

INTRODUCTION

INTO THE DANGER ZONE

Beyond the bar glittered the dark Atlantic. Beer bottles clinked in the African night breeze as expats danced to the booming tunes of a European DJ under a canopy. In the crowd of artists and hangers-on, French culture buffs and curators in expensive shawls mingled with lanky Senegalese painters and smart-shirted Western aid workers, the stalwarts on Dakar's international scene. It was May 2014 and the art biennale had come to the Senegalese capital, bringing a well-needed party to the very edge of West Africa. For out there, beyond the chatter and champagne, lurked a different reality: the vast hinterland of the Sahel and the Sahara, where in the past few years the onetime music festivals had packed up and their swirling desert blues had ceased to reverberate.

Paco Torres stood, wild-haired with beer in hand, in our awkward aid worker clique at the bar.¹ He had the same round reporter's spectacles as the last time we had met in Spain four years earlier, but his beard was shaggier, his pants baggier and stained, his voice raucous and his eyes glinting. As a stringer for two or three Spanish newspapers, he had just come back from a trip through rural Guinea, full of stories of the Ebola-quarantined villages he had sneaked into, trekking past gun-wielding police to the devastation within. "I shag a lot nowadays!" Paco told me with a laugh, his face lighting

up like a child's. It was the "adventurer aura" that did it, he explained while recounting an earlier venture up the Niger River to conflict-racked northern Mali, skirting roadblocks and recalcitrant soldiers. Now Paco was mulling a trip into northern Nigeria, an area where Boko Haram had just kidnapped more than two hundred schoolgirls—and where, as one Dakar-based aid chief told me, "If your complexion is anything less than a Nigerian's, you won't really be going." All trips were at Paco's own expense and risk. "Now is the first time ever that I can afford insurance," he said, though on second thought he was not sure whether it covered his risk-filled escapades. His pay from Spanish dailies remained miserly, but at least he was now their voice from West Africa, covering disease and disaster, terror and conflict—the four horsemen of the Apocalypse—plus Senegalese wrestling shows and much else thrown in for good measure.

"I'm not a war correspondent," Paco insisted as he downed his beer. "I'm really a journalist of peace." As the DJ played away into the Dakar breeze at the biennale party, he lingered at the far edge of the canopy, his mind yet again scheming for the next trip. Unlike most of the Dakar "expats" around us—and much like one of the early colonial explorers in whose footsteps he was treading—he longed to roam the hinterland and the far-flung no go zones of our new, fearful era.

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Look at the world today. Switch on Google Maps on your smartphone and search for Timbuktu, that onetime epitome of remoteness, and you will get car directions—three days and fourteen hours from my Oxford home via the N-6, on a route that "has tolls," "includes a ferry," and "crosses through multiple countries," as the app helpfully informs me. You can browse geo-positioned images from northern Nigeria and the Libyan desert, or get customers' restaurant recommendations for Quetta in the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderlands, a town I once crossed on my way to India (apparently, for a tandoori treat, don't go here: "Usmania at Pishin stop SUCKS. Their service is bad, prices unreasonable and food tastes horrible"). In fact, don't go to any of these places—not if you are a white Westerner, at any rate. These sites are all off limits; they are reblanked parts of the map at a time of disorderly globalization.

Hic sunt dracones. Those medieval maps may not have spelled out “Here be dragons,” as we tend to think, yet they were often adorned with fantastical creatures and exotic beasts, serving as flourishes or as indicators of the limits of our knowledge.² Now the beasts are back.³ Switch on the news and it soon becomes clear that deadly threats are lurking in far-fetched corners of our map, areas where the inhabitants of the rich Western world no longer dare venture. Syria and Iraq’s embattled border zones, Somalia and Pakistan’s tribal regions, Afghanistan’s rugged terrain, and the deserted northern reaches of the sub-Saharan Sahel all harbor a litany of contemporary fears. Terror and drug running, disease and disaster, conflict and displacement: these dangers lurk on the margins of our maps, vague yet distant, seemingly at a remove until they blip by on the newscasts, temporarily bringing news of distant atrocities and random tragedies.

The signs are big and bleak. No Go. Stay away. And we do. Indeed, the first reaction for those of us sitting in well-furnished living rooms in richer nations may well be to switch the television off whenever we hear of misery in distant lands. Why should we even care? After all, Afghanistan and northern Mali are nowhere most well-off Westerners would drop by on holiday—not now, at any rate; it is easy to forget that Timbuktu was recently served by direct budget flights from Paris, while Afghanistan was once firmly on the hippie trail. In any case, our economies do not hinge on what happens in these places. They remain comfortably out of reach: remote and rarely any of our business.

This is not least the fate of the region around which this book pivots—the Sahel. For those who have even heard of it in the West, this arid southern shore of the Sahara conjures up clichéd images of chronic crisis and lawless abandon. War-torn deserts, jihadist killings, men wrapped in shawls brandishing AK-47s; trucks heaving with contraband, cocaine, and clandestine migrants; locust plagues, cracked dry soils, and starving children; Gao, Agadez, Timbuktu. Remote and shot through with dangers, the region seems the antithesis of the capital hubs of the rich world—a zone of insecurity stuck on to the global margins.

This is a fallacy, as *No Go World* will show. In fact, remote zones of insecurity are becoming central to our new world disorder, in which they serve as a convenient stage for geopolitical battles; for struggles over illicit

cross-border flows; and for media-fueled propaganda wars, as seen from the Afghan-Pakistan borderlands to the Sahara Desert. Yet rather than acknowledging this, Western states, and international organizations funded and supported by them, have come to organize military, border, and aid interventions in insecure zones in a dangerously myopic fashion. Through diverse forms of remote control and containment—from drones to militia middlemen, from border reinforcement to repurposed and outsourced aid—risk-obsessed powers are in effect collaborating in the remapping of the world into zones of safety and danger, with the media lending a helping hand. This is a failure of imagination, opportunity, and responsibility whose consequences are already coming back to haunt the West, as chaos visits the fortified borders of Europe and terror attacks proliferate across the patchwork map of globalization.

The dangers are in some ways real enough. Terror attacks worldwide have been rising swiftly since 9/11, and in 2015, suicide bombs tore into more countries than ever before.⁴ While the trend remains disputed, it is clear that armed groups now see those who were once deemed neutral to conflict—reporters, aid workers, peacekeepers, civilian visitors—as fair game. But these dangers are not necessarily new: peacekeeping, for one, was deadlier in earlier decades by some accounts, and terror attacks (however we define them) are a rather persistent historical threat too.⁵ However, one aspect of this insecurity does stand out today: its distribution. Most of the victims of today's insurgent attacks are civilians, aid workers, and soldiers from poor, non-Western nations. Only a small percentage of worldwide fatalities from terrorism since 2000 has taken place in the West, while in the peak year of 2014 five countries—Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Syria—together suffered almost four-fifths of such deaths.⁶ This is before we count those killed by explosive weapons, which in 2017 reached a high of more than fourteen thousand civilians according to one tally, with air strikes—not homemade bombs—the reason behind the sharp increase, especially in Syria.⁷ As for professionals intervening in crisis zones, more than nine out of ten aid workers killed are now national staff, and it is African peacekeepers—rather than well-equipped external forces—who increasingly man the bloodied front lines on the continent.⁸ In Somalia alone, some estimates list about three thousand dead African Union peacekeepers in a non-UN operation funded by

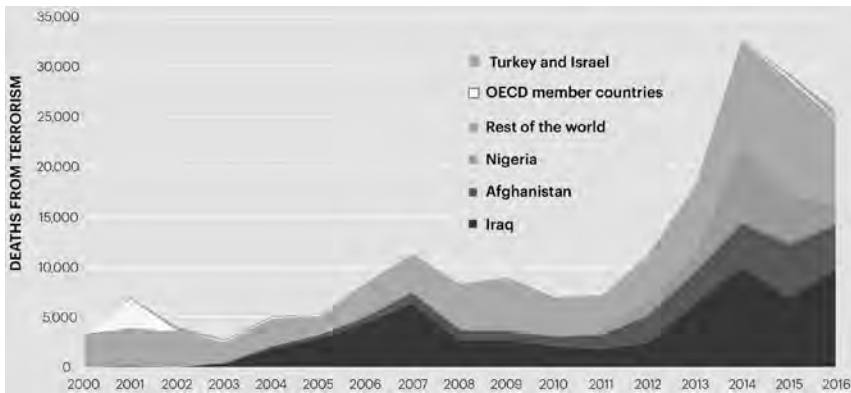


Figure 1. Deaths from terrorism, 2000–2015, are dominated by a few “hot spot” countries. © Institute for Economics and Peace.

the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations to the tune of billions of dollars.⁹

As the money trails behind force deployments, air strikes, and aid operations indicate, it’s not that powerful states have stopped caring about what happens in far-off places—rather, their focus is shifting. In military campaigns, instead of the mass peacekeeping deployments and military surges of yesteryear’s Bosnia or Afghanistan, Western governments are supporting proxies and dropping bombs, as in Syria or Libya; deploying drones, as in Pakistan or Yemen; training local soldiers to do the hard graft, as in Somalia or the Sahel; or deploying select special forces as spearheads to quell transnational dangers. Security is also being outsourced to a booming private military industry with multi-billion-dollar revenues—a trend matched by the surging market for remote-controlled weapons and surveillance systems.¹⁰ As for aid interventions, donors have in recent years leant heavily on NGOs and the UN to enter, stay, and “deliver” in distant danger zones, rather than exit them, yet these operations too are increasingly managed at one remove, through local partners and staff. In the media, a similar trend is afoot as news organizations are cutting their losses, leaving freelancers such as Paco to engage in the der-ring-do. Meanwhile the rich world’s borders are increasingly resembling the moats of a fortress, in an ill-conceived stab at keeping the people from

the wrong side of our global divides far away, in the buffer zones of the “global borderlands.”¹¹

This is the dark tale of *No Go World*—one of global distancing and endangerment. For a start, the relationship by remote control forged between powerful interveners and crisis-hit areas of the planet is a tragic case of failed connectivity. As new technologies are supposed to be bridging geographical divides, as global risks expand, and as the climate is heating up, peoples and governments need to be *more* connected, not less. Yet instead of deepening cooperation among the world’s rich and poor, we are being torn apart. We are seeing the emergence of a global geography of fear: a parsing up of the world map in which the dirty work in distant crisis zones is left to middlemen and advanced technology while borders are reinforced and contact points severed. And this distancing should concern us deeply, whether we live in Texas or Timbuktu. Those of us in the rich, comfortable world may turn our back on global crises, yet these crises will not turn their back on us—in fact, these crises were never separable from us to begin with. For as the coming chapters will show, danger is not geographic but systemic, and it is fundamentally entangled with our fears and the response these fears engender. To move beyond the political geography of fear, we may need a different kind of road map: not the facile map of Google connectivity or the bordered-up map of security analysts and strategists, but a cartography of hope and possibility, crisscrossed by renewed connections.

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Hello mister, let’s have some tea. It was autumn 1997 and I had just arrived, as a fresh-faced nineteen-year-old, in the Pakistani frontier town of Quetta. My bones still rattled from the forty-hour journey in a garish wreck of a bus, bedecked like a circus elephant in bright reds and yellows, up the slow-grinding road from the Iranian border. Amid the shuttered shops, their fronts closed to the night, I and a Pakistani fellow traveler weaseled our way into a ramshackle hostel and caught a few hours of fitful sleep on thin mattresses until the calls to prayer rang out in the early morning hours.

Next day I walked the streets and had tea everywhere I went, a nomadic Swede on the onetime hippie trail turned celebrity of the marketplace. I

scrawled my tattered Turkish notebook full with the numbers and home addresses of motorcycle mechanics and university lecturers, football players and layabouts. I let my tea glass be filled again and again, let the same questions be asked by new smiling faces, let myself be the stranger everyone wanted me to be. This was what I had desired, I thought, recalling why I had set out on my overland journey from suburban Sweden; this exhausting, exhilarating encounter; this notebook full of numbers I would never call; this, and perhaps a softer mattress.

Some two decades later, Quetta is best known for the suicide bombs tearing through that market where I once shared sweet glasses of tea with teachers and mechanics. It is a mass host to refugees and a flashpoint in between Iran, war-torn Afghanistan, and Pakistani tribal regions abuzz with the CIA's Taliban-hunting drones. I had Quetta's smiles all to myself in 1997, and so would any foreign visitors passing through today, if indeed anyone would contemplate such a prospect. The fragile bridge travelers such as myself had built with Quetta's tea drinkers before 9/11 has been torn down. In its stead another relationship has been constructed: one centered on risk and terror, on distance and fear and containment.

No Go World, then, is shot through with a sadness of sorts. As a traveler in those Quetta years, I was drawn to distant frontiers; and as I went on to train as an anthropologist in London in the next decade, I dedicated my professional life to a discipline that has historically been wedded to such far-off places. Yet now more and more of them are out of bounds, as many of my fellow anthropologists are finding out—and as I was to realize myself when I decided to study the crises besetting a different region, the sub-Saharan Sahel, in 2013.¹² With my research proposal on Mali's conflict completed, funding received, and desk eventually set up at the London School of Economics, the dilemma soon became acute. Would I actually be able to *visit* the places of most concern to me? On earlier trips to Mali, I had exchanged guitar tunes with some of Bamako's struggling musicians and researched migration trails across the Sahara; now, as conflict had visited its northern regions, going there meant exposure to multifarious dangers, setting alarm bells ringing in university offices (and in my family). Along with an array of rebel groups, the north presumably still harbored al Qaeda affiliates who threatened kidnapping and targeted attacks, much as in Quetta and its hinterland. Was it sensible to go, or



Map 3. Africa detail from the World Threat Map 2014, by Result Group, the global risk consultancy: www.result-group.com. Shading indicates risk level. © Result Group.

cowardly to stay away? Didn't locals face much larger risks? There I sat, in my London office, scheming and eyeing the news, all too aware that my risk-averse university was loath to let any researcher set foot in lands of danger. Instead of feeling like that intrepid traveler hitting the road with oil-stained trousers and dust in my hair, I prudently kept tallying the risks while "the field" receded ever further from reach.

My predicament was far from unique. Academics, journalists, humanitarians, diplomats, and even soldiers all face the problem of no go zones, although we rarely want to dwell publicly on our decisions about entering



Map 4. Africa detail from the World Threat Map 2018. © Result Group.

them. Yet the dilemma can no longer be ignored as whole chunks of the contemporary world, from Mali in West Africa to Pakistan and beyond, are rife with dangers—at least if we are to trust our employers, newspapers, insurance companies, and travel advice—wielding foreign ministries. “If you follow U.S. travel warnings, *Out of Africa* is more a strategy than a summer read,” quipped one radio report when looking at the State Department’s no go advice for vast stretches of the continent, expanded from twelve to eighteen countries between 1996 and 2013.¹³ The UK Foreign Office, meanwhile, had thirteen countries or parts of countries on its global no go list in 1997; fifteen years later, that figure was forty, again with a raft of new entries for Africa.

Western victims of terror attacks in Africa are in fact few and far between: only 15 of the 1,005 Americans killed in terrorist acts worldwide between 2004 and 2013 took place on the continent, for instance.¹⁴ Relative to other threats—traffic accidents, crime, and illness both at home and abroad—the risk looks even smaller. As one terror expert notes, “Approximately 13,472 murders occurred in the U.S. during 2014. Yet the 24 private citizens’ deaths worldwide by terrorism in 2014 got a great deal more media attention.”¹⁵ Yet quite regardless of the numbers, foreign ministries are now painting larger and larger chunks of the world in a deep, menacing red—areas that we enter, if at all, at our own risk and peril.

This risk dilemma was viscerally present for me in early 2014 as I paced up and down my kitchen floor, the irony alive in my mind—here I was, wanting to do ethnographic fieldwork on how interveners grappled with risk and danger in northern Mali, yet now I might not even be able to travel there because of these very dangers! Then I hit upon the idea that became *No Go World*. The obstacle to going there—*this* is what I must study. Instead of donning the proverbial khakis and pith helmet of my anthropological ancestors, returning heroically with my ethnographic heist, I shifted my gaze toward the distancing at work in the relationship between interveners and the intervened upon. After all, my university’s risk aversion and my own dilemma over northern Mali mirrored a much broader distancing from danger among interveners of all kinds. I now set out to trace, in that relationship, the paradoxical workings of power by remote control, as former imperial masters skulked to the sidelines. In short, I had to draw a map of global risk and danger the way risk-averse interveners saw it, blanks and all.

So instead of rattling away in my bus, as I did in those Quetta days of 1997 or as Paco did when entering the theater of Mali’s war, I opted for circling Mali remotely, mimicking my ethnographic tribe, the interveners, and the world they have mapped and made. I hung out among peacekeepers, aid workers, and displaced Malians working at one remove in the country’s capital, Bamako, as local anger stirred among citizens fed up with the bunkered international presence. In headquarters managing faraway conflicts, from New York to Brussels to Addis Ababa, I met assorted soldiers and aid chiefs who shared a deep frustration over the receding field of intervention. I traveled along the West’s reinforced

borderlines from Arizona to the Mediterranean, where walls, military patrols, and surveillance systems act as magical defenses against the threats supposedly emanating from the world's danger zones. I sought out the security outfits that have made distant risk their line of business, and I met the brave and sometimes foolhardy men and women who do enter the new danger zones: aid workers, reporters, peacekeepers, migrants, and adventure seekers of Paco's kind. I also delved into colonial and pre-colonial history, whose lessons resonate with our fractious geopolitical present. Indeed, today's risk takers, much like the intrepid early colonial explorers—the Rudyard Kiplings and René Cailliés whom we will also meet in coming chapters—break through our self-imposed borders to explore the world outside, rendered exhilarating in part because of its very dangers. Out of these glimpses, we may be able to discern openings for another, more positive relationship between the global rich and poor. We may also come to see who the winners and losers are when risk and fear start framing this relationship. For the new no go zones on our world maps are not just an avoidable evil; they are also of great benefit to many powerful people and organizations, as well as to their elusive enemies.

It may seem natural that international interveners are withdrawing from danger, like pedestrians crossing the road to avoid a street fight. Yet from the perspective of powerful states, we must note how *difficult* it is to withdraw in an otherwise wired world—and how massive efforts have been expended on various levels to achieve this purpose. Distance is physical: interveners withdraw not just ordinary citizens but also key humanitarian, political, and even military staff; they build bunkers in the “field”; they develop new technologies of remote control via drones, satellites, and surveillance; and they barricade their borders to keep the threat from reaching their societies. Distance is social: they outsource risky and dirty tasks to local staff, mercenaries, or freelancers, deepening the divide between “expat” and local, intervener and intervened upon, former colonizer and colonized. Distance is conceptual: interveners promote and buy into new buzzwords and theories that, while on the surface seemingly scientific and global in their reach, in fact end up acting as metaphorical containers for those “others” affected by insecurity. Finally, distance is psychological: as “we” in the rich, safe world withdraw from danger zones, we are paradoxically tied more closely than ever to these new no go areas,

which exercise a peculiar power over us and our imaginations.¹⁶ Insurgents, knowing this, may then tap into our deepest fears as they reconnect the danger zone to our wired world with ease. A pocketknife and a webcam are now all that is needed to shake the White House or the Elysée out of their complacency.

Danger and distance, in short, are deeply intertwined—and terrorists and drug runners, state officials and soldiers, journalists and assorted visitors have all conspired to wind them ever more tightly together. Those medieval monsters have yet again come to inhabit the edges of our Google-era maps; worse, the growing fear of venturing into their domains is now steering powerful actors' quest for intervention and involvement, creating a negative spiral from which it becomes increasingly difficult to extricate ourselves.

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Media pundits, TED talkers, and scholars have in recent years been busy at work drawing connections across the globe, and with good reason. In studies of Silk Roads old and new, the nervous system of cyberspace, the connective tissue of high finance, and the web spun by global migrations, it seems as if the fabric of the world is ever more tightly woven, its strands entwined despite the onslaughts of nationalisms new and old.¹⁷ Yet what if we start our inquiry from the opposite end: with disconnection and rupture? What if, moreover, global distance is becoming entrenched through a most peculiar connective medium—danger itself?

The emergence of global danger zones is symptomatic of much broader political shifts. The gradual retreat of Western dominance, the rise of China, the resurgence of nationalism—at this time when the tectonic plates of geopolitics and of the world economy are creaking, danger zones are opening up as geographic rifts in the presumably smooth terrain of globalization. It follows that if we study these rifts closely enough, and if we can grasp the political and symbolic logics through which they emerge, we may find better ways to mend our fractious politics.

There are two somewhat simplified ways to understand the emergence of danger zones today. One is by examining the economies of *risk*; the other by examining the politics of *fear*. The two, as we shall see, complement each other in troubling ways.

Some sociologists would say that our world is now wired in terms of risk. Some three decades ago, their doyen, Ulrich Beck, coined the term *risk society* to describe our late modern predicament, in which technological prowess generates unforeseen risky consequences.¹⁸ In the rich world, we tremble at the existential risks looming ahead of us: financial meltdown, climate change, terrorism, and conflict in our backyards. Against this backdrop, the contemporary political obsession with risks emanating from remote borderlands and deserts is but one expression of the anxieties haunting late capitalist society.

Yet while risk is usually seen through a negative prism, as something “bad” to be avoided, it is in fact double-edged, a source of both costs and gains. To take the most obvious example, risk (in its technical rather than existential guise) is the currency of the insurance industry; it is the magic where profits happen. It allows for setting premiums, calculating future liabilities, optimizing returns. Risk has also become a currency of sorts in international finance. In the derivatives trades at the heart of the 2008 global financial crisis, risky subprime mortgages were packaged with other financial products, traded, and speculated in until the whole system came tumbling down. Ever since the 1970s oil crisis and the revolutions in finance that followed, the global economy has thrived on risk, high-stakes gambles, and quick-fire rent seeking. In this sense, we face a fundamental contradiction in the global economy: between risk-averse citizens and politicians on the one hand, and a financial world of rampant risk taking—and even the exploitation of radical uncertainty—on the other.¹⁹

Risk is not just unevenly appreciated by different social groups and classes; it is also distributed helter-skelter among them, and across our world map. In her work on the global geography of capitalism, the sociologist Saskia Sassen has shown the financial world to be condensed into key locations: “global cities” such as London, Tokyo, and New York functioning as one-stop shops for speculative capital. Standing in sharp contrast to these global cities are similarly “extreme zones” for “new or sharply expanded modes of profit extraction”: manufacturing hubs such as China’s Shenzhen, or the land-grab and resource-cursed lands of sub-Saharan Africa.²⁰ Across these specialized sites in the world economy we see a transfer of risk from costly Western laborers to poorer counterparts; from blue-chip companies to subcontractors; and from mining groups to the villages or

habitats they destroy. By and large, economic upswings made Western citizens comfortable with this arrangement until the credit crunch took hold. Since 2007–8, financial risk has been “socialized” and transferred back into Western societies too, with the state and its taxpayers bearing the cost of the bailouts and banking recoveries.

Where on the global map of risk do remote “danger zones” such as the Sahel-Sahara band or the Afghan-Pakistan borderlands fit? We may suggest, rather crudely, that they stand as an inverse example to the rampant risk-based markets of global cities. These zones are similarly specialized, but not in producing goods or forging out credit default swaps. Rather, they serve as sites for the manufacturing of one key “product” for contemporary world markets: insecurity or danger.²¹ Seen from this viewpoint, remote zones of insecurity are no longer on the margins. Rather, they are exemplary of a “new normal” of the kind now regularly invoked by European officials amid recurrent terror threats and migration crises—a jarring state of chronic endangerment.²²

Danger, as a bridging concept, links the economies of risk with our second concern, the politics of fear. Fear is the most base and basic of emotions: it is visceral and instinctive, and as such a source of immense political power. Trump’s wild claims about Mexican rapists and terrorist-carrying caravans; the Hungarian government’s proclamations of a Muslim invasion of Europe; the Italian Far Right’s fear-driven portrayals of refugees and their boats—such figments and bogeymen work on a deep psychological level, as do their solutions of walls and military patrols, quite regardless of any evidence, risk based or otherwise. *Psychopolitics*, philosopher Byung-Chul Han’s term for new technologies of power that burrow their way deep into the human psyche, is mobilizing fear and associated emotions (anger, shame, hatred, anxiety, indifference, and more) on a massive scale, via Big Data and the Internet as much as via traditional media. And the object to which such a politics of fear frequently attaches is the racial and geographical Other.²³

Consider the idea of the no go zone itself. It seems straightforward; if in doubt, just don’t go. If you do go, you have only yourself to blame, as the UK and US governments have repeatedly shown when they refuse to budge in response to kidnappers threatening to murder their hostages. Yet the mapping of insecurity and danger—that is, *naming* and *placing* the

threat—is itself a political act. To take the most blatant example, since the 2015 Paris terror attacks, Fox News and Far Right websites have joyfully slathered urban Europe with the red paint of menace, from the French capital's banlieues to Britain's Birmingham. As I search for “no go zones” in early 2018, hits include a book by a Breitbart staffer entitled *No Go Zones: How Sharia Law Is Coming to a Neighborhood Near You* (foreword by a certain Nigel Farage of Brexit fame) and a poster issued by the Hungarian government of Viktor Orbán showing the alleged *no-go zóna* in and around London, Berlin, and Stockholm. “Alleged” because they are no such thing.²⁴ Little did I know that I had lived most of my life in Orbán's no go zones—in between London and Oxford, Stockholm and my hometown outside the Swedish capital, as sleepy an industrial backwater as any in well-to-do northern Europe!

These politicized no go zones of the most extreme kind should, at a minimum, unsettle any simplistic idea that the red-tinted risk maps used to depict large parts of Africa and Asia today are veracious and apolitical. They should also disabuse us of any notion that dangers near and far are somehow separate in the official imagination. Already in colonial times, Victorian cartographers and social scientists saw poor London as a “dark continent within easy walking distance of the General Post Office” while slathering the streets of “semi-criminal” classes in menacing hues of black on their city maps.²⁵ The color code may have changed from black to red, yet the pattern echoes down the ages as dangerous Otherness at the heart of the West is again being telescoped out to depictions of faraway danger.

Again as in Victorian times, assorted intellectuals are complicit in this remapping of danger. Consider Samuel Huntington and his “clash of civilizations” meme from the 1990s, or his fear peddling over the “flood” of Latino immigrants in the following decade, inspiring a generation of lower-level punditry of doom. For a more liberal perspective, consider Oxford economist Paul Collier's best-selling sketch of a biblical “Exodus” of the global poor, or his rallying calls for military intervention in the home countries of the “bottom billion.” Or, for a tougher approach from a fellow Briton, take the historian Niall Ferguson, who argued amid Iraq's descent into darkness in 2004 that the absence of liberal US imperialism would herald “an anarchic new Dark Age.” In their treatises and texts, such

authors present muscular Western power as the bulwark against a “coming anarchy,” to cite one of their journalistic fellow travelers, Robert Kaplan. As the size of their media, political, and popular audiences show, these are good times indeed for peddling rough-hewn fear with an intellectual patina and for purveying simplistic solutions to impending doom.²⁶

Ours may be an “age of anger,” in the words of author Pankaj Mishra, but it is also an age of fear.²⁷ Fear, anger, and raw power travel together in our frenzied politics, bringing among other things a phobia-ridden fear peddler into the White House in 2016. Beyond high politics, our “new normal” of high alert is also characterized by proliferating security solutions—from biosecurity to human security, from cybersecurity to climate security, all feeding on the twinned resources of risk and fear, as scholars of “securitization” have shown for some time.²⁸ The starting point of *No Go World*, contentious as it may be, is that this normalized state of security is itself abnormal, to the point of being pathological. Tracing this pathology across time and space will be the task of the chapters that follow.

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Only a few pages back, I suggested that we must forge genuine connections as the solution to a world of distancing and danger. Alas, if I could only bring back those thumbled address books, those smiles over tooth-rottingly sweet tea from my backpacker days! But let us set aside such nostalgic longing for a long-lost world and roll up our sleeves: we must garner some optimism of the will and find concrete ways of confronting shared problems, one step at a time. While we may not be able to tear down the hastily erected walls between the poor, insecure territories out there and the safety of the rich world, interveners of all kinds may at least start turning the key in the door. Politically, international actors can shift some of the massive efforts behind their anxious absence toward a *positive presence*, based around opportunities rather than insecurity. In practical terms, interveners and citizens can learn from those who do not shy away—including the UN officials, freelance reporters, humanitarians, and national aid workers in Mali, Somalia, or Afghanistan whom we will meet in coming chapters. Above all, we must learn to listen to the intellectuals, activists, and ordinary inhabitants of countries in crisis: largely unrecog-

nized by international media, they labor away at home-grown solutions and at critiques of crisis interventions thought up from afar. Through such voices, and with the help of some simple statistics, powerful politicians may also be able to reassess the shifts happening in poorer parts of the world. In sub-Saharan Africa, living standards and educational levels are *rising*, as they have been elsewhere for some time.²⁹ Indeed, the global migrations so feared by Western leaders and electorates are fueled by a thirst for wider horizons, not simply caused by grinding poverty or perpetual conflict. Even the seemingly intractable danger zones fretted about in the West may become vanguards of cosmopolitan interaction for a global cause—reconnecting us around shared potential rather than around fears of mounting insecurity.

We can say all this, and yet it would be criminally naive to peddle simple fixes. Rather, the problem is *systemic*, and deeply historical: how those who until very recently saw themselves at the pinnacle of progress and power are now retreating, yet pushing out; warding off danger, yet stoking it; mapping distance, yet clamoring for connections. For this reason, I offer *No Go World* not as a prescription for a simple cure but rather as a diagnosis of the interventionist ills besetting especially Western (and West-backed) power.³⁰

Geopathology is a term we may borrow for this purpose. I apply this label, used for anything from quack feng shui to the study of geographical determinants of diseases, to the ways in which geography itself (or, rather, powerful interveners' understanding of it) is becoming afflicted with ascribed danger. We need to find ways of getting to grips with this pathological state besetting our interventionist "patient," and to this end we will deploy for our geopathological diagnosis one of the interveners' favorite playthings—maps.

Maps are wily things. They seem to portray certainty, they establish a gaze; yet their hold on reality is elusive and imperfect. They are a work in progress that hides their ad hoc nature. They are powerful: they define forms of intervention, and they buttress stories of the world. Our focus must be *mapping*, rather than maps: the struggle over how to draw and define what matters—and how these mappings mesh with political action, as seen when threatening arrows of Europe-bound migration help justify more border patrols, or when drones unleash their warheads on lands imprisoned by the twinned cartographies of fear and military omniscience.³¹

Imperfect mappings, somewhat like the psychoanalyst's Rorschach blots, may help us discern the complex geopathology of our interventionist patient. This is a patient, after all, who still believes himself to be mighty, if not all-powerful, and a bringer of good to *others* who are supposedly ailing. The trope of intervener-as-doctor is present whenever powerful states designate crises and how to treat them, whether via "surgical" strikes, economic "shock therapy," or gentler humanitarian or development action aimed at ridding the target country of the "infection" of terror or the "scourge" of migration (to use just a few of the idioms deployed by technocrats and politicians). For this reason, we must approach our diagnosis with care, and in discrete parts. In chapter 1, we deploy the case study method and investigate Mali's descent into danger, observing the mechanisms underlying our present geopathological condition and its most acute symptoms. In chapter 2, we deploy mapping itself to build an etiology for our patient's ills, with the aim of discerning the stubborn historical patterns lurking behind the pathological compulsions seen in the war on terror. Our third chapter, set in Somalia, deepens the analysis by mapping intervention across three dimensions—soaring into the skies, where military campaigns gain distance from the danger zone while brutalizing the relationship with inhabitants on the ground below.

If the first part of the book tells the story of the map of danger, with its quest for control and separation, the second part scrunches up the map, sullyng it with the septic smears of contagion. As we visit the drone wars in global danger zones, we glimpse how danger may be *embraced* by interveners to the point where it spirals into runaway circuits of mimicry among foes. Contagion effects abound, too, at the US and EU borders visited in chapter 4, where politicians cannot help but feed red meat to the wolves slaving outside the door. If these politicians' affliction is a peculiar case of *phobophilia*, or a morbid love of fear, chapter 5 looks in the other direction—toward the power brokers and entrepreneurs in putative danger zones, who know how to satisfy every dangerous desire as they court external donors and interveners. In chapter 6, set at ground zero of global danger in Kabul, we finally follow the daredevil reporters, soldiers, and explorers into the wild world outside the protective barriers—a world where nightmare projections are made real, and where Self and Other merge under the sign of danger.

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In mapping global danger, this book faces a few dangers of its own.³² To some readers, it may seem to underplay real and urgent threats. Am I putting too much blame on an amorphous and fractious “West,” at a time when states such as Russia and Saudi Arabia are aggressively pursuing dangerous interventions of their own, including in the very “danger zones” of concern to us here? Further, am I letting violent jihadists off the hook and dismissing fears around migration and instability as so much fantasy? That is not the intention. But whereas our public debate is replete with proposed solutions to migration “crises” new and old, and with commentaries and analyses of ISIS, al Qaeda, and their murderous ilk, we urgently need to understand the logics and politics of fear from the other side—that is, from inside the interventionist apparatus of democratic states and international organizations—with a view to redrawing the map of danger. Challenges of war and want, and of citizen anxiety and insecurity, are real and must be addressed: and the best way to do so is through partnerships, not partitions. The initiative for such a shift, needless to say, must come from those legitimate public actors, internationally and within crisis-hit nations, that may be informed by reasoned debate and by evidence of our current dangerous spiral.

To other readers, our mapping of danger may rather be seen as *overplaying* the risks and reinforcing divides. Hopeful maps and narratives of our world are after all proliferating, too, among aid groups, scientists, businesses, and civil society, or among intellectuals, activists, and politicians in countries hit by conflict. Why am I giving so much importance to stories of old-fashioned domination and doom, rather than to positive openings, alternatives, and even resistances, as anthropologists are usually wont to do? In short, because we must understand our politics of fear from the inside in order to begin the hard task of lifting its spell. To this end, *No Go World* mimics the narrative power of our global mapping of danger, the better to dispel it: like a monster-infested medieval *mappa mundi*, we may say, it seeks to ward off threats by locating them, drawing them, and so enabling a certain hold on them.³³

In other words, and returning to our geopathological frame, making a diagnosis may at least help us acknowledge the affliction. Such self-

knowledge is of the essence for any curing to take place. Not only does our interventionist patient believe he is curing someone else, but we will see how he is actively transmitting his affliction to the Other, whose illness in this way is in large part iatrogenic, or caused by the treatment. Is it delusion, then, that we are treating? We are indeed good at deluding ourselves, citizens and powerful alike, but as we will see, there is a *rational* side to endangerment that accounts for much of the longevity of the affliction. This instrumental rationality can be explained in part by reference to the risk economies of today and in part by history—especially colonial history, whose patterns of thought and action echo into our fearful present.³⁴

Until a change of tack, Western states increasingly play both hostage and host to pervasive fears. Anxious citizens and politicians shudder at the thought of the great unwashed reaching our shores. Visa application offices are closed for business if you are of the wrong, “risky” profile—including, for instance, most poor people in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as refugees fleeing “our” conflicts in Afghanistan, Libya, and Iraq. Borders are sealed by radars and fences, satellites and sea sensors, patrol boats and policing networks. Embassies are bunkered up, and bureaucrats, aid workers, and officials have withdrawn from the front lines. Contact points of a positive kind are decreasing just as they are most needed.

No Go World is about the severe consequences of this highly selective distancing. For the withdrawal of “normal” relations—travel, exchange, trade—leaves the field open for darker forces. It boosts certain lines of business. It creates fiefs not just for warlords but also for anointed local middlemen: hucksters, sheriffs, and chiefs with the most modest of claims on real authority yet with a sudden hold on our purses and attentions. It kills, as people in need are left without assistance and as innocents are maimed by unaccountable militias, drone operators, or mercenary-style soldiers. It creates winners and losers—and the biggest loser of all may, in fact, be the once so mighty “West” as politicians and their voters start seeing certain Others through the lens of existential threats, while other world powers fill the vacuum it leaves behind.³⁵ This book is about the distance those of us in the rich Western world seek to put between ourselves and others; the buffers we build; and the dangerous effects of our highly selective shutting ourselves off from engagement. For the danger zone, as we shall see, is not as far away as we would perhaps like to imagine.