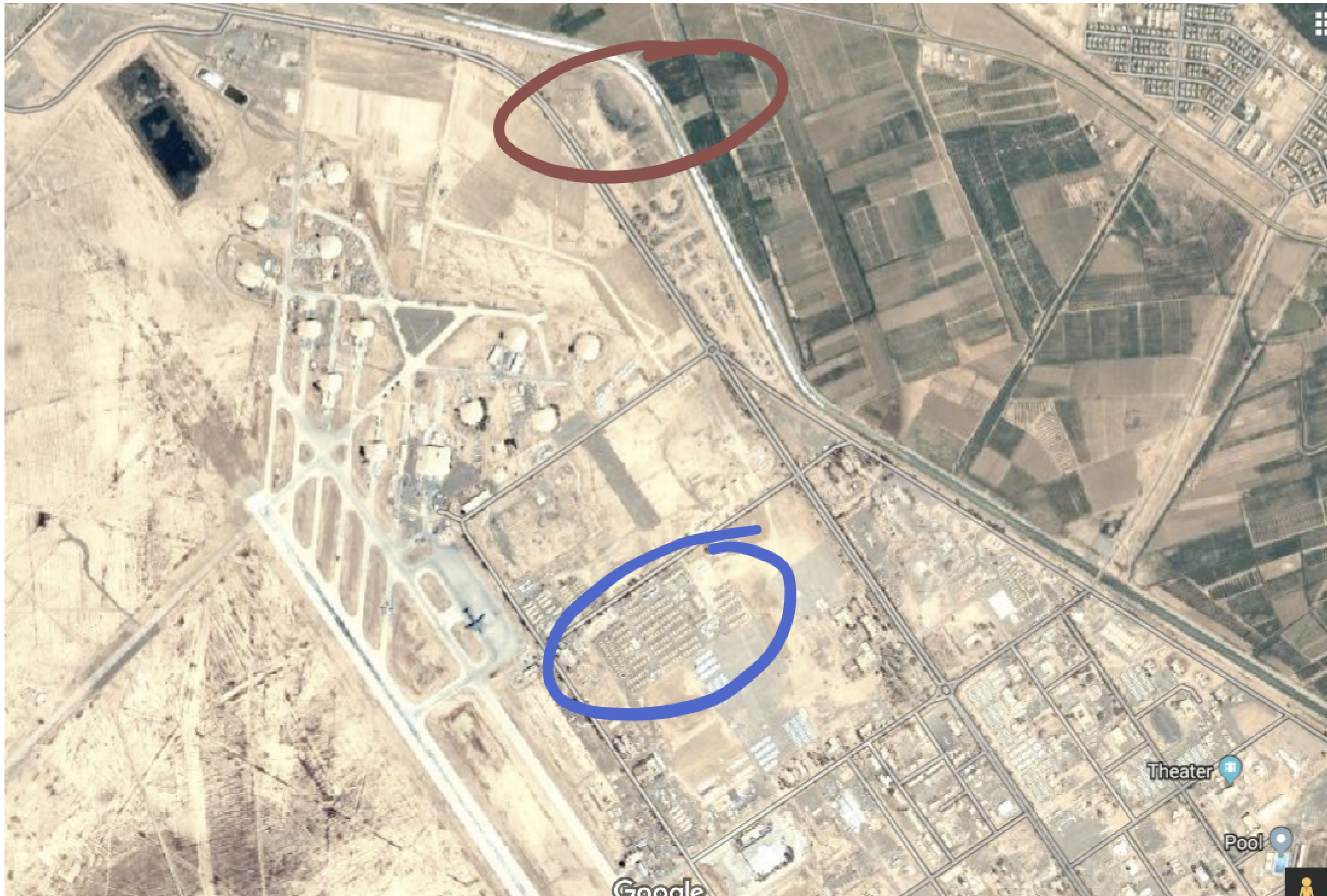# Mapping Burn Pits

Design Statement

This visualization locates sources of exposure and injury, thus helping convey the reasons toxic subjects become toxic. In this sense, the visualization explains more than it documents, accomplishing the classic ethnographic task of providing background and context. It also, however, demonstrates how now readily available digital mapping tools enable articulations of toxic subjects, highlighting how available media technologies shape what is legible in different contexts. Recall, for example, Daston and Galison's work on ways the availability of cameras changed both the production and ideals of scientific illustration.

Project Statement

This essay explores how "toxic injury" and "toxic stress" have emerged as categories for clinical and juridicial claims making. I am particularly interested in the ways that claims of toxic injury grant recognition and access to resources while at the same time reproducing marginality in difficult-to-diagnose conditions. Given the ways in which toxic subjects are rendered invisible by dominant understandings of transmission, injury, and time, new forms of visualization and reading are called for. The images I include seek to illustrate the various tools patients and clinicians use in order to render toxic conditions visible in both clinical and legal domains.

Caption

This Google Maps screen capture shows Balad Air Base, an Iraqi Air Force base occupied by US troops from 2003-2011, at which time it was named Joint Base Balad. The site of the largest burn pit (10 acres), several tons of waste was burned each day until 2008. Annotated by a US Army veteran stationed at Balad from 2005-2006, the red circle outlines the pit and the blue, the housing quarters located downwind from the pit. The proximity of sleeping and living quarters to the burn pits is an often cited metric in claims of exposure by both veterans and environmental scientists. Importantly, digital mapping has long been critical to recognition of toxic subjectivity. A 1987 report published by the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice (CRJ) made early use of GIS to demonstrate widespread environmental racism in the United States.