Copenhagen school, it is the future that has been securitized. Accordingly, the concomitant rise of risk-based, anticipatory governmental rationalities legitimated under the banner of an ongoing War on Terror has led one commentator to aptly refer to the contemporary global security climate as a “state of pre-emption” (Ericson 2008: 57).

While Foucault may have presciently anticipated this turn with his claim that the very concept of security is ultimately concerned with “the temporal and the uncertain” [*l’aléatoire*] (2007: 20), the swift rise of risk and pre-emption as arguably the dominant security logic of the past decade represents a drastic shift in the theory and practice of security governance. In particular, the emergence of pre-emption has led to significant changes in the way sovereign power is deployed in pursuit of security, thus posing a number of challenges to established understandings with which scholars must come to terms. As such, any critical theoretical engagement with pre-emptive security requires a rethinking of the nature of the sovereign security decision, since the deployment of sovereign power emanates precisely from this political moment. As with all acts of sovereignty, the security decision is necessarily imbued with a degree of purely arbitrary decisionism (Butler 2006, Suganami 2007); but the key point here is that this is especially so in the case of pre-emptive security, since the context in

which it operates—characterized by joint narratives of radical contingency and imminent catastrophe (Dillon 2008: 315; Aradau & van Munster 2008: 23)—ensures that the decision is both divorced from established knowledge and verifiable fact, and invariably “taken beyond the realm of certainty” (Aradau & van Munster 2008: 32). The pre-emptive security decision is thus best understood as an “ungrounded, arbitrary attempt to subdue the contingency of the future” that is explicitly rooted in the realm of the speculative and the imaginary (*Ibid.*; see also de Goede 2008a; Salter 2008). In this regard, it constitutes a theoretically unique political act, conferring upon the sovereign decider an enhanced degree of decisional subjectivity, and thus deviating markedly from entrenched assumptions about rational decision-making that underpin conventional understandings of security governance.

What these points suggest, is that the current primacy of pre-emption raises important questions relating to the governmental mechanisms and logics underpinning the contemporary security climate. Accordingly, this conceptually exploratory paper asks after these questions by critically unpacking the pre-emptive security decision with a view to revealing precisely how the emergence of pre-emption as a dominant security technology requires that we rethink what we take seriously in theorizing the governance of security in the contemporary context. Put differently, I am broadly interested in asking after what is at stake epistemically with the rise of pre-emption; and in so doing, I will also seek to illustrate how a critical reading of what can be called the pre-emptive sovereign security decision can serve to highlight some important theoretical points in this regard.

In particular, I am interested in advancing three lines of argument here. The first builds upon several recent interventions into theorizing risk and pre-emption in the context of international security (see Aradau & van Munster 2007; de Goede 2008a; Salter 2008), and argues that the rise of pre-emptive security highlights the crucial importance of what I will term the *sovereign imagination* to the governance of security in the current moment. Here, the aim is to illustrate how the uncertain context of the pre-emptive decision prioritizes the imaginary, or the “virtual”, over the “actual” (Anderson 2010: 785; Dillon 2008: 314), and thus confers upon the decider a higher degree of arbitrary decisional subjectivity than under other governmental logics. The remaining two arguments build upon this claim, and highlight two conceptual areas that require greater analytical attention in light of the emergence of pre-emptive security. The second claim asserts that, with the rise of pre-emption, we must take seriously the question of *temporality*, specifically with regard to how particular articulations of time are crucial to politics of pre-emption. The argument here will be that the pre-emptive security decision is ultimately a temporal operation, as it fundamentally seeks to “act on time” (Massumi 2005a: 5). Moreover, it will be shown that the logic of pre-emption actively manipulates political time and inscribes its own particular temporality that is characterized by immediacy and compression, and that challenges the relationship between present and future presumed by conventional temporal narratives based on a linear conception of time. Relatedly, the third line of argument contends that that the centrality of pre-emption requires that we also take seriously the role of *affect* as a significant factor in the governmental framework of contemporary global security. This claim will be based upon my reading of the pre-emptive decision, and will highlight how, at its core, this decision is inherently non-rational, and is instead rooted in fundamentally affective knowledges and ‘gut feelings’ created by the sovereign decider in the context of the interaction of the sovereign imagination with the aforementioned temporal manipulations.

These claims will be elucidated through a detailed critical reading of the logic of the pre-emptive security decision, and this will constitute the bulk of the remainder of the paper. As should be clear, the primary arguments I hope to make are conceptual in nature, relating to how the rise of pre-emption requires that we rethink what we take seriously when theorizing both the nature of the sovereign security decision in particular, and thus the governance of security more generally. However, following the theoretical account of the pre-emptive decision, I will conclude by building upon the insights developed therein and offering some further reflections on the broader implications of the pre-emptive turn. In particular, I will explore how, in light of the arguments presented, three additional

implications can be seen to follow the rise of pre-emptive security and its unique decisional rationality: first, that pre-emption explicitly facilitates the emergence of practices and circumstances commensurate with the Agambenian state of exception; second, that the affective and temporal elements of the pre-emptive decision diminish the power of democratic forces in the governance of security through processes of de-politicization; and third, that the emergence of pre-emption fundamentally changes what the idea of ‘security’ itself can mean and how it can be conceptualized, with potentially radical implications for theorizing the fluid relationship between sovereignty, security and subjectivity in the current moment. Prior to engaging with all of these questions, however, it merits briefly clarifying precisely what I mean when speaking of the ‘pre-emptive sovereign security decision’—a rather unwieldy term to be sure. The next section will thus offer a brief explanation in this vein, emphasizing the importance of the sovereign imagination to the logic of pre-emptive security.

### ***Anticipation and Imagination: What is/of the Pre-emptive Sovereign Security Decision?***

In political terms, the concept of pre-emption has been articulated in myriad ways that differ in important respects depending upon the particular context in which it is being deployed—be it from a juridical (Dershowitz 2006), national security policy (Ehrenberg *et al.* 2010), criminological (Ericson 2007, Aradau & van Munster 2009), or environmental (Haller 2002) perspective. As a detailed survey of the various definitional nuances of the term and their respective practical iterations is well beyond this paper’s scope, this section will be limited to developing an account of what pre-emption—and, in particular, the political decisionality underlying it—has meant within the context of the temporally inflected, future-oriented security discourse that has emerged with the advent of the War on Terror.

In this regard, the pre-emptive security decision can be most succinctly understood as a sovereign decision taken in the face of perceived radical uncertainty, and that is explicitly concerned with confronting and governing the potentially pernicious effects of that uncertainty. It is precisely this epistemology of “objective uncertainty” (Massumi 2005: 8), particularly as regards the future, that provides the fundamental basis for the pre-emptive decision, since the spectre of potential catastrophe implied thereby provides the political impetus to take action regardless of knowledge levels. Importantly, it is immaterial whether the catastrophic irruption against which the subsequent pre-emptive intervention is to be taken will in fact occur, as it is the mere *potential* of future catastrophe that provides the normative foundation for pre-emptive action. The decisional rationality under the logic of pre-emption thus differs markedly from other logics of political decision-making—such as the more conventional logics of cost-benefit analysis and rational calculation (Sunstein 2007), but also from seemingly related logics such as deterrence and prevention (Massumi 2007)—since, in contrast to pre-emption, these all assume at least some degree of certainty with regard to the substantive concerns animating the decision. This is not to imply that such approaches require complete knowledge and/or total certainty, or that this is even possible in the realm of social relations; rather, the point is to emphasize that these decisional logics are nevertheless congruent with conventional ideas about logical/inductive reasoning based on the use of established, verified knowledge to develop assumptions about future potentialities with a greater or lesser degree of confidence or certainty. As will become apparent, this contrasts markedly with the logic of pre-emption, which takes radical *uncertainty* precisely as its departure point, requiring the decider to actively create the informational basis for the decision through the play of imagination.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, this location of objective uncertainty at the core of the pre-emptive decision renders it unique in the radicality of its speculative nature, as the catastrophic futures against which it is framed possess no ontological presence apart from their existence in the realm of the imagination. It is thus not

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<sup>2</sup> Brian Massumi provides an excellent typological account of the differences between deterrence, prevention, and pre-emption which highlights precisely these points. See Massumi 2007: 3-8.

established or verified empirical fact that forms the basis of the decision under the logic of pre-emption, but potentially radically speculative articulations of potential future catastrophe. As Aradau and van Munster put it, “[w]hat counts is a coherent scenario of catastrophic risk and an imaginary description of the future” (2007: 106; see also de Goede, forthcoming: 112). Accordingly, the pre-emptive decision taken in the context of potentially catastrophic uncertainty is effectively severed from knowledge, enacting a purer decisionism reminiscent of the so-called precautionary principle made familiar by theories of environmental governance (Aradau & van Munster 2007: 105; Ewald 2002). The result is that material evidentiary circumscriptions of the decisional process are diminished considerably, as the sovereign decider is encouraged, or even compelled, “to take into account doubtful hypotheses and simple suspicions...to take the most far-fetched forecasts seriously”, since the Cartesian “malicious demon” of catastrophe could emerge at any time and in any form (Ewald 2002: 288). By placing radical uncertainty at the core of the decision, therefore, the logic of pre-emption creates a governmental climate in which decision-makers are obliged to “break free from the tyranny of the plausible” (Kessler & Daase 2008: 225), since the ultimate aim is to assert control over the contingent future by ensuring that a seemingly imminent catastrophic event—which always remains inherently unknowable—does not, in fact, come to pass (Anderson 2010b: 228).

This brief account of the logical essence of the pre-emptive security decision highlights two key points that lay the foundation for the arguments developed in the subsequent sections. The first is that the pre-emptive security decision ought to be understood as a fundamentally temporal political operation, as it rearticulates the relationship between present and future by prioritizing the security of the latter, which is to be pursued through anticipatory intervention in the former. Pre-emption thus attempts to “act on the future” (Massumi 2005a: 4), and in so doing assert some agentic control over the contingencies of time’s flow in a manner reminiscent of Machiavelli’s *virtuous* prince’s seduction of *fortuna* (Machiavelli 1995: 76). As will be seen below—when the relationship of pre-emptive security to the question of time is taken up in greater detail—the temporalities of pre-emption imply significant changes in the way we ought to understand the governance of security in the current moment, particularly as regards conceptions of the relationship between present and future.

The second point suggested here is that the emergence of pre-emption necessarily shifts the primary basis of the security decision from the realm of empirically verifiable facticity to the realm of the imagination (Anderson 2010b: 228; de Goede & Randalls 2009: 868; Amoore & de Goede 2008: 11; de Goede 2008a: 156; Aradau & van Munster 2008: 31). As Mark Salter puts it, “[t]he logic of pre-emption prioritizes the power of imagination over the power of fact—suspicions over evidence” (2008: 243). Of course, given the logic of pre-emption’s fixation of the sovereign gaze firmly upon the open future, this ought not to be surprising, since, as RAND nuclear strategist and prominent futurist Hermann Kahn has noted, “[i]magination has always been one of the principal means for dealing in various ways with the future” (1962: 145). Yet the primacy of imagination has a particularly transformative effect on the political logics of sovereign activity in a security climate characterized by a combination of perceived radical uncertainty and apparently imminent catastrophe, and in which mitigatory action is thus seen to be required. Indeed, what emerges is a condition in which the severity of the imagined catastrophe, rather than the actual likelihood of its emergence, serves as the baseline for sovereign decision-making within the realm of security. Potentially violent sovereign interventions are thus authorized and legitimated primarily on the basis of imaginary constructions of the catastrophic future, thus “endow[ing] our suspicions, fears, and panics with an active force,” regardless of their connection to verifiable data or evidence as ostensibly required by the prevailing politico-judicial norms of liberal democracy (Cooper 2006: 125). The result is that, as former Bush Administration counter-terrorism ‘czar’ Richard Clarke put it, “those with the darkest imaginations become the most powerful” (quoted in Ericson 2008: 61; see Clarke 2004).

The governance of security in accordance with the logic of pre-emption thus inherently relies upon a “prolific imagination,” since any attendant sovereign decision cannot, by definition, be made

without invoking an imaginary catastrophic rendering of the future against which present interventions can be framed, legitimated, and enacted (de Goede & Randalls 2009: 868). Put differently, the imagination is not merely an active element in the pre-emptive sovereign decision—indeed, given that there are individual human subjects behind *every* sovereign decision, imagination necessarily plays some role in all exercises of sovereign power. Rather, imagination is the absolutely vital element of the decision, as pre-emption simply cannot function as a governmental rationality without placing its exercise at the forefront. In short, the pre-emptive sovereign security decision ultimately turns on the exercise of the imagination, and the imagination is the fundamentally constitutive element of the decision. It therefore makes sense to speak of what I have termed the *sovereign imagination* in the context of pre-emptive security, since it is imaginary constructions of the catastrophic future that fill the knowledge void which invariably plagues attempts to act on the future. The imagination thus directly and primarily informs *all* decisions concerning the pre-emptive exercise of sovereign power, as the ultimate capacity to decide—the defining trait of the practice of sovereignty—is necessarily channelled through the exercise of the imagination. Under the political logic of pre-emption, sovereignty in fact necessarily requires such a creative act in order to be operationalized in terms of practical interventions, since these interventions are conceptualized and legitimated in reference to a catastrophic irruption that has not, and in fact may never, take place, and which exists only in a future imagined by the sovereign decider. Accordingly, recognizing the primacy of pre-emption in the contemporary governance of security must also entail a parallel recognition of the emergent primacy of the sovereign imagination with regard to the decisional rationality that underpins it.

As with the temporal aspects of pre-emptive security discussed briefly above, the vital importance of the realm of the imaginary thereto raises a set of challenges for understanding the nature of security governance in the contemporary context. In particular, by highlighting the radical subjectivity of the sovereign decision due to its severance from the circumscriptions of facticity and its emphasis on speculative constructions of a catastrophic future, the primacy of the sovereign imagination hints at the importance of affect to the governmental rationality of pre-emption. These points will become clearer in the next section, as I seek to develop a detailed critical account of the pre-emptive sovereign security decision, paying particular attention to the importance of temporality and affect—as well as the contextual relationship between them—to its operational logic.

### ***Unpacking Pre-emption: Temporality, Affect, Security***

#### *I – The Time of Pre-emption*

Melinda Cooper concisely articulates the core of the logic of pre-emption as it pertains to decision-making in the face of radical uncertainty and apparently imminent catastrophe: “It exhorts us to respond to what we suspect without being able to discern; to prepare for the emergent long before we can predict how and when it will be actualized; to counter the unknowable before it is even realized” (2006: 120). Perhaps the most obvious characteristic of this political rationality is its highly temporal orientation, as its concern is to exert control over the vicissitudes of time by governing the future in accordance with a particular discourse of security based on an imagined imminent catastrophe. Its normative premise is thus inherently temporal, and pre-emption must accordingly be understood to be acting “on time” (Massumi 2005a: 5). Yet a more careful reading suggests that the logic of pre-emption is more specifically characterized by its futurity. Indeed, it is clear both from Cooper’s articulation and from the account I have developed thus far that the focus of pre-emption is inexorably fixated on the open, indefinite future, while its aim is to govern the latter’s potentially catastrophic contingency through appropriate interventions in the present. Thus, rather than simply acting on time, pre-emption is perhaps better understood be acting “on the future” (Massumi 2005a: 4).

By focusing its active capacity on the future, however, pre-emption radically reconfigures the temporal relationships underlying the governance of security. It does so by enacting a political temporality in which the future is prioritized—both in terms of the creation of knowledge on the basis of which security decisions are made, and in terms of the temporal location of the desired outcomes of those decisions. The logic of pre-emption thus shifts the temporal orientation of the sovereign decision from what Massumi terms a “past-present axis”—where the existence of past data and established knowledge about the present permits inductive reasoning about the likelihood of future events and thus enables preventative planning—to a “present-future axis”—whereby the spectre of an unknowable catastrophic future severs the sovereign decision from established fact and roots it in potentially unlimited speculative imaginings concerning the time, place, and extent of the irruption (see Massumi 2005a: 4). The key temporal relationship is thus between the present and future—but this relationship is (re)articulated in such a way that the future is prioritized over the present, and the present is construed in instrumental terms as the temporal location of the pre-emptive interventions required to adequately secure the future.

This broader point becomes clearer when we think through in more detail the specific temporal mechanisms at play in the pre-emptive security decision. Massumi’s (2007, 2005a, 2005b) reading of the politics of pre-emption is instructive in this regard, as he discusses how *potential* catastrophes located in the future can nevertheless be mobilized through a degree of temporal manipulation to produce *actual* consequences in the present. This idea is best described as the “presence of the future” (Anderson 2010a: 783), in that the pre-emptive decision “brings the future into the present...mak[ing] present the future consequences of an eventuality that may or may not occur” (Massumi 2005a: 8). The key point is that, under the logic of pre-emption, a future irruption that may never actually occur—and regardless, has no ontological presence outside the sovereign imagination—nonetheless enacts very real consequences in the present through the interventions that follow from the pre-emptive security decision. Thus, the actual future occurrence of the catastrophic irruption is irrelevant, since the pre-emptive decision grants it causal and/or constitutive power in the present by casting it as the basis for disruptive sovereign interventions. As Massumi puts it, “the [catastrophic] event is an eventuality that may or may not occur, but *does nevertheless in effect*” (2005a: 9, my emphasis). In other words, while the catastrophe remains always *virtual* and located in the indefinite future, the pre-emptive decision ensures that it nevertheless enacts very *actual* effects in the present—it occurs “in effect.” Under the logic of pre-emption, the catastrophe is thus both present and absent. It exists only in the realm of the imagination, but yet also brings into being very real material consequences (Anderson 2010a: 783).

These points make clear the peculiar temporality of pre-emption, as the relationship between present and future is rewritten in an important way. In this regard, the conventional narrative of time as a linear unfolding—whereby the arrow of time flows from the past through the present and into the future, with causal relationships following the same direction—is challenged, such that the yet-to-come, imaginary future is granted what amounts to causal power vis-à-vis the present. The conventional logic of cause-effect relationships congruent with a linear temporality is thus destabilized, as the future catastrophic event engenders effects in the present without yet having happened. Pre-emption thus creates something of a “time-slip” (Massumi 2005b: 36), whereby the future, and any imagined catastrophes speculatively located therein, are “in effect” made present. As such, under the logic of pre-emption, the catastrophic event can be best understood as “transtemporal” (*Ibid.*), since the pre-emptive decision confers upon it an effective presence in both the imagined future and the lived present. By enacting a temporality in which the imagined future is able to directly create material consequences in the present, the logic of pre-emption thus ruptures with prevailing temporal narratives based on linear continuity. It reinscribes its own alternative temporality, in which political cause-effect relationships deviate from the strictures of temporal linearity by, in a sense, reversing the causal arrow such that it doubles back against the arrow of time.

Moreover, it is crucial to understand that it is the pre-emptive decision itself—taken on the basis of the sovereign imagination—that actively creates the time-slip which confers upon the future event this transtemporal causality. In other words, under the logic of pre-emption, the imagined consequences of a future catastrophic event generate tangible effects in the present, but do so “under conditions of the sovereign’s choosing” (Anderson 2007: 159). It is the sovereign decider that ultimately determines both *which* catastrophic irruption will be taken as the basis for intervention—i.e. which imagined future will be secured against—and *how* that imagined event is to be mitigated through present intervention—i.e. what actions are to be taken as a pre-emptive response. The act of the pre-emptive decision thus actively constructs, on the basis of the sovereign imagination, both the catalytic cause and its ultimately tangible effects, therefore exercising a significant degree of control over the political temporalities of security governance and demonstrating the extreme decisional subjectivity inherent in the logic of pre-emption.

To further clarify these points through an illustrative example, consider briefly the case of the American decision for war in Iraq.<sup>3</sup> In this case, Bush Administration officials imaginarily constructed a catastrophic future in which Saddam Hussein’s Iraq had covertly achieved WMD capability that became verified fact only when the “smoking gun” came in the form of a “mushroom cloud” (Ehrenberg *et al.*: 552). The sovereign decision was thus made to intervene pre-emptively so as to condition the future in a manner that eliminated this potentiality. This decision inscribed that imagined event as a causal force in the present, enacting tangible consequences in the form of a military incursion. Through this process, the virtual future was made present and actual action was taken in anticipatory response; and this occurred entirely on the terms of the sovereign authority, whose decision was fundamentally rooted in its own imagination of a catastrophic future. Time itself was thus actively manipulated by the pre-emptive decision to invade, and the sovereign imagination was at the core of this process, highlighting the enhanced subjectivity of the sovereign decider.

While this the most well-known example of pre-emption, the processes of temporal manipulation inherent to that decision are also present at the core of the myriad acts of pre-emptive security that characterize the contemporary War on Terror, from the decision to indefinitely detain a suspected terrorist (Ericson 2008, Mutimer 2007), to the choice to freeze mobile capital suspected to be headed to a terrorist organization (de Goede, forthcoming). As such, appreciating the centrality of this sovereign temporal re-ordering to the logic pre-emptive security is crucial to understanding the governance of global security in the current moment. And it also highlights the broader importance of taking the question of temporality seriously when theorizing this and related issues.

## *II – The Political Time of Pre-emption*

In developing a comprehensive account of the pre-emptive security decision, it must not merely be demonstrated that such temporal manipulations are at the core of pre-emptive security conceptually; it is also crucial to ask after precisely how this process is made possible politically. In other words, the political mechanisms that render these temporally manipulative practices effective in their legitimation of pre-emptive interventions must be interrogated. Thinking through this question will reveal further insights regarding the political temporality of pre-emptive security, and will also hint at the importance

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<sup>3</sup> While I have chosen to use this example for illustrative purposes in this largely conceptual paper, it is important to note that the type of pre-emptive security decision-making I am discussing here is by no means limited to the idiosyncratic doctrine of conventional inter-state war developed by the Bush Administration. Indeed, while the Iraq case is certainly the most well-known exemplar of this approach to security—and thus provides a clear frame through which to demonstrate my points in this section—the logic of pre-emption has become arguably the dominant security rationality within the broader context of the War on Terror, and is applied in multiple guises in an equally wide range of circumstances (see Ehrenberg *et al.* 2010; Amoore & de Goede 2008). As such, the conceptual points I am exploring here are, I believe, applicable to analyzing the nature of decisions made in any and all such cases.

of affect to the logic of pre-emption—a point which will be taken up in greater depth in the next portion of the paper.

To begin to adequately address these issues, it is useful to consider the temporality of pre-emption in the context of Philip Fisher's typology of temporal spaces developed in *The Vehement Passions* (2002). Of particular relevance is his distinction between what he terms the "imminent future" and the "indefinite" or "abstract future", and their respective relationships to the present (Fisher 2002: 79). Fisher's typology is rooted in his thesis that it is the operation of the passions that fundamentally informs our perception and understanding of time (*Ibid.*: 78). Accordingly, for Fisher, the abstract future is restricted to the realm of the imagination, as it is too far removed from our existence in the present for any certainty to obtain as to what precisely it holds. As such, the passions are not operative on its imagined contents, because there is no sense of urgency regarding its potentialities that would generate the imperative to act immediately to mitigate an impending irruption (*Ibid.*: 78, 81). The imminent future, by contrast, constitutes the about-to-be-realized, and is defined precisely by the operation of the passions. In this temporal space, our perception of the impending becomes actionable, since, even if we remain somewhat uncertain as to the precise details of what is about to occur, we feel affectively compelled to take appropriate action due to its temporal proximity to the present (*Ibid.*: 78, 86). Fisher summarizes this distinction with reference to the affect of fear:<sup>4</sup> "A possible harm located in the indefinite [abstract] future cannot be the subject of fear, but it is precisely fear that tells us where the indefinite future leaves off and the imminent, or definite, future begins" (*Ibid.*: 78). In other words, the imaginary, abstract future is not seen to be actionable in the present, since we are unaffected by a sense of urgency about it due to the lack of any significant affective relationship we have to its potentialities. The imminent future, however, is defined by the fact that we *do* experience an affective reaction to its potentialities. We are thus impelled to act in response to its imminence, rendering it and its potentialities politically actionable in the present.

To return to the question of pre-emption, then, the latter's temporalities can be mapped on to Fisher's typology to provide a clearer, account of both what the pre-emptive decision entails conceptually, and how it operates politically. In this regard, under Fisher's framework, the future catastrophe that provides the impetus for pre-emptive action initially inhabits the *abstract* future, as its existence is confined to the sovereign imagination. Fisher's account suggests that, under normal conditions and conventional decisional logics, this renders it largely inactionable in the present, since it cannot be apprehended with adequate certainty to render it capable of generating adequate affective resonance to precipitate responsive action. However, the adoption of pre-emption as a decisional rationality actively transports the imagined catastrophe from the abstract future and the realm of the imagination into the imminent future and the realm of the passions. The catastrophic irruption—which is nevertheless still inherently imaginary and entirely virtual—is thus rearticulated as an imminent threat that could emerge at any time; and the uncertainty regarding its emergence is transformed from a barrier to action into the core basis for it, as the combination of uncertainty and seemingly imminent catastrophe affectively induces a political response. Sovereign decision-makers are thus impelled to take action which, given the event's continued virtuality, must be pre-emptive in nature. Exceptional

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that fear is by no means the only affective response capable of triggering the impetus for political action, even in relation to the question of security. For instance, a more amorphous affect of general anxiety wrought by the uncertainty of the impending future could act as the trigger, as could an affect of desire relating to the urge to bring into being one particular iteration of the future in lieu of another. Indeed, it is most likely that a combination of affective responses and resonances, unique to each circumstance, coalesces to generate the impetus to act in response to the about-to-become, thus demarcating the imminent future and rendering it politically actionable. The specificities of this question are beyond my present concern, however, as the point here is merely to emphasize how the play of affect, broadly conceived, is crucial to the political temporality of pre-emptive security. Moreover, this caveat to avoid seeing the intersection of affect and security as solely related to fear applies to the subsequent section, where the importance of affect to the logic of pre-emption will be discussed in greater detail.

speculative interventions by sovereign power, determined on the basis of decisions divorced from fact and rooted in the imagination, are thus politically legitimated, as they constitute the only type of action available under such conditions. It is this temporal sleight-of-hand—which transports the catastrophe from the abstract future of mere imagination to the imminent future of urgency and affective resonance—that enables the pre-emptive decision to ‘make the future present’ in the manner discussed in the previous section. This process lays the legitimative foundation for anticipatory interventions, and is therefore crucial to politically operationalizing of the logic of pre-emption. The manipulation of time in this way is thus a core component of pre-emptive politics, highlighting once more the importance of taking temporal questions seriously when theorizing the governance of security in the current pre-emptive moment.

In addition to illustrating the nature and degree of the temporal manipulation that is inherent in the politics of pre-emption, however, the application of Fisher’s framework also highlights two further aspects of pre-emption that must be adequately reckoned with if a comprehensive understanding of what is epistemically at stake with the turn to pre-emption is to be achieved. Firstly, the reading developed here begins to demonstrate the importance of affect to pre-emptive security. This point will be taken up at greater length in the next subsection; however it is worth briefly considering here. In this regard, what Fisher’s framework shows, is that the imagined future catastrophe only becomes actionable when it is transported into the imminent future, which is itself defined explicitly as the temporal space where affective responses constitute the most important decisional catalysts (Fisher 2002: 72). The temporal manipulations of the logic of pre-emption thus unite the imaginary with the affective, placing an imagined catastrophe into the temporal realm of imminence, and thus rendering it capable of triggering affective responses which, in turn, compel decision-makers to take mitigatory, pre-emptive action. The play of affect is therefore crucial to precipitating the pre-emptive decision. It transforms the imagined catastrophe into a radically imminent threat requiring a response, thus rendering it explicitly politically actionable; and since the event’s enduring uncertainty requires that this response be speculative and anticipatory, a pre-emptive sovereign decision is what follows. Put most simply, reading pre-emption in terms of Fisher’s temporal framework illustrates that it is the play of affect that in fact activates the pre-emptive decision. This point alone implies that affect must be taken seriously in theorizing the governance of (pre-emptive) security; although the next section will further this claim by showing that the role of affect is key not only to precipitating the pre-emptive security decision, but also to the logical mechanics of the decision itself.

Prior to turning to that discussion, however, we must consider the second additional aspect of the pre-emptive decision highlighted by considering its logic in terms of Fisher’s temporal typology—an aspect that might best be termed temporal compression. In this regard, the affectively induced urgency of the decisional moment affirms the necessity not simply of taking action, but of doing so as soon as possible. Not only must we act, but we must act *now*, since the imagined catastrophe could materialize at any moment. The collection and weighing of verified evidence and a subsequent lengthy, reasoned, democratic deliberation about the appropriate course of action is thus precluded, since there is *no time* to do so under the logic of pre-emption. Indeed, every moment spent deliberating as to the proper response to the apparently imminent catastrophe is a moment in which the catastrophe could emerge. The logic of pre-emption is thus characterised by “a collapse in time, contemplative time to be exact” (Elmer & Opel 2008: 14). As a consequence, the pre-emptive decision, to use Massumi’s phrase, “strikes like lightning” (2005a: 5), as the perceived imminence of catastrophe ensures that it is inevitably taken in a compressed political time devoid of any serious deliberative activity.<sup>5</sup> Sheldon Wolin reminds us that all politics—which presumably includes decision-making regarding security

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<sup>5</sup> Of course, it is possible that this is ultimately a rather moot point, since, as will be recalled from earlier in the paper, it is perhaps unlikely that any reasoned deliberation would change the outcome, due to the necessary severing of the pre-emptive decision from the facts and established knowledge that would ostensibly inform such deliberation.

concerns—necessarily “takes time” (Wolin 1997); however, in the context of the pre-emptive decision, the apparent imminence of catastrophe and the attendant impetus to act now supersedes this requirement, implying that “the elixir of speed” (Falk 2010: 255) is more important to preventing the cataclysm than an adequately politicized, deliberatively reasoned conclusion about appropriate action.<sup>6</sup> The perpetual spectre of imminent catastrophe thus ensures that the political timescape of the pre-emptive decision is severely compressed; and this development can have potentially profound implications for those against whom such decisions are directed.

With regard to this latter point, the July 2005 shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes is tragically instructive, as this incident provides a stark illustration of the potential consequences of pre-emptive security’s compressed political temporality. In frenzied aftermath of the 7/7 London bombings, de Menezes, a Brazilian electrician, was erroneously believed to be a prospective suicide bomber and was pre-emptively shot several times in the head in accordance the London Metropolitan Police’s “Kratos” shoot-to-kill anti-terror policy (see Vaughn-Williams 2007, Taylor 2006).<sup>7</sup> On the day of the shooting, a suicide attack was perceived to be imminent, and so interventionary action aimed at pre-empting the threat was immediately authorized under the Kratos guidelines. de Menezes’ life was ended by this deployment of sovereign power because, believing an attack to be imminent, the shooters did not take the time to assess the circumstances, and instead undertook a pre-emptive strike based on an imagined imminent future in which de Menezes *had* detonated a bomb on the Tube. That the temporal compression of pre-emptive security and the resultant “lack of time” given to de Menezes was at the core of this incident is made starkly clear by the words of his cousin, who, when interviewed after de Menezes’ death, asserted that “[t]hey judged my cousin and sentenced him, all in the space of a moment” (quoted in Vaughn-Williams 2007: 187). The logic of pre-emption was clearly operative in this case; and the temporal compression inherent therein is highlighted by the fact that de Menezes was denied adequate time to demonstrate his innocence by the fact that the shooters felt impelled to make a ‘lightning decision’ to shoot to kill. As Vaughn-Williams aptly puts it, “time was quite literally ‘taken away’ from him” (2007: 187). The temporal compression that animates the logic of the pre-emptive decision—as tragically demonstrated by the de Menezes case—thus constitutes a further way in which pre-emption acts on time, as the pre-emptive decision enacts a unique political temporality precisely because the time of the decision is compressed and the decider does not, or perhaps cannot, ‘take time.’

### *III – Affect and the Pre-emptive Decision*

The de Menezes shooting also illustrates an implication of this temporal compression that once more brings us back to the importance of affect, providing a useful segue into discussing the importance of the latter in greater depth. In this regard, the shooting can be seen to show not only that pre-emptive decisions are made quickly and devoid of deliberation, but also that they are made on the basis of fundamentally non-rational “gut feelings” (de Goede, forthcoming: 125; Elmer & Opel 2008: 14). Indeed, confronted with the apparent imminence of catastrophe and thus deprived of the time to adequately collect and consider the evidence, it is reasonable to surmise that the officers chose to shoot to kill based on little other than the *feeling* that an attack was in the offing—a feeling undoubtedly at least partially attributable to the still-fresh memory of the recently executed 7/7 bombings.<sup>8</sup> Elmer and

<sup>6</sup> The compression inherent in pre-emption’s political temporality is intimately related to the de-politicization of security governance that has accompanied the rise of pre-emptive strategies. This point will be discussed further below.

<sup>7</sup> This policy authorized armed officers to fire at the heads of suspected suicide bombers without warning if the detonation of a bomb was perceived to be imminent by the senior agent on the scene. The rationale behind the policy is based on the aim of neutralizing the threat without accidentally detonating an explosive device located on the suspect’s person. See Taylor 2006.

<sup>8</sup> This last point highlights the importance of questions of memory and trauma to the affective temporalities of security practices. While I have chosen to bracket out this line of theorizing in this paper—largely due to space constraints—it is

Opel emphasize that “gut instinct” emerges as the primary basis for the sovereign decision “in the absence of either time to contemplate decisions or adequate intelligence and research on which decisions are based” (2008: 14). And the account developed in this paper has shown that such conditions by definition constitute the context for all pre-emptive security decisions, including those which led to the death of Jean Charles de Menezes.

The importance of ‘gut feeling’ or ‘instinct’ to the pre-emptive decision thus perhaps most clearly illustrates the latter’s reliance on the play of affect. The preceding section briefly discussed how affective responses to the logic of pre-emption’s temporal manipulations were crucial to precipitating the pre-emptive decision; however, as is implied by the centrality of ‘gut feelings’ in such instances, affect can also be seen to operate within the decisional logic itself. Indeed, affective resonances do not only enable the catastrophic future to be made present, thus mobilizing pre-emptive sovereign interventions; they also ultimately provide the informational basis for these interventions. Massumi’s concept of the “affective fact” usefully captures the key point here (see Massumi 2005a: 7-8). In the context of pre-emption, the affective fact can be understood as the ‘knowledge’ produced by the sovereign decider through the affective resonances triggered by both the temporal manipulations that cast the imagined catastrophe as imminent, and the decider’s gut feelings regarding what action must be taken in response. It is the collection of affects that coalesces within the decider and serves as the lens through which to view the perceived threat, ultimately providing an epistemic platform upon which to base a decision regarding the proper course of action. The affective fact is thus actively created by the sovereign decider; but, more importantly, it serves as the ‘factual’ basis for the ultimate decision. Since it is inevitably rooted in the realm of the imagination, pre-emptive governance is blighted by “the decline of the empirical fact,” and as such, it is the affective fact that replaces it as a legitimate form of knowledge upon which sovereign security decisions can be based (Massumi 2005a: 7). The affective fact is thus vital to the pre-emptive decision, since it fills the epistemological void created by both the de-linking of the decision from empirical fact, and the lack of time for deliberation about appropriate courses of action—both of which are part and parcel of the logic of pre-emption (*Ibid.*). The importance of affect to pre-emptive security thus becomes clear, as the informational basis for sovereign decisions made in the context of pre-emption must ultimately be derived from what William Connolly terms the “visceral register,” specifically by way of affective facts informed by gut feelings and imagined futures (Connolly 2002: 130).

Moreover, the centrality of affect to the pre-emptive decision further emphasizes the enhanced decisional subjectivity of the sovereign decider in the context of pre-emption that was considered earlier. In this regard, the present discussion has shown that, not only is the sovereign imagination central to identifying the potential future catastrophe and constructing it as imminent, but it is the sovereign decider’s affective responses to these conditions that construct the ‘facts’ on which the security decision is ultimately based. The subjective will of the sovereign decider is thus radically present throughout all political processes involved in the logic of pre-emption. In other words, not only does the sovereign make the ultimate decision regarding pre-emptive intervention, but the conditions under which the decision is taken *and* the knowledge on whose basis the decision is made are also produced by the sovereign’s subjectivity. Indeed, since all is speculative and anticipatory, there can be little material circumscription on the pre-emptive decision, as all evidence either remains confined to the perpetually potential future of the sovereign imagination, or is explicitly a product of processes enacted by that imagination, taking the form of affective facts. The logic of pre-emption thus creates a political authority whose power constitutes an extreme iteration of the Schmittian/Agambenian exceptional sovereign (Agamben 2005; Schmitt 2006; Suganami 2007). Its decisions embody a potential for arbitrariness beyond those arrived at under more conventional decisional logics, since the

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still crucial to recognize that the affective resonances operating within the logic of pre-emption are inevitably conditioned by memoraic traces of traumatic experience. On this issue, see in particular Zehfuss 2003 and Edkins 2002.

sovereign not only makes the final decision, but does so on terms of its choosing and based on knowledge and facts largely of its own creation.

These points are perhaps best captured by Judith Butler's analysis of the importance of the act of "deeming" to the operation of sovereign power in the current pre-emptive moment—an act she links to her better-known concept of the "petty sovereign" (Butler 2006: 56-60; see also de Goede, forthcoming: 172-3). Referring specifically to the indefinite detention of "suspected" terrorists—itsself an archetypical act of pre-emptive security (Ericson 2008)—Butler highlights how, under the logic of pre-emption, an actor endowed with sovereign power needs merely to "deem" an individual or group to be "dangerous" to trigger such a violent intervention by sovereign power as indefinite detention (Butler 2006: 76). Based on Butler's account, the act of deeming dangerous and the subsequent decision to detain can be understood as an exemplar of the pre-emptive sovereign security decision in action. In this regard, the act of deeming is not circumscribed by any evidentiary restrictions, since the "dangerousness" of s/he who is deemed so exists only in the particular future imagined by the deemer—an agent granted the capacity to make a sovereign decision (*Ibid*). As such, the sovereign decider's gut feelings, developed in the course of interactions with the deemed subject, provide the key source of knowledge for the decision to deem. When this process is combined with the more general narrative of imminent catastrophe enacted by the temporal manipulations of the prevailing logic of pre-emption, a set of affective facts are created that ultimately suggest the necessity of exceptional anticipatory intervention.

The exceptionally arbitrary power of the sovereign decider within the context of pre-emptive security is thus made clear in the act of deeming dangerous: on the one hand, this act is grounded in circumstances, knowledges, and 'facts' that are the creation of the sovereign decider, as they emerge from the interplay between the sovereign imagination of future catastrophe and affective responses thereto; on the other hand, the decision taken on this basis is profoundly powerful, as it can have drastic implications for the deemed individual. Indeed, under pre-emption, this individual is potentially rendered subject to violent interventions whose extrajudiciality is enabled by the location of all 'evidence' in the realm of the imagination—the makeup of which is, we should recall, determined by the sovereign decider. Accordingly, as Butler puts it, the logic of pre-emptive security confers upon the latter "an extraordinary power over life and death" (*Ibid.*: 59).<sup>9</sup>

For present purposes, the upshot of Butler's analysis is that such "extraordinary" power as is characteristic of the practice of sovereignty under the logic of pre-emptive security is derived in large part from the play of affect in particular, and the primacy of the sovereign imagination in general. The act of "deeming dangerous"—a type of sovereign decision that is crucial to the contemporary governance of terrorism—provides perhaps the best example of the pre-emptive security decision in this regard. It highlights the importance of affective knowledges and facts, derived primarily from 'gut feelings,' to the decisional process, and also emphasizes the radical degree of arbitrary subjectivity that the pre-emptive decision confers upon the sovereign decider—regardless of whether this actor is a titular executive, a military commander, a mid-level bureaucrat, a border guard, or otherwise.

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<sup>9</sup> Butler's account also importantly demonstrates that, in practice, the pre-emptive exercise of sovereign power in the name of security confers the status of sovereign decider upon myriad political actors beyond the executive branches of government. Indeed, the new sovereignty of the War on Terror—or, as Butler puts it, "sovereignty in the midst of governmentality"—is characterized by the proliferation of such "petty sovereigns", operating under the auspices of legitimate governmental authorities but "delegated with the power to render unilateral decisions" that are ultimately accountable to no legal or political authority beyond themselves (Butler 2006: 56, 59). This decentralization of the sovereign decision also has significant implications for theorizing the governance of security; however, it does not directly relate to the key point of this section relating to the importance of affect to the pre-emptive security decision and thus will not be discussed further.

A more implicit theme in Butler's analysis, however, is the novelty of a security order defined by such characteristics; and this point resonates strongly with the underlying themes of both this section and the paper more generally. With respect to this question, I have attempted to show, by way of a critical interrogation of the logic of the pre-emptive security decision, that the latter constitutes a new and unique type of political act whose rise as a dominant security technology within the context of the War on Terror demands a reorientation of our analytical frameworks in a way that takes the importance of affect and questions of temporality more seriously. Indeed, the pre-emptive security decision cannot be properly understood without doing so, since, as has been illustrated, it is a fundamentally temporal operation that is necessarily dependent on speculative knowledges derived in large part from the play of affect. As such, these two elements ought to be understood as fundamentally co-constitutive of the pre-emptive decision, since the temporal manipulations at its core are only converted into interventionary action through the affective resonances they produce in conjunction with the sovereign imagination of an imminently catastrophic future. A comprehensive conceptual understanding of pre-emptive security must recognize this; and arriving at such an understanding is a crucial requirement for developing critical responses to a contemporary security regime based on a securitized future whose practical implications appear to include the normalization of exceptional irruptions of sovereign power—a fact tragically demonstrated by the death of Jean Charles de Menezes. Building upon this last point, then, I will offer in the final section some further reflections on the implications of the anticipatory turn in the governance of security that can be extrapolated from the account of the pre-emptive decision developed here. I will then conclude with a brief consideration of how some of their more pernicious elements might begin to be mitigated and/or resisted.

### ***Further Reflections on the Implications of the Pre-emptive Turn***

To recapitulate briefly, the principle aims of this paper thus far have been twofold. Firstly, I have attempted to contribute to the growing body of scholarship concerned with theorizing the rise of risk-based, pre-emptive security practices by developing an in-depth critical reading of the logic of pre-emption more generally, and the pre-emptive sovereign security decision more specifically. In so doing, I sought to fulfil the second aim, which was to demonstrate that the pre-emptive turn in post-9/11 security governance poses significant challenges for students of international security, and in particular requires a reorientation of existing analytical frameworks that grants greater theoretical attention to questions of time and the role of affect. In this regard, the arguments developed here have highlighted the vital centrality of both components to the logic of pre-emptive security, indicating that any conceptual understanding thereof that does not take concerns about temporality and affect quite seriously risks overlooking crucial components of the governmental logics that animate the contemporary global security climate. As some of the work cited in this paper attests, these imperatives have already begun to be taken up by (critical) security studies scholars; however, I hope the preceding arguments have illustrated that it would be to the detriment of our understanding of global security governance if the recent rediscovery of temporality (Jarvis 2009, Hutchings 2008) and the nascent affective turn (Ross 2006) in International Relations were to fade away as merely two of the latest “fads” to which, as Susan Strange rightly warned us, the discipline of IR is all too susceptible (Strange 1982). Indeed, so long as the risk-based, pre-emptive governmental framework of the War on Terror continues to characterize the international security climate, the necessity of analyzing the latter through conceptual lenses focusing on these two elements will only increase.

However, the theoretical importance of time and affect is certainly not the only conceptual conclusion that can be drawn from the account of the logic of pre-emption and its attendant decisional rationality that has been developed in this paper. At this point, therefore, it is worthwhile to reflect briefly upon three additional, and perhaps broader, consequences of the pre-emptive turn that can be

extrapolated from the arguments developed above, and which also have serious implications for the way the governance of security can and ought to be understood in the current moment.

The first of these is the degree to which the emergence of pre-emption as a dominant security rationality has significantly enabled the proliferation of practices and techniques of governance commensurate with Agamben's concept of the state of exception (Agamben 2005). While this point has been made by a number of scholars (see, in particular, Aradau & van Munster 2009; Amoores 2008; Ericson 2008), it merits emphasizing in light of the arguments presented in this paper that the emergence of many of the exceptional practices pointed to by critical scholars of the War on Terror is directly traceable to the logic of pre-emption itself. Consider in this regard that arguably the central characteristic of the Agambenian exception is the suspension of the established juridical order, such that the rule of law is supplanted by the arbitrary rule of sovereign power (Agamben 2005). It is clear from the above account that this is a necessary effect of pre-emptive security, as the immanent futurity of the logic of pre-emption ensures that sovereign decisions are necessarily divorced from established knowledge and verifiable fact and reliant instead upon imaginations and gut feelings, thus circumventing established judicial procedures based on the collection and evaluation of evidence prior to rendering a (potentially life-and-death) decision (Aradau & van Munster 2007: 106). Under the logic of pre-emption, therefore, the power to adjudicate an individual's guilt or innocence—and thus to subject her or him to potentially lethal interventions—is necessarily transferred from the mechanisms of the juridical order to the whim of the sovereign decider. Butler's concept of "deeming", as discussed in the preceding section, captures this well, as it illustrates that established judicial channels are incapable of accommodating the type future-oriented security decisions that are putatively required in an environment of potentially imminent catastrophe. The result is a downloading of this prerogative to the (petty) sovereign, and the suspension of the established juridical order by default—at least in cases where the idea of 'security' is invoked. In other words, since the catastrophic 'harm' that a suspect is 'deemed' to be threatening remains confined to the open future, imagined speculation and affectively mediated gut feelings on the part of the decider can trump any lack of verifiable evidence when the pre-emptive decision is made.

Pre-emptive security thus brings into being the type of pure, arbitrary decisionism associated with the logic of the exception, in which the juridical order is suspended and a largely uncircumscribed life-and-death power is vested in the sovereign (Aradau & van Munster 2008: 32). That such undeniably 'exceptional' practices as indefinite detention, extraordinary rendition, and targeted killing have been embraced by ostensibly liberal democratic regimes in the name of pre-emptive security is a testament to the affinities between the logic pre-emption and the logic of the exception. As such, commentators and analysts concerned with highlighting the exceptional nature of the War on Terror must remain attuned to the degree to which the emergence of pre-emption as a dominant security logic is at the core of the very practices that animate these concerns.

A second broader consequence of pre-emptive security that can be extrapolated from the account developed here is the emergence of a depoliticizing impetus that significantly curbs the influence of democratic deliberative forces on the governance of security. In this regard, the points made in this paper relating to the narrative of imminence that underpins pre-emptive security and the related account of the "lightning decision" are of particular import, as they make clear that the political space for democratic deliberation regarding the governance of security is diminished by the adoption of a pre-emptive rationality. Specifically, there are two related ways in which this is the case. Firstly, under the rationality of pre-emptive security, any debate as to whether or not to act is all but pre-ordained, as the narrative of imminent catastrophe that characterizes the logic of pre-emption implies that action *must* be taken, regardless of the prevailing uncertainty. Under such circumstances, "there is little need for public deliberation and debate," since the potential imminence of catastrophe suggests that there is no alternative but to act now (Elmer & Opel 2006: 479).

Secondly, the radical uncertainty against which this imperative emerges unavoidably locates the basis for the ultimate decision regarding what precisely is to be done in the realm of the sovereign imagination. This vests in the sovereign decider(s) a radical decisional subjectivity, rendering the prospect of democratic deliberation ultimately irrelevant, since the informational basis that frames the terms of the decision consists of imagined futures and affective facts that are necessarily of the sovereign's own construction. Once again, the façade of (inter)national debate in the lead-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq is perhaps the best illustration of these dual, anti-democratic aspects of pre-emptive security (see Ehrenberg *et al.* 2010: *passim*; Kessler & Daase 2008: 226); although it merits emphasizing once more that such de-politicization is to a significant degree inherent in the logic of pre-emption itself rather than limited to the decisions behind that one particular case. Accordingly, critical interventions must remain cognizant of this process of democratic closure, while also recognizing that it is at least as much a structural result of the logic of pre-emptive security as it is a specific effect of the idiosyncratic policy decision(s) of a particular governmental authority.

The third, and potentially most far-reaching implication of the rise of pre-emption that I want to address returns to the discussion with which the paper opened, as it relates to the changing meaning of the idea of security itself. Recall the suggestion at the outset that the introduction of the logic of pre-emption into the realm of security governance reframed the tired post-Cold War discussion about the proper referent object(s) of security in a decidedly temporal way, inscribing the future itself as that which must be secured and casting the present in instrumental terms as the temporal space in which the political interventions toward this end are to be undertaken. Building on this idea, the arguments developed in this paper suggests a deeper shift in the meaning of security than the mere temporalization of its referent object. In this regard, it appears that, under the logic of pre-emption, the idea of security—when understood as an ontological state of being—can, in fact, *only* apply to Bigo's imagined "future perfect" toward which present interventions are oriented. Indeed, under the temporality of pre-emption, the lived present is perpetually haunted by the spectre of imminent catastrophe, and thus characterized by immanent *insecurity*. Security is thus always, to borrow from Derrida (2005), "to-come", as the fully secured existential space exists only in the ideally imagined future that serves as the normative counterpoint to the future of catastrophic devastation. Any sense of ontological security in the present is thus necessarily anticipatory, as it is derived from the (dubious) promise of a future free of the spectre of imminent catastrophe, but that is, paradoxically, always to come. Paul Virilio has aptly referred to this altered meaning of security brought about by the pre-emptive turn as "the passive security of probabilist anticipation"—passive precisely because it is only found in the anticipatory promise of a future that may never arrive (Virilio 2010: 32).

The upshot is that the emergence of pre-emption appears to have transformed the very idea of security into something of "an empty concept," since its identification with the future in this way seems to imply that "as much as we strive for it, it appears to be an unreachable ideal" (Kessler & Daase 2008: 214). Pre-emption's fixation on the future thus not only orients political action toward perpetually mitigating the potentially imminent catastrophe implied by the future's contingent openness; it also renders the purported ends of this action—namely, "security" as such—somewhat aporetic, as it locates their realization in a temporal space that is always to-come. This in turn allows the lived present to be perpetually cast in instrumental terms as the space of pre-emptive (exceptional) sovereign intervention, thus transforming the exception into the everyday norm, and radically altering the political relationship between security and subjectivity.

This all suggests that the pre-emptive turn has introduced a radically new articulation of the concept of security into the discursive framework within which the governance of global security takes place. Critical scholars must remain sensitive to what is at stake as a result, particularly with regard to the ever-changing relationships between security and political subjectivity in the current global political moment.

### ***Conclusion: A Way Forward?***

In this paper, I have been primarily concerned with developing conceptual arguments with the aim of better informing further explicitly critical work; however, the normative implication that both the decisional exigencies of pre-emptive security and the consequences of its emergence as a dominant security rationality are inherently problematic has been interwoven throughout the presented arguments. It is thus fitting to close with a brief reflection upon how these problems might be overcome by way of a discursive strategy to reorient understandings of security once again. The departure point for such a strategy would necessarily be the recognition, and, more importantly, *acceptance* of the inherent vulnerability of existence in the current moment (on this idea, see de Goede & Randalls 2009: 867; Fireke 2007: 203). Such an orientation would weaken the political strength of Virilio's "culture of the imminence of disaster" by curbing the apparent necessity to act in the face of uncertainty and potential catastrophe. Indeed, by accepting vulnerability as an inexorable element of modern life, the impetus to seek ontological security by eliminating this precarity through active intervention would be diminished. Accordingly, the affective resonances that pre-emption's temporal manipulations enact by moving the imagined catastrophe into the imminent future would be calmed, thus reducing the need to take immediate action despite a lack of established knowledge. With this decline of the political salience of the narrative of imminence, the apparent need for pre-emptive intervention that would inevitably take the form of an affectively mediated lightning decision divorced from fact and based on gut feelings would be severely curbed. This would limit the conditions that enable the enhanced decisional subjectivity of the sovereign decider, thus opening up space for the reintroduction of material evidentiary circumscriptions on the sovereign security decision with a view toward curbing the excesses of sovereign power inherent in pre-emptive interventions.

Such a reorientation of the politics of security would therefore go some way toward mitigating some of the more pernicious consequences that have been identified in this paper. Most markedly, it would ease the temporal compression that plagues the circumstance of the pre-emptive security decision, as the diminution of the narrative of imminence would permit the decider to 'take more time.' This would decrease the need to rely solely on imagination and gut feeling, while also potentially reducing the possibility of grievous errors such as those that resulted in the de Menezes shooting. Moreover, this elimination of the exigencies of temporal compression could in turn contribute to a *re-politicization* of the governance of security, since the temporal necessity of taking immediate action would be lessened, thus delegitimizing its use as a tactic of political closure and opening up space for the reinvigoration of deliberation in the context of security governance. The radical decisional subjectivity vested in the sovereign by pre-emption could then perhaps begin to be challenged by greater democratic demand for decisional input.

Finally, such changes would also have direct implications for the problem of the exception. The decline of the narrative of imminence and the need for immediate pre-emptive action would begin to challenge the discourse of the exceptional moment, thus ensuring that the established juridical channels based on the collection and analysis of verifiable (rather than imagined/affective) evidence could no longer be arbitrarily circumvented solely in the name of necessary expedience. Moreover, the potential reintroduction of democratic deliberation into the governance of security would permit greater contestation of such exceptional practices by critical voices. While this would not necessarily succeed in limiting exceptional sovereign practices, it would nevertheless go some way toward furthering their delegitimation.

Thus, while the contemporary global security climate can still be rightly termed a "state of pre-emption," a discursive strategy that begins with the acceptance of the inherent vulnerability of life in the current moment—and thus resists the impetus to eliminate that vulnerability by attempting to govern and control the future—can lay the foundation for rolling back some of the more pernicious practices that characterize it.

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