

## Mapping September 11, 2001: Cartographic Narrative in the Print Media

The attacks of September 11, 2001 on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were unprecedented in scope if not in their fundamental nature. While the United States moved toward resurrection of Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, known popularly as "Star Wars", and focused its resources on sophisticated weaponry, terrorists with primitive weapons turned commercial aircraft into guided missiles. The suddenness and enormity of the events, coupled with the fact that so many people were acquainted with victims of the attacks, created a sense of concern and confusion that was more pervasive and ubiquitous than evoked by either the 1993 bombing of the Trade Center or the 1995 attack on the Murrah Federal Building. In the immediate aftermath, the events of September 11 attracted the sympathies of the entire country, evoked both an outpouring of patriotism and a rhetoric of retribution, and temporarily redefined task saliencies (Wright, 1978) as firefighters and law enforcement officers became heroes of the moment.

The media also assumed a heightened level of importance as people turned to television, the Internet, and print for information and for insight and meaning. On September 11, the *New York Times* recorded over 21 million page views on their site, more than twice the previous record, and a six-month circulation audit by the *Times* following September 11 showed daily gains of approximately 42,000 newspapers (Robinson, 2002). Since the number of maps appearing in the media has grown rapidly with the advent of desktop computing and electronic publishing technologies (Monmonier, 1989; 2001), it is not surprising that much of the story of September 11 has been illustrated with maps. At the very least, these maps offer distinctive insights that help define both the events and the public reaction, but a paradigm shift that emphasizes their textual nature suggests that in addition to illustrating the attacks and the subsequent events, maps cast their own narratives of these events. Our purpose here is to explore these narratives through a systematic examination of maps that appeared in the print media in the period immediately following September 11.

### MAPS, MEDIA, POLITICS AND PERCEPTION

Until recently, maps were most often regarded as objective, scientific documents: mirrors of reality to borrow a familiar metaphor (Harley, 1989; Edney, 1993; Thrower, 1996). But with the emergence of critical theory in cartography, there no longer can be any doubt that maps are propositional, that every map is an argument, and that maps shape our "realities" in the same way those realities are influenced by conventional text (Harley 1988; 1989).

In this regard, the influence of popular periodicals in shaping perspectives and points of view has been convincingly demonstrated. Lutz and Collins (1993), for example, explored the impact of *National Geographic* with special emphasis on the publication's photographic

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content. Because, as Sontag (1977:4) noted, "Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality ...", photographs are profoundly effective in purveying a particular world view. Photographs and maps are different, to be sure, yet as visual forms they may share more similarities than differences, and with digital technologies, the distinction between map and photograph has become blurred. Add to this the fact that contemporary society has become increasingly if not dominantly visual, and the impact of *National Geographic's* photographic reportage in shaping worldview is even more significant.

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Moreover, the combined influence of artistic images, photographs, maps, and text almost certainly has a synergistic effect. Schulten (2001) constructs a compelling argument that the American view of the world – "the geographical imagination", in Schulten's words – in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the collective construct of inexpensive and widely available maps, school atlases, and *National Geographic* magazine.

With an even larger circulation than *National Geographic*, *Readers' Digest* defined the parameters of the cold war for a substantial segment of the American population and in so doing, demonstrated the ability of the print media to define the Other (Sharp, 2000). Similarly, in a comparative content analysis of newspaper reports on Bosnia and Rwanda, Myers, Klak, and Koehl (1996) demonstrated effectively how both rhetoric and maps were used to Other not only Rwanda but, by conflating the entire continent, all of Africa. And defining the Other, of course, is essential in establishing self-identity and as corollary, in promoting nationalism and patriotism.

The structuring if not the very construction of nationalism is dependent on cartographic representation (Anderson, 1991) to the point that it is imperative to ask if nationalism can exist without the map. Maps have been indispensable in efforts to foment nationalism (Herb, 1997) and to assert national hegemony (Edney, 1997). The map was the primary instrument in the creation of both the modern nation of Thailand and in articulating the nation's territory or "geo-body" (Thongchai, 1994). And if the Israeli nation was not created cartographically, then surely the territory was appropriated and consolidated with maps, while those same maps were used to expunge completely the Arab presence (Benvenisti, 2000).

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Perhaps because maps often serve as an icon for state unity and control, the focus in assessing the relation between maps and nationalism most frequently has been on the map as a significant instrument in exercising state hegemony, a form of power knowledge. But in exploring cartographic representations of Mother India, Ramaswamy (2001) offers a convincing argument that geographic perceptions, and the promotion of nationalism, in particular, can originate spontaneously in sources that are not controlled by the state. In a similar vein, Sparke (1998) offered an example of what he referred to as contrapuntal cartographies in which contrasting cartographic voices both reflect and effect views that are quite different yet in some ways complementary. While there can be no doubt that the map historically has been and remains an essential arbiter of political power (Harley, 1989; 1994), it is important to recognize a more subtle reciprocity of sorts in which the map can promote nationalism or state hegemony yet at the same time interrogate the underlying assumptions.

The recursive character of the map more generally – the map as both an agent-shaping viewpoint and simultaneously an expression of viewpoint – is especially worthy of attention in exploring the media maps

that appeared in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. For while these maps help define and articulate the events thereby molding perception of the situation, these very same maps promote particular perspectives and beliefs and values. Of special interest in the case of September 11 is the dynamic of this circularity: the rapidity with which perspectives and beliefs and values shifted in the immediate aftermath. In some sense then, media maps are a nexus of cartography, geographic self-image, and world image.

#### MAPS IN THE NEWS

In an effort to better understand the reaction to events of September 11 in general and the significance of media maps both in shaping and reflecting the American viewpoint in the weeks that followed, we examined all the maps that appeared in two major newspapers and three news magazines from September 11 through October 15, 2001. The *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* were selected for their stature as major national newspapers. At the same time, because these two papers represent different regions and are acknowledged to have different editorial perspectives, they may provide some insight into the relative unity or diversity of responses politically and geographically.

Based on the assumption that weekly news magazines have time to be somewhat more contemplative and less hurried in their reporting, we also examined the maps in four issues each of *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report* that were published during the same 35-day period. Due in part to greater lead time, the maps in the newsweeklies often tend toward more elaborate compositions that are designed not only to draw the reader into the story but to tell the story graphically and cartographically (Ohlsson, 1988).

While there is a set of objects that nearly everyone would agree is maps, arriving at a formal definition of a map is considerably more difficult (Vasiliev, et al. 1990). The challenge of articulating a working definition is further confounded by growth of electronic print media and consequent melding of artistic renderings, photographs, and satellite imagery with maps. Although it does not provide for unequivocal distinction of what is and is not a map, we are partial to the definition offered by Harley and Woodward (1987, xvi) for its breadth and inclusiveness: "Maps are graphic representations that facilitate a spatial understanding of things, concepts, conditions, processes or events in the human world." Accordingly, in this study, we include conventional maps, satellite images, and cartoons that include maps. We also include what we refer to as map images, i.e. map outlines or figures that are used decoratively or for iconographic purposes.

During the five-week period of the study, a total of 193 maps appeared in the selected publications: 152 maps in the two newspapers, and 41 in the three newsweeklies. As evident from a tabulation of fundamental characteristics (Table 1), maps were used frequently to provide general geographical information, yet nearly an equal number promoted an explicit message or position, most often through combining the map with photographs, artistic imagery, and expository text. Over one-half of the maps were accorded three columns or more, which undoubtedly speaks to the media's appreciation for their power and effectiveness. Not surprisingly, these larger compositions were most often those of an editorial nature, while general maps often were accorded only a single column. The majority of maps addressed two general subjects: attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and the search for and pros-

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**SIZE**

One Column	Two Columns	Three or More Columns	Full Page	Double Page
41	54	53	37	8

**SCALE<sup>2</sup>**

<1:10,000	<1:100,000	<1:1,000,000	<1:10,000,000	<1:100,000,000
44	20	11	28	75

**LOCATION**

Manhattan	Pentagon	Eastern U.S.	U.S.	Africa/ Middle East	Afghanistan	World	Other
53	11	17	6	29	54	9	12

**SUBJECT**

Attacks and Recovery	Domestic Security	Search for Suspects in U.S.	International Terrorism	War and Retribution
82	3	12	35	61

**TYPE<sup>3</sup>**

General/ Reportorial	Editorial/ Expository	Cartoons/ Map Images
92	86	15

**SYMBOLOLOGY**

Black-and White	Color
132	61

<sup>1</sup>What constitutes a map is not always obvious. Single compositions sometime involve more than one map: an inset at a different scale, for example, or repetitions of the same base map to show different themes or conditions at different points in time. Such compositions were tallied as one map. We also included satellite images, perspective views, cartoons, and map images used for decorative or iconographic purposes.

<sup>2</sup>For maps published without scale, the scale was determined as accurately as possible. No attempt was made to estimate scale for cartoons and map images used ornamentally.

<sup>3</sup>While use of map images for decorative purposes and in cartoons is apparent, the difference between general maps used in reportorial fashion versus maps used to editorialize or promote particular arguments is far less distinct. In this context, the first category includes maps that simply provide location reference and show accepted features without additional comment or embellishment. The second category includes maps that represent information subject to question or interpretation, compositions that blend maps with photographic imagery and expository text, and maps intended to support a particular storyline rather than giving simple geographic reference.

Table 1. Selected characteristics of maps.<sup>1</sup>

ecution of terrorists in the international arena. These seemingly simple generalizations, however, reflect more subtle temporal trends and transitions among underlying processes.

**UNDER ATTACK**

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, the media focused on attempting to make the incredulous believable. The composition that appeared in

the September 12 *New York Times* (Figure 1) is quite representative. Like this one, nearly all of the maps that appeared were large-scale, detailed representations of the target areas, but these maps also reveal a good deal about the general mood of the country. The title alone, “Reclaiming Lower Manhattan” belies a sense of siege, and the map not only reinforces this impression but also delineates its areal extent. Depicted in black at the center of the map, the wreckage of the World Trade Center defines ground zero even before that rhetoric had found its way into the common vernacular. Damaged buildings around this area are depicted in gray, while toward the periphery of the composition undamaged structures are symbolized in white. Likely intended to provide location context, these unshaded symbols help to place bounds around the focus and suggest the visual metaphor of a target. As lines of crippled and disabled transportation infrastructure bound the area but also cut it into fragments, the map further evokes some sense of an open wound. Additional metaphors might be suggested, but what is apparent is that by its scale, focus, and imagery, this map not only documents the devastation but also evokes emotive reactions that color readers’ perspectives.

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Although large-scale maps of the Trade Center and the Pentagon dominated the initial cartographic coverage, a few smaller scale, regional maps addressed collective representation of the events of September 11. Like the map that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* entitled “Morning of Terror” (Figure 2), these regional maps showed only the eastern seaboard of the country. While the focus is ostensibly on the geography of the events, what is particularly obvious in this *Times* piece is that the body of the map occupies less than a quarter of the frame. Moreover, the limited portion

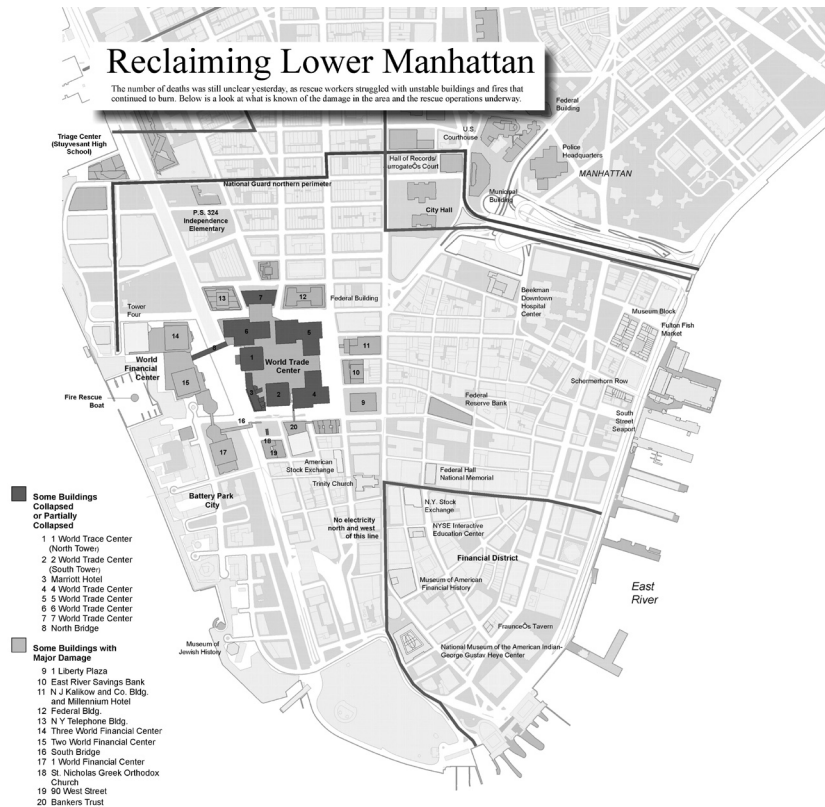


Figure 1. Detail from “Reclaiming Lower Manhattan”, *New York Times*, 12 September 2001. Copyright 2001, *New York Times*. Reprinted with permission.

of the country that is depicted is shaded in deep gray and peeks out from the corner quite tentatively. Clearly this map was constructed hastily, and although it almost certainly was not the deliberate intent of the map-maker, it is tempting to suggest that the overall effect is one of ambiguous identity and withdrawal.

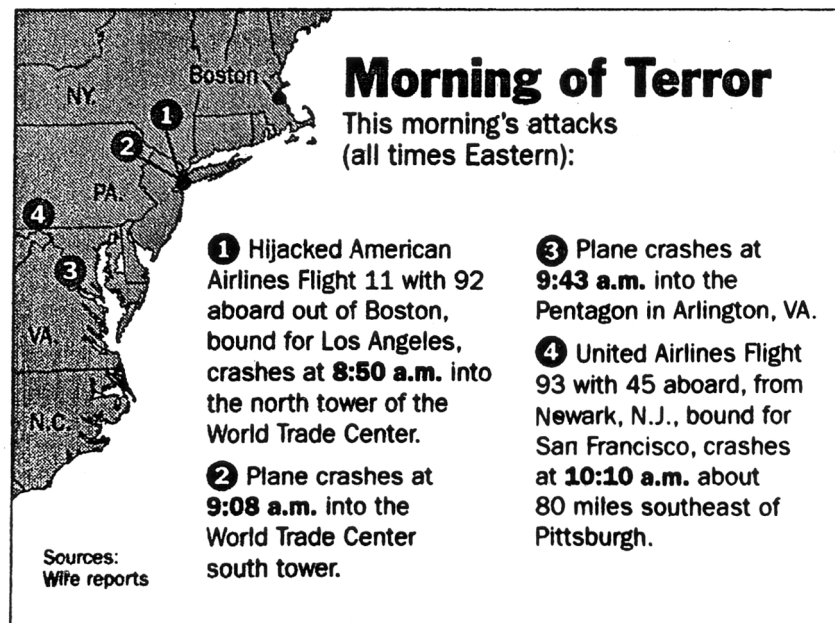
This suggestion is reinforced by similar maps that appeared in other publications and by the fact that in the days immediately following September 11, maps and images of the continental United States were almost non-existent, both in the formal reportage and in advertising and ancillary material. On the one hand, this seems logical given that the attacks – both successful and unsuccessful – all occurred along the eastern seaboard. Certainly the distribution of these events did not require a map of the entire country. Yet the absence of maps of the continental United States is made conspicuous given that the outline appears on everything from mud-flaps to advertisements for candy bars (Holmes, 1991) and has become a ubiquitous icon that invokes a sense of belonging and identity if not allegiance and control (Monmonier, 1989; King, 1996).

The momentary disappearance of the United States map, which is curious at very least, is accentuated by the emphatic reappearance of the map within a week. “One that didn’t fall”, a cartoon reprinted in the September 17 issue of *Newsweek* (Figure 3), depicts the continental United States as an inviolable skyscraper impervious to dramatic attack. This cartoon heralds not only the return of the U.S. outline to iconographic status, and its reappearance in media maps in general, but the reemergence of the state from its momentary period of retreat and introspection.

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#### THE OTHER

While the devastation in New York and Washington continued to be of interest for some time, within a week the number of maps of domestic areas that appeared in the newspapers dropped markedly, while at the



Los Angeles Times

Figure 2. “Morning of Terror”, Los Angeles Times, 11 September 2001. Copyright 2001, Los Angeles Times. Reprinted with permission.



Figure 3. "One that Didn't Fall", Dallas Morning News, reprinted in Newsweek, 17 September 2001. Deore copyright 2001 Dallas Morning News. Reprinted with permission of Universal Press Syndicate. All rights reserved.

same time, the number of maps of foreign locations, especially maps of Afghanistan, increased noticeably as focus shifted from recovery, both materialistically and emotionally, to identification of the perpetrators and retribution (Figure 4).

Remarkably pliant, Americans' collective geographical cognition and perception can be stretched and reshaped as situations change (Schulten, 2001). Maps arguably serve as important agents in this process. There may be no better example than the way in which Afghanistan emerged as the primary culprit in the September 11 attacks. The need to define an enemy, of course, is not only essential in seeking retribution, but defining the Other is crucial to definition of self (Anderson, 1991). In the case of September 11, the Othering of Afghanistan not only served to reestablish and reassert self identity and integrity of the United States, but to contain the enemy within a geographical border, however tenuous and permeable, which undoubtedly contributed to a greater sense of security.

The *Los Angeles Times* map of September 16 (Figure 5) uses heavy, black ink and piercing callouts to identify a number of potential targets for retaliation, while the key at the bottom of the map attests to the United States' military might. The fact that these targets are identified as entire state entities is especially apparent. The conundrum here, of course, lays in the fact that terrorism is not state based, yet the experience of history demands a geographical container, a discrete entity on the map, in which to confine the enemy. Yet as a cartoon published a few days later (Figure 6) argues, even after state boundaries were used to delineate and contain the terrorist threat, the list was still too broad if not in terms of actual locations of terrorist activity, then in terms of the need to clearly articulate an enemy. Ultimately the necessary container for retribution was conveniently provided by Osama bin Laden's presence in Afghanistan. Also noteworthy here is that in some 35 maps that address international terrorism, Iraq escapes mention altogether. This seems ironic given that early justification for military action in Iraq was based on the premise that the state was harboring al Qaeda operatives and sponsoring terrorism, a claim that has persisted throughout the war and occupation.

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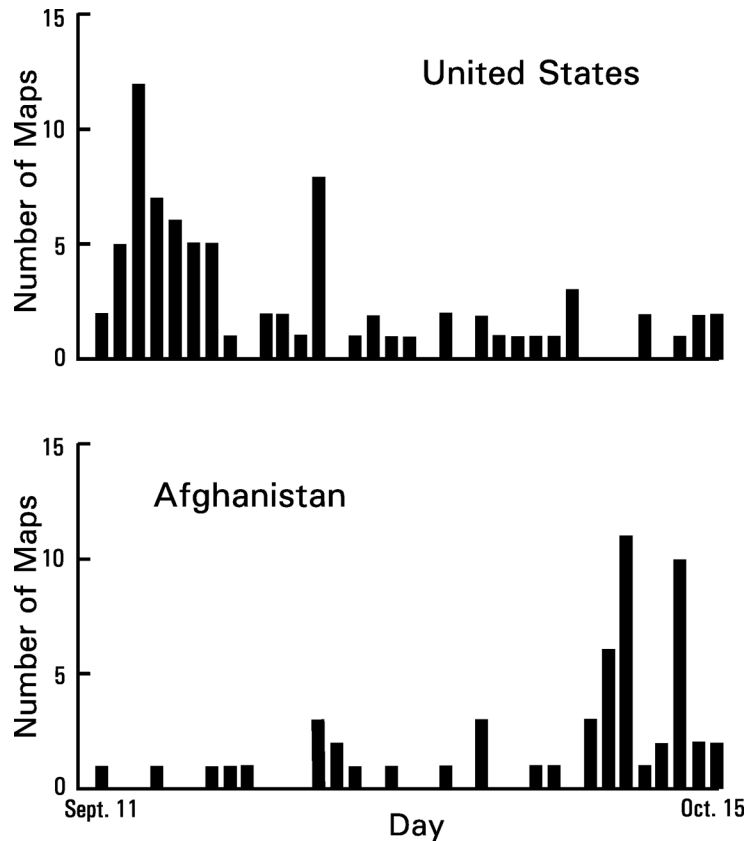


Figure 4. Number of maps published daily by the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times that focused on the United States (top) compared to those that focused on Afghanistan (bottom).

*Time* magazine's spread of September 24 (Figure 7) unequivocally identifies Afghanistan as the principal foe. With the map centered on the Mideast, the United States is nowhere to be seen and Europe is masked by the legend, but a number of the same states that appeared in earlier maps – Algeria, Sudan, and Pakistan, in particular – are highlighted in a muted but visually prominent orange. Yet in spite of the content, the title "Osama's World", the flashpoint symbols highlighting terrorist acts, and the extensive text frames detailing bin Laden's particular activities, the visual focus of the map is Afghanistan. Advancing off the page in bright orange, the addition of a magnified view surrounded in black leaves no visual doubt as to Afghanistan's sinister culpability.

By early October, the other suspects literally disappeared from the map. There no longer was any room for cartographic equivocation as to the identity of the enemy. Two maps further demonstrate this point: one from the *New York Times* and one from *Newsweek*. Although stylistically quite different, both are equally definitive and bellicose in tone. The *Times* map (Figure 8) resurrects the polar projection that was so popular during the cold war (Henrikson, 1980; 1991) to show geographical juxtaposition of the United States and Afghanistan. The United States is located at the top of the map, while Afghanistan occupies dead center, if not literally then certainly figuratively, as it is the only state on the entire map distinguished by its boundaries and encircled by radiating lines, ostensibly to show distance and ranges but, perhaps not entirely by coincidence, resembling a bull's eye.

"The Options for Battle" (Figure 9), a composition that is more elaborate yet similar in tone, appeared in *Newsweek* a week later and is some-

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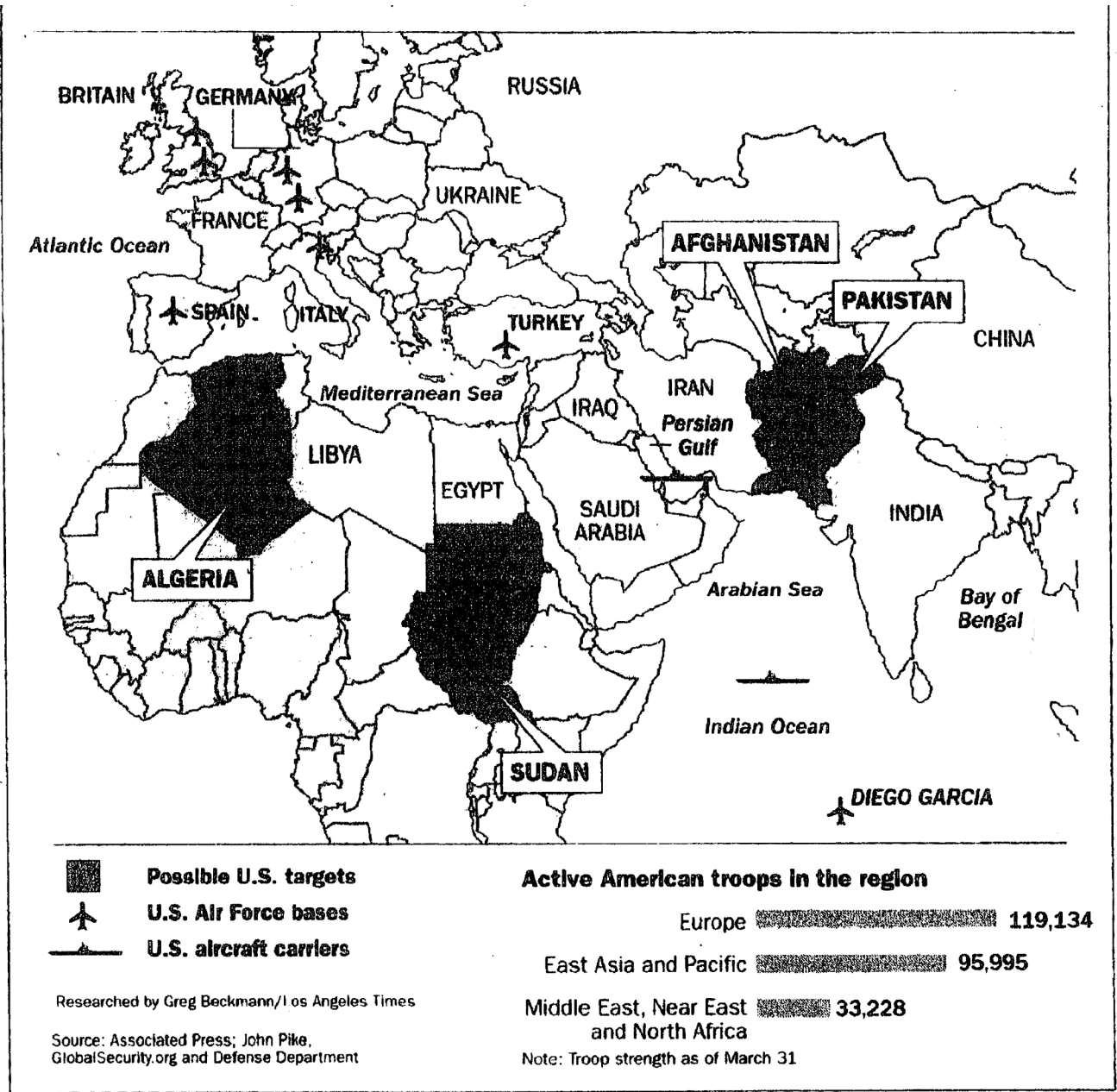
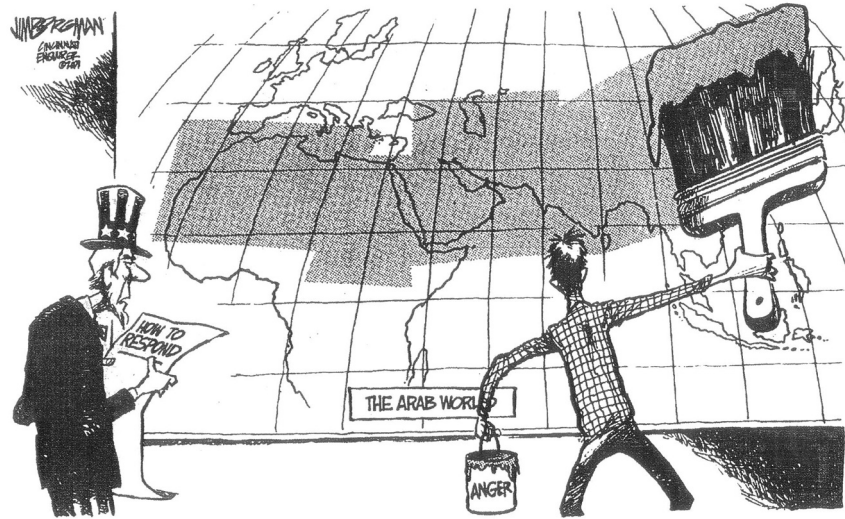


Figure 5. "Potential Launch Points", Los Angeles Times, 16 September 2001. Copyright 2001, Los Angeles Times. Reprinted with permission.

thing of a primer on cartographic representation of force (Monmonier, 1996). Suspended helplessly at the center of the map, Afghanistan is penetrated from every direction by red arrows and completely encircled and contained by boxes that speak with images and text to the strength, resolve, and international scope of retaliation. Like the preceding offering from the *New York Times*, as well as other maps of the period, this composition moves well beyond Othering the enemy to foretell of inevitable defeat. Retribution has been achieved if not in actual fact then in cartographic construct.



JIM BORGMAN, Cincinnati Enquirer

*"Your brush is too broad for this business, son."*

Figure 6. "Your brush is Too Broad", Cincinnati Enquirer, reprinted in the Los Angeles Times, 21 September 2001. Reprinted with special permission of King Features Syndicate.

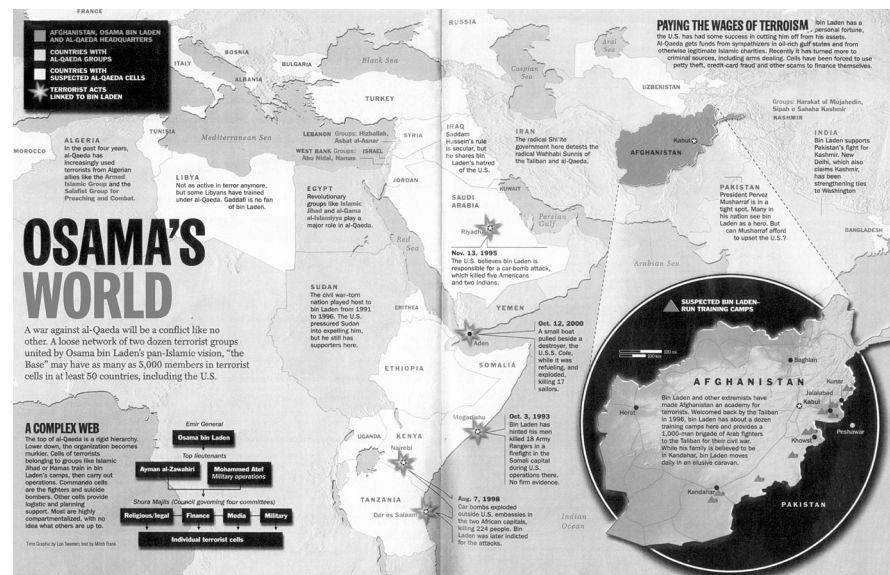


Figure 7. "Osama's World", Time, 24 September 2001. ©TIME, Inc. Reprinted by permission. (See page 67 for larger color version)

### GATEKEEPERS

Because the public garners its geographic information principally from popular journalism, the media has been described as cartographic gatekeeper (Monmonier, 1989). Even though the inherent subjectivity of atlases and geographic reference works is now well rehearsed (e.g., Black, 1997), media maps tend to be far more expository and far more subjective in character. Maps in newspapers and news magazines depicted the precise location and extent of the September 11 terrorist attacks, but they often did so in ways that were subtly, and sometimes not so subtly, evocative and provocative. Maps articulated locations of terrorists, but they also vilified

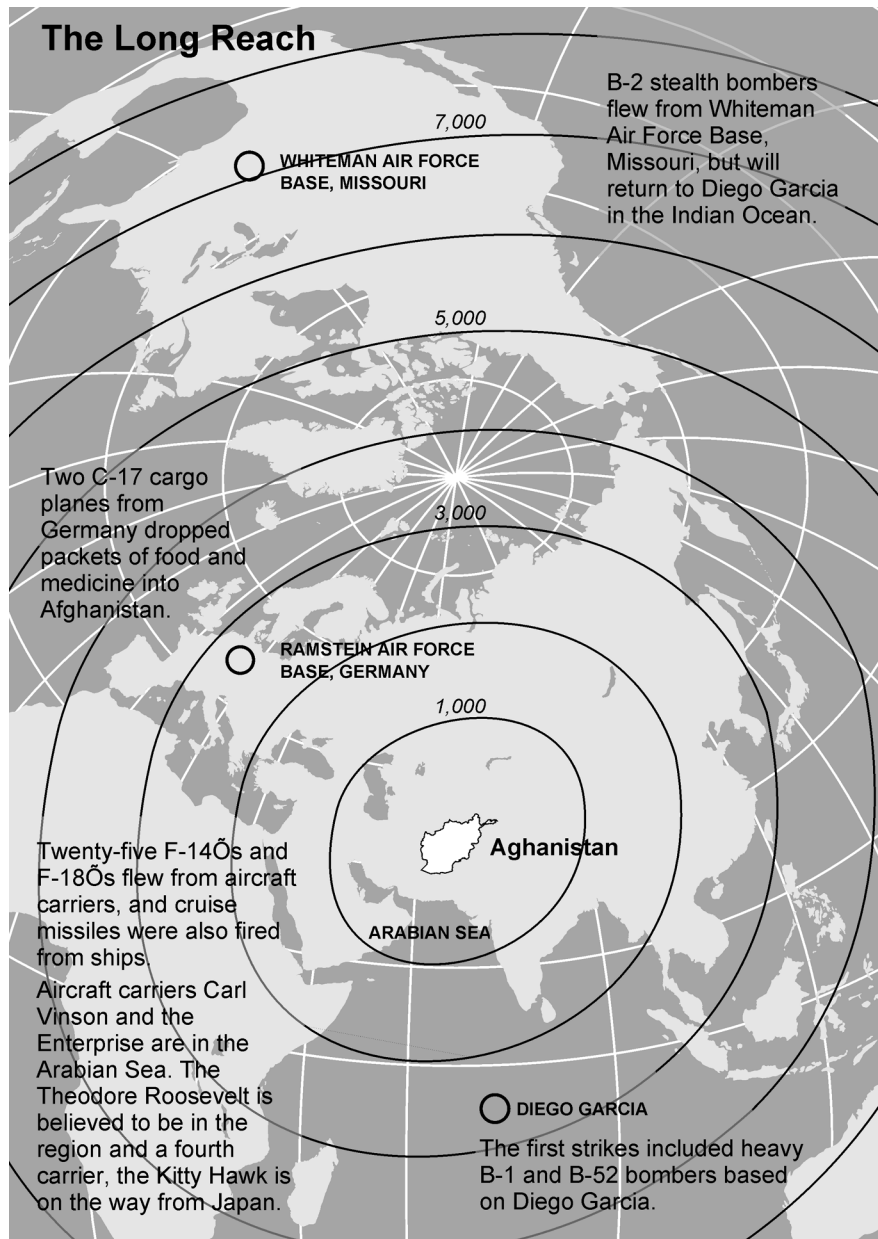


Figure 8. "The Long Reach", New York Times, 7 October 2001. Copyright 2001, New York Times. Reprinted with permission.

even if it was first necessary to simplify. Maps detailed the geography of Afghanistan, but they also expressed patriotic fervor and military resolve in ways unlike those found in any reference atlas.

Although the view of the map that took root in the Enlightenment as an objective, scientific, and ever more accurate representation of reality (Edney, 1999) has been recently revised if not rejected by the academy, outside the academy the map continues to be viewed as objective and objectifying. While school children are taught that the written word can be crafted to present any point of view, the map is unassailable. It simply reports factual, geographic information. The visual character of maps reinforces this perception. Whether the map, like the photograph, can be construed as reality rather than as representation of reality, the frequent integration of map not only with conventional photographs but also satellite imag-

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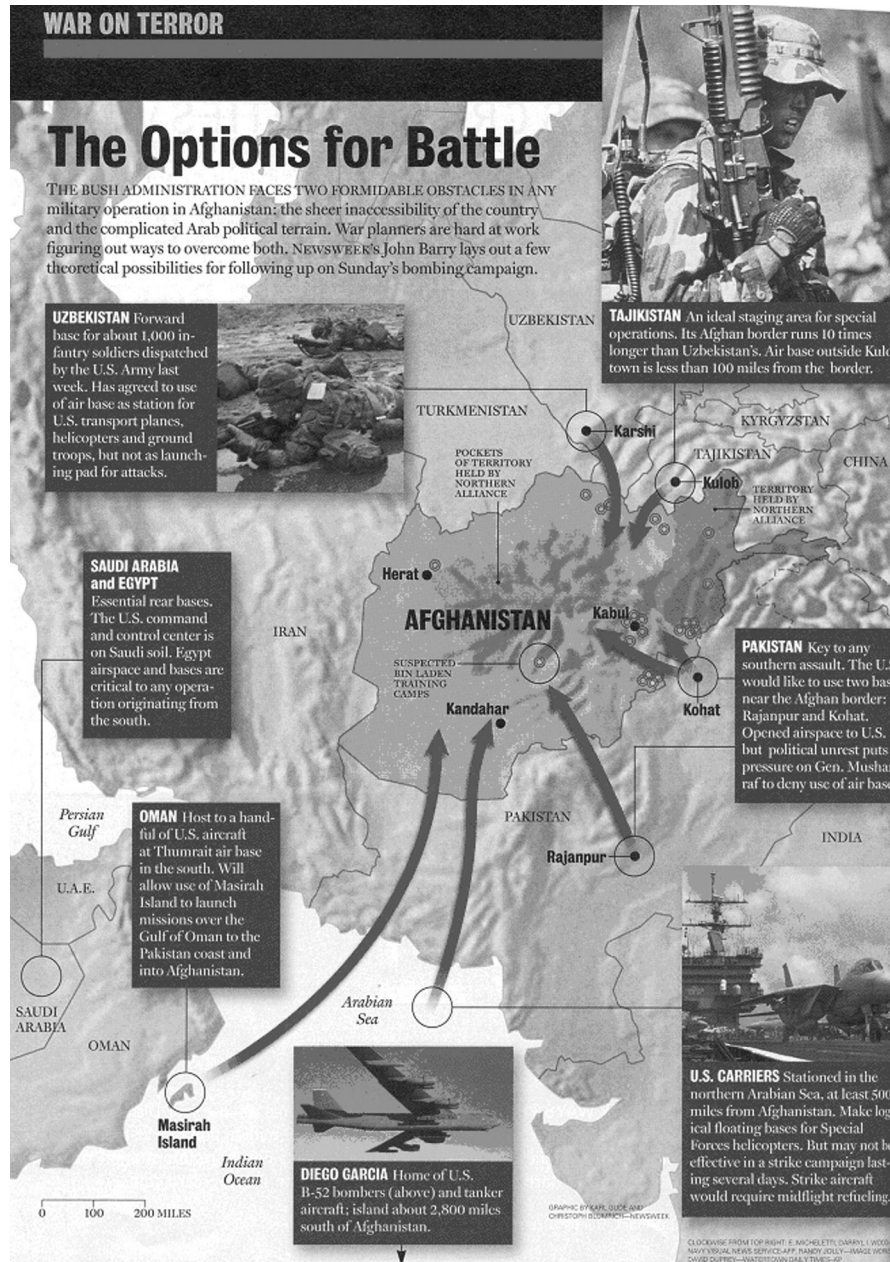


Figure 9. "The Options for Battle", Newsweek, 15 October 2001. ©2001 Newsweek, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission. (See page 68 for larger color version)

*"While media maps reflect editorial positions, those positions do not exist in isolation."*

ery (e.g., Figure 9) obscures the distinction among them and underscores the veracity of the map. A photograph, Sontag (1977) argued, constitutes incontrovertible proof. To many readers, the message of the map is equally incontrovertible. So while the remarkable growth in the number of maps in the media is a direct consequence of technology, the underlying reason for this growth almost certainly lies in the appeal of the map, its effectiveness, and its authority.

Like all maps, those found in newspapers and news magazines reflect the values and viewpoints of their makers: ultimately the journalistic institutions from which they come. While media maps reflect editorial positions, those positions do not exist in isolation. Government, controlling corporate interests, and editorial policies, shape journalistic perspectives

but it also seems likely that they are affected by the social context in which those institutions operate. Media maps then may not only shape public opinion but arguably are influenced, even if tangentially, by that collective opinion. What is more certain is that because all of the controlling forces are fluid, maps document changes in prevailing influences. As the search for those responsible for the September 11 attacks was narrowed to Afghanistan – the “New Ground Zero”, to borrow the title from a map that appeared in *Newsweek* – media maps quickly taught the public an unfamiliar geography. And as interest in Afghanistan faded nearly as quickly as it emerged, cartographic focus shifted to Iraq.

Beyond this general dynamic, the interplay among media interests, government position, public perspective, and other forces suggests that media maps often might assume different and even conflicting positions. At one time or in one particular publication, it might be argued, a map may promote the government position but at another time or in a competing publication, cartography may draw that position into question. In this context, what is striking about the maps surrounding September 11 is their remarkable similarity in tone and content across publications recognized for differences in positions and perspectives. There simply are few significant differences in the maps and their messages. Compare again “The Long Reach” (Figure 8) with “The Options for Battle” (Figure 9), for example, or consider that in mid October, all three news magazines published maps of Afghanistan, each somewhat different in design, but all similarly large and forceful and combative in voice. Crisis tends to generate convergence behaviors (Dacy and Kenreuther, 1969). Following the events of September 11, there was geographic convergence of supplies and support in all forms and an even more demonstrative convergence of public opinion. Perhaps it is not surprising then that there also was a convergence of cartographic representations not just of the attacks and recovery but also in the search for perpetrators and demands for retribution. What is less clear is whether the passage of time will give rise to divergent cartographic voices.

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