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EXAMINING CHANGING AMERICAN PERCEPTIONS OF THE TERRORIST THREAT: FROM THE OKLAHOMA CITY BOMBING TO AL QAEDA

by

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December 2017

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The American public's fear of becoming a victim of terrorism significantly increased after 9/11 and remained elevated much longer than one might expect. This thesis explains how and why Americans' perception of the terrorist threat bears little relation to the dangers Americans actually face. Several factors influenced that shift. First, the news media landscape changed dramatically due to structural factors such as increased competition for audience share among traditional news sources, cable news networks, and the Internet. Second, the Internet allowed terrorist organizations, especially Al Qaeda and its affiliates, to propagate threats and messages directly to the public. Third, popular culture, especially film and television drama, affected Americans' stereotypical understanding of terrorism. Finally, politicians and members of the terrorism industry were incentivized after 9/11 to inflate concerns about the terrorism threat. These factors coalesced, reacting with innate human sociological and psychological characteristics, to create a prolonged collective psychosis. This thesis finds that future policies and research focusing on risk communication, counterterrorism economics, and intelligence transparency may be essential to breaking this collective psychosis cycle.

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ABSTRACT

The American public's fear of becoming a victim of terrorism significantly increased after 9/11 and remained elevated much longer than one might expect. This thesis explains how and why Americans' perception of the terrorist threat bears little relation to the dangers Americans actually face. Several factors influenced that shift. First, the news media landscape changed dramatically due to structural factors such as increased competition for audience share among traditional news sources, cable news networks, and the Internet. Second, the Internet allowed terrorist organizations, especially Al Qaeda and its affiliates, to propagate threats and messages directly to the public. Third, popular culture, especially film and television drama, affected Americans' stereotypical understanding of terrorism. Finally, politicians and members of the terrorism industry were incentivized after 9/11 to inflate concerns about the terrorism threat. These factors coalesced, reacting with innate human sociological and psychological characteristics, to create a prolonged collective psychosis. This thesis finds that future policies and research focusing on risk communication, counterterrorism economics, and intelligence transparency may be essential to breaking this collective psychosis cycle.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A common conception among the public in the United States (hereafter referred to as the American public) is that the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 (9/11) "changed everything" regarding the terrorist threat. While 9/11 was undoubtedly a horrific event of unprecedented scale, Americans' experience with terrorism pre-dates those attacks, most notably exemplified by the Oklahoma City Bombing (OKC bombing) in 1995. Furthermore, no major terrorist attack has occurred in the United States since 9/11. This thesis examines the post-9/11 shift of the public's perception of the terrorist threat, seeking to understand how and why Americans' perceptions of the terrorism threat changed. The major research question answered in this thesis is: how do Americans perceive the threat of terrorism, and, more importantly, why did Americans' fear of terrorist attacks in the United States subside after the OKC bombing, but not after 9/11, at least not to the level one could logically expect given the number of incidents since then?

A. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

This research question is significant because, as counterterrorism scholar Benjamin Freidman relates, "inflated fear creates a permissive environment for overreaction to terrorism. Security politics becomes a seller's market where the public will overpay for counterterrorism policies."[1] Specifically, Americans have spent significant amounts of tax dollars, supported initiating two wars, and sacrificed their civil liberties in an effort to address their fears about terrorism.

Regarding counterterrorism expenses, estimates are that, in the decade following 9/11, more than one trillion dollars was spent on domestic homeland security.[2] Expenses increased significantly in comparison to pre-9/11 spending. For example, about

[1] Benjamin H. Friedman, "Managing Fear: The Politics of Homeland Security," in *Terrorizing Ourselves: Why U.S. Counterterrorism Policy is Failing and How to Fix It*, ed. Benjamin H. Friedman, Jim Harper, and Christopher A. Preble (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 2010), 191.

[2] John Mueller and Mark G. Stewart, "Balancing the Risks, Benefits, and Costs of Homeland Security," *Homeland Security Affairs* 7, no. 1 (2011): 2.

$12 billion was spent in 2000; 2009 expenses topped $66 billion.[3] Furthermore, the Department of Homeland Security's budget grew 45 percent, from $31 billion in 2003 to $55 billion in 2010.[4] Moreover, the United States intelligence budget doubled to $70 billion per year between 2001 and 2013.[5]

The majority of the American public also identified and supported the campaigns in both Afghanistan and Iraq as counterterrorism efforts.[6] As a result of these wars, through 14 February 2013, the Department of Defense reported 6,656 American service members dead and another 50,476 wounded in action.[7] Furthermore, contractor deaths are estimated between three and six thousand over the same period.[8] The Department of Veteran's Affairs also reported nearly 675,000 disability claims stemming from the two wars.[9] Besides the human costs, Harvard University's Linda Bilmes estimated in 2013

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[3] Friedman, "Managing Fear: The Politics of Homeland Security," 191.

[4] Ibid.

[5] James Risen, *Pay Any Price: Greed, Power, and Endless War* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2014), xv.

[6] "Afghanistan: Gallup Historical Trends," Gallup, accessed 31 May 2017, http://www.gallup.com/poll/116233/afghanistan.aspx; Andrew Dugan, "Fewer in U.S. View Iraq, Afghanistan Wars as Mistakes," Gallup, 12 June 2016, http://www.gallup.com/poll/183575/fewer-view-iraq-afghanistan-wars-mistakes.aspx?g_source=IRAQ_WAR&g_medium=topic&g_campaign=tiles. Gallup polls from 2002, 2003 and 2004 showed that 55 percent, 50 percent, and 50 percent, respectively, of respondents identified the Iraq war as part of the War on Terrorism. A similar poll undertaken in 2007 showed that 65 percent of respondents identified the war in Afghanistan as part of the War on Terrorism. Interestingly, Gallup did not have earlier data for Afghanistan. However, an October 2001 poll asking respondents to define the primary military mission in Afghanistan revealed 41 percent of respondents answering "Destroying terrorist operations" and another 25 percent answering "Capturing or killing bin Laden," with only 29 percent answering "Removing the Taliban from power." Regarding war support, in a January 2002 Gallup poll, 93 percent of Americans considered the military campaign in Afghanistan "Not a mistake"; in October 2004, 51 percent of Americans said the same for the war in Iraq.

[7] Catherine Lutz, "US and Coalition Casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan" (working paper, Watson Institution for International Studies, Brown University, Providence, RI, 21 February 2013), 1 & 4, http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2013/USandCoalition.pdf.

[8] Ibid., 1.

[9] Ibid., 5.

that the wars' total costs will exceed $4 trillion, including operations, medical and disability, and social costs.[10]

Finally, in response to fears about terrorism, a significant number of Americans have been willing to exchange civil liberties for security. Immediately after 9/11, 47 percent of poll respondents said they supported the view that "the government should take all steps necessary to prevent additional acts of terrorism in the United States, even if it means your basic civil liberties would be violated."[11] A year after 9/11, about a third of Americans maintained the same opinion and continued to do so through 2015.[12] As a reflection of this sentiment, the government passed the USA PATRIOT Act in October 2001, passing in the Senate by a vote of 98 to 1, and by 357 to 66 in the House.[13] The measure was extended in March 2006 and again in May 2011. Provisions included so-called "sneak-and-peak" searches that allowed law enforcement to search private homes without notifying owners, "roving wiretaps" that allowed investigators to track suspects even if they changed phone numbers or service providers, "national security letters" that allowed the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to demand confidential records of consumers from private firms, and extended detention or deportation of terror suspects without due process.[14] Other policies included retaining indefinitely and even torturing "unlawful combatants" captured in Afghanistan and other regions.[15] As late as June

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[10] Linda J. Bilmes, "The Financial Legacy of Iraq and Afghanistan: How Wartime Spending Decisions Will Constrain Future National Security Budgets" (Faculty Research Working Paper Series, Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University, Boston, MA, March 2013), 20, https://research.hks.harvard.edu/publications/workingpapers/citation.aspx?PubId=8956&type=FN&PersonId=177); Neta C. Crawford, "US Budgetary Costs of War through 2016: $4.79 Trillion and Counting" (working paper, Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University, Providence, RI, September 2016), http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2016/Costs%20of%20War%20through%202016%20FINAL%20final%20v2.pdf. Crawford supports Bilmes' analysis: through 2016, war and homeland security costs have been $4.79 trillion.

[11] "Terrorism in the United States: Gallup Historical Trends."

[12] Ibid.; polls show Sept 2002 at 33 percent and June 2015 at 30 percent.

[13] Joshua Woods, *Freaking Out: A Decade of Living With Terrorism* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012), 14.

[14] Ibid., 14–15.

[15] Ibid., 16.

2014, when asked whether the United States should or should not close the detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, for these captives, 66 percent of American poll respondents declared that it should not be closed.[16] Moreover, when asked if the Attorney General under President Barack Obama should investigate the George W. Bush administration's use of torture against terrorism suspects, only 47 percent of Americans approved of the investigation.[17]

Clearly, the costs for Americans' reactions to terrorism are not inconsequential. As Benjamin Freidman, Jim Harper, and Christopher Preble put it, "overreaction does the work of terrorism."[18] Understanding what causes Americans to disproportionately fear the threat of terrorism will help develop strategies to help correct that imbalance. This thesis will add to the body of literature debating this topic, especially in regard to understanding Americans' increased fear of terrorism despite the lack of a major attack in the United States since 9/11.

B. THE PUBLIC'S PERCEPTION OF THE TERRORIST THREAT

Evidence suggests that Americans' perception of the terrorist threat changed significantly after 9/11.[19] Sociologist Joshua Woods argues that, "one of the most powerful and long-lasting changes in the public mindset after 9/11 was the increase in the perceived threat of terrorism… After previous attacks in the United States, including the first assault on the World Trade Center in February 1993 and the Oklahoma City bombing in April 1995, the threat of terrorism captured the county's attention, but did not become…a permanent concern for most Americans."[20] Numerous data support this

---

16 " War on Terrorism: Gallup Historical Trends," Gallup, accessed 20 May 2017, http://www.gallup.com/poll/5257/War-Terrorism.aspx.

17 Ibid.

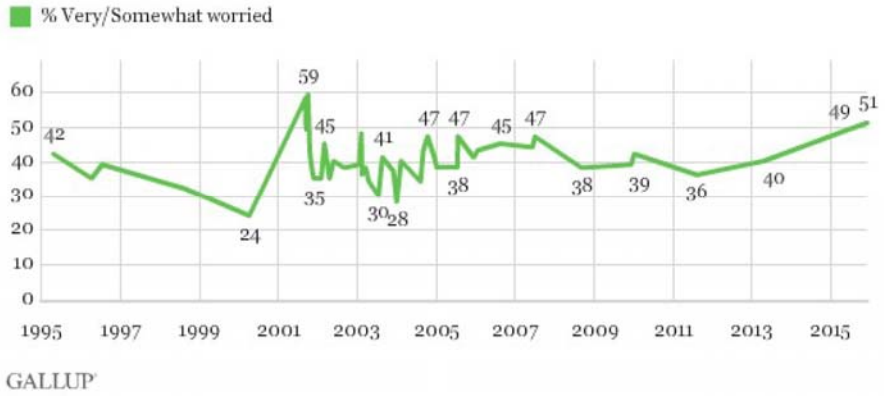
18 Benjamin Friedman, Jim Harper, and Christopher A. Preble. *Terrorizing Ourselves* (see note 1), 1.

19 Sociologist Joshua Woods uses the term "perceived threat" in regards to terrorism to describe the "deeply intertwined components" of emotional reactions, such as concern, worry or fear, and so-called cognitive reactions, or risk beliefs, to danger. See Joshua Woods, "The 9/11 Effect: Toward a Social Science of the Terrorist Threat," *The Social Science Journal* 48 (2011), 214.

20 Ibid., 214.

assertion. According to Gallup polls, immediately after Timothy McVeigh bombed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City and killed 168 people on 19 April 1995, 42 percent of poll respondents reported that they were very or somewhat worried about becoming a victim of terrorism.[21] By 2000, the percentage had declined to 24 percent. After the events of 9/11, when terrorists hijacked four commercial airliners, crashing them into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and a Pennsylvania field, killing 2,976 people, Gallup reported 59 percent of polled respondents being very or somewhat worried about becoming a victim of terrorism.[22] By early 2002, the percentage dropped to 35 percent. Since then, the percentage oscillated between a high of 51 percent (reported in December 2015) and a low of 28 percent (reported in January 2004), though averaged between 35–40 percent through 2015 (see Figure 1).[23]

Figure 1. American Perceptions of the Terrorist Threat (1995–2015).[24]



Question: How worried are you that you or someone in your family will become a victim of terrorism—very worried, somewhat worried, not too worried, or not worried at all?

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21 "The Oklahoma City Bombing: 20 Years Later," Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed 20 May 2017, https://stories.fbi.gov/oklahoma-bombing/; "Terrorism in the United States: Gallup Historical Trends," Gallup, accessed 20 May 2017, http://www.gallup.com/poll/4909/Terrorism-United-States.aspx.

22 "Remembering 9/11: FBI Has Evolved in Response to Changing Threats," Federal Bureau of Investigation, 9 September 2016, https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/remembering-911.

23 John Mueller and Mark G. Stewart, "American Public Opinion on Terrorism Since 9/11: Trends and Puzzles" (paper prepared for presentation at the National Convention of the International Studies Association, Atlanta, GA, 8 March 2016, http://politicalscience.osu.edu/faculty/jmueller/tpoISA16.pdf), 5.

24 Source: "Terrorism in the United States: Gallup Historical Trends," Gallup, accessed 20 May 2017, http://www.gallup.com/poll/4909/Terrorism-United-States.aspx.

Other data follows similar trends. For example, immediately after 9/11, 66 percent of polled Americans thought another attack was very or somewhat likely. As late as 2007, however, 40 percent of Americans continued to believe so.[25] Fears peaked again after the death of Osama bin Laden, with polls in May 2011 showing that 62 percent "thought an act of terrorism was either somewhat or very likely in the next several weeks."[26] Similarly, an average of about one third of Americans, from 2001 through 2014, thought that the United States was "less safe" compared to before 9/11, with peaks as high as 42 percent thinking so in late 2006 and 2010.[27] Finally, in response to Gallup's long-running open-ended poll about the most important problem facing the United States, immediately after 9/11, 46 percent of Americans listed terrorism. This concern slowly declined over the next decade, with eight percent citing terrorism in 2010. However, before 9/11, terrorism responses "barely registered" as a response at nearly zero percent, and, as of December 2015, terrorism was the most oft-cited concern at 16 percent.[28]

Another indicator of Americans' perception of the terrorist threat is reflected in their support of counterterrorism policies. For instance, Gallup polls found that in November 2001, 62 percent of Americans "advocated the start of a 'long-term war'" against terrorism.[29] Furthermore, one study found that 20 percent more Americans supported military action in response to 9/11 than the 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania.[30] Moreover, support for American military intervention was sustained by a large majority of Americans for years after 9/11. As late as 2007, 70 percent of Americans answered "no" when asked if military action in Afghanistan was "a

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[25] Woods, "The 9/11 Effect: Toward a Social Science of the Terrorist Threat," 215.

[26] Woods, *Freaking Out: A Decade of Living With Terrorism*, 26.

[27] John Mueller and Mark G. Stewart, *Chasing Ghosts: The Policing of Terrorism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 56.

[28] Rebecca Riffkin, "Americans Name Terrorism as No. 1 U.S. Problem," Gallup, 14 December 2015, http://news.gallup.com/poll/187655/americans-name-terrorism-no-problem.aspx. Per the article's title, 16 percent of Americans in December 2015, the highest since 9/11, named terrorism as the top problem facing the United States. The next highest concerns were the government at 13 percent, the economy at nine percent, and guns at seven percent.

[29] Cited in Woods, "The 9/11 Effect: Toward a Social Science of the Terrorist Threat," 220.

[30] Ibid.

mistake."[31] In regard to the American public's "willingness to make the civil liberties tradeoff" to fight terrorism, polls show that, after the OKC bombing, 49 percent of Americans were willing to support tradeoffs immediately after the bombing but only 29 percent were just two years later. After 9/11, 69 percent of the public were willing to support tradeoffs and, as late as July 2005, that percentage remained 11 points higher than pre-9/11 levels.[32]

In sum, according to available polling data, Americans' fear about the terrorist threat in the years after 9/11 increased significantly compared to after attacks in the 1990s. Moreover, after the spike in concern about the terrorist threat immediately after 9/11, Americans' concerns remained elevated for an extended period whereas after the OKC bombing and other previous attacks Americans' concerns eased more quickly and to lower levels. As Karlyn Bowman explains regarding public perceptions post-9/11, "today that threat is part of everyday life, and Americans expect another attack on our soil."[33]

C. ASSESSING CHANGES IN THE TERRORIST THREAT IN THE UNITED STATES

Though Americans' concerns about the terrorist threat have increased post-9/11, the actual scale and intensity of terrorism in the United States has not. That said, as Alex Schmid, a scholar who has focused extensively on sifting through the broad field of defining terrorism, argues, "terrorism is a contested concept."[34] As such, this thesis relies on the data and definitions from the well-known Global Terrorism Database (GTD) to meet this requirement. GTD defines a terrorist attack as:

> The threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear,

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., 221.

[33] Karlyn Bowman, "U.S. Public Opinion and the Terrorist Threat," *One Issue, Two Voices* 4 (October 2005), 8, http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/20060606_threats.pdf.

[34] Alex P. Schmid, "The Revised Academic Consensus Definition on Terrorism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, no. 6 (May 2012), 158.

> coercion, or intimidation…In addition, at least two of the following three criteria must be present for an incident to be included in the GTD:
>
> Criterion 1: The act must be aimed at attaining a political, economic, religious, or social goal…
>
> Criteria 2: There must be evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a larger audience (or audiences) than the immediate victims…
>
> Criteria 3: The action must be outside the context of legitimate warfare activities.[35]

In order to avoid as much ambiguity as possible, this thesis also focuses solely on incidents and deaths from attacks occurring within the United States between 1991 and 2011.[36] Geographically, this decision excludes overseas attacks that could be argued as terrorism, insurgency, or even warfare; chronologically, this 20-year period not only provides a large enough time period so trends become visible, it also crosses multiple presidential administrations, includes the two largest-ever terrorist attacks on United States soil, and is bookended by the end of the Cold War and the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), both topics which deserve their own focus beyond the scope of this thesis.[37]

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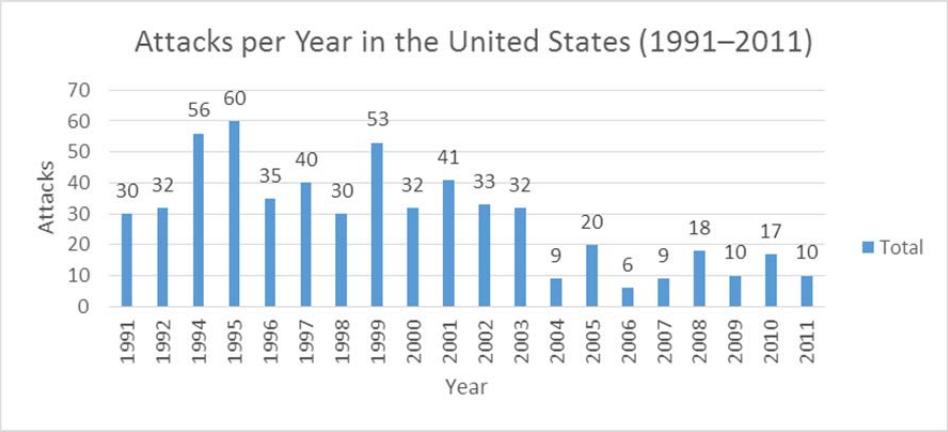
[35] National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) Global Terrorism Database (Codebook: Inclusion Criteria and Variables; June 2017), https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd, 9.

[36] GTD counts 798 terrorist attacks on Americans and 991 American deaths due to terrorism globally (United States excluded) between 1991–2011. This is an average of nearly 40 attacks and 50 deaths per year. Notably, 235 of those deaths happened during the 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. Also, 112 attacks and 441 of those deaths happened in either Iraq or Afghanistan after 9/11. This thesis also reports only the number of people killed in a terrorist incident and not injuries or structure damage. The biggest issue precluding an analysis of injuries and structure damage is that of degree. The GTD counts injuries in aggregate per attack without discerning among the severity of injuries. As a result, injury counts do not accurately reflect the comparative scale of terrorist incidents. Likewise, the GTD's limited categories for estimating property damage are wide, thus creating the potential for extensive variability when aggregating damage estimates. Additionally, although passport circulation increased steadily from 11 million in 1990 to 101 million in 2010, fewer than one third of Americans in 2010 possessed, let alone used, passports. Therefore, exposure to terrorism overseas for most Americans was, and continues to be, a limited issue. "Passport Statistics: Valid Passports in Circulation (1986-2016)," U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Consular Affairs, accessed October 26, 2017, https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports/statistics.html.

[37] "The Collapse of the Soviet Union," Department of State, Office of the Historian, accessed 13 July 2017, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1989-1992/collapse-soviet-union; "Mapping Militant Organizations," Stanford University, 14 April 2017, http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/1.

Data from the GTD supports the premise that the scale and intensity of attacks pre-9/11 is not less than post-9/11.[38] First, in terms of the quantity of terrorist attacks, terrorist attacks were actually more prevalent before 9/11 than afterwards. According to GTD data, there were 573 terrorist attacks in the United States from 1991–2011, with 389 occurring before 9/11 and 180 occurring afterward (see Figure 2).[39] On average, there were slightly more than 39 attacks per year before 9/11 compared to nearly 18 per year after 9/11. In other words, in the decade before 9/11, there were nearly twice as many terrorist attacks in the United States than in the decade after 9/11.

Figure 2. Terrorist Attacks per Year in the United States (1991–2011).[40]



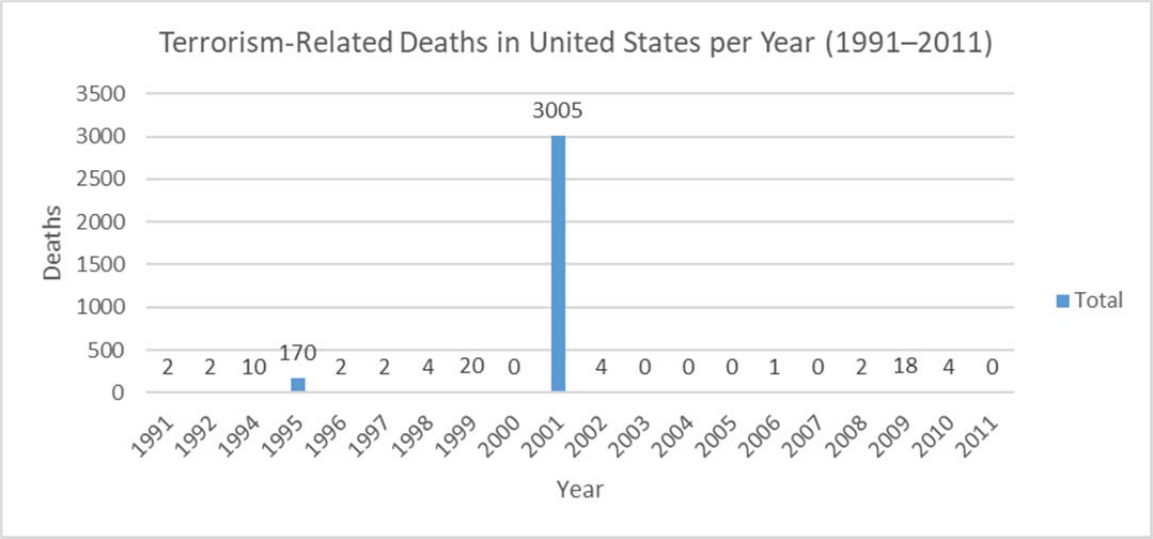
[38] The GTD suffered a technical database error resulting in incomplete data for 1993. As such, this thesis omits the year 1993 when analyzing GTD data (including in average calculations). However, according to terrorism scholar Christopher Hewitt, there were 43 terrorist and political violence incidents and 113 associated deaths in 1993 (count includes the April 19, 1993 Waco, Texas shootout at the Branch Davidian compound where 92 people died during a federal law enforcement raid). Of those, perhaps five incidents and 101 deaths (including the Waco, Texas shootout) are questionably associated with terrorism proper as defined above. As such, 1993 does not appear to be an outlier year in terms of terrorism during the 1990s. Christopher Hewitt, *Political Violence and Terrorism in Modern America: A Chronology* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2005), 161–163.

[39] National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) Global Terrorism Database (globalterrorismdb_0617dist.xlsx; June 2017), https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd. The GTD includes both successful and failed attacks, but not foiled plots; see discussion below regarding accounting for foiled plots. Also, the GTD counts 9/11 as four separate terrorist incidents—one for each hijacked airliner. The GTD also counts 78 "Doubt Terrorism" cases before 9/11, 35 cases after 9/11, and lists 43 "Not Coded" cases (all before 1997) from 1991–2011. Even eliminating all "Doubt Terrorism" and "Not Coded" cases from calculations, the number of pre-9/11 attacks exceeds post-9/11 attacks by nearly two-to-one.

[40] Adapted from: Ibid.

Second, the GTD data reveals 9/11 as an outlier in terms of the number of deaths due to terrorism. There were 211 terrorism-related deaths before 9/11. After 9/11, not including 9/11 itself, there were 36 terrorism-related deaths (see Figure 3).[41] On average, there were more than six times the number of terrorist-related deaths per year in the United States pre-9/11 than post-9/11.[42]

Figure 3. Terrorist-Related Deaths per Year in the United States (1991–2011).[43]



Of course, some scholars, such as Martha Crenshaw, Erik Dahl, and Margaret Wilson, have noted that the GTD data may only represent the "tip of the iceberg" leading

41 Ibid. The GTD attributes 2,998 deaths to 9/11. In addition, the GTD reports 24 "Doubt Terrorism" deaths and five "Not Coded" deaths before 9/11. Post-9/11, the GTD reports two "Doubt Terrorism" deaths. Eliminating all "Doubt Terrorism" and "Not Coded" cases from calculations, the average number of terrorism-related deaths pre-9/11 outpaces post-9/11 deaths by a factor of more than five.

42 Notably, excluding both the OKC bombing and 9/11 as outliers, terrorism-related deaths have remained nearly constant over the 20-year period at approximately four per year. Including both events, the average number of deaths is just over 162 per year. For a point of comparison, there were an average of 12,757 gun-violence homicides per year in the United States from 1993–2011. See Michael Planty and Jennifer L. Truman, "Firearm Violence, 1993–2011," Bureau of Justice Statistics (May 2013): 2, NCJ241730, https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/fv9311.pdf. Moreover, there were an average 43,396 motor vehicle-related deaths per year between 1999–2015. See Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS); Accessed 16 July 2017), https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal.html.

43 Adapted from: Ibid.

to "an incomplete understanding of terrorism and its consequences."[44] Rightly so, they logically insist that public concern about terrorism should only be judged while balancing consideration for failed and foiled plots with successful ones.[45] Indeed, some counts appear to support this argument. According to Dahl's personal tally, there were 133 domestic failed or foiled plots of terrorism in the United States between 1993 and 2011.[46] This averages to nearly two and a half more unsuccessful plots per year post-9/11 than pre-9/11 (see Figure 4). However, this thesis argues that considering this information in relation to public opinion is premature: first, it is arguable whether or not the public is fully aware of these foiled plots and failed attacks; and second, as Crenshaw and associates admit, many of these post-9/11 incidents involve "individuals who do not appear to represent a significant threat, and whose commitment and abilities are questionable."[47] In other words, the government may simply be casting a wider net, or as John Mueller and Mark Stewart suggest, even manufacturing cases to justify counterterrorism budgets: "one approach to the problem of the near-dearth of domestic terrorists is to create them…and the police seem to be getting better at this enterprise."[48]

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[44] Martha Crenshaw, Erik Dahl, and Margaret Wilson, "Beneath the Tip of the Iceberg: A New Data Set of Failed and Foiled Terrorist Plots" (Preliminary draft as of February 2017 for presentation at the International Studies Association Annual Conference, Baltimore, MD, 2017), 2.

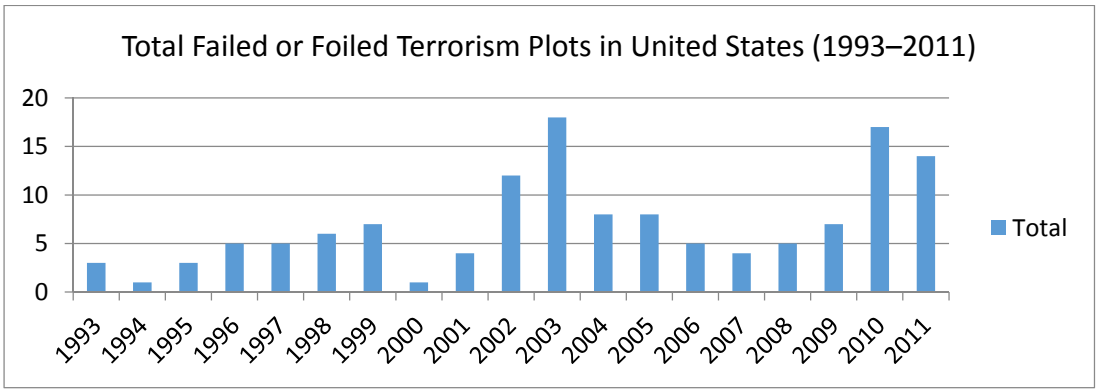
[45] Ibid., 2. As mentioned, GTD includes failed (e.g., an explosive device did not detonate as intended) but not foiled (e.g., prevented by law enforcement) plots.

[46] Erik Dahl, email message to author, 11 July 2017. Dr. Dahl provided, and granted permission to cite, a working database he uses to "track unsuccessful plots and attacks against American targets, both in the U.S. and overseas, and from both radical Islamist and from other sources…" The database is an extension of an earlier version published in Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack* (Georgetown University Press, 2013).

[47] Crenshaw, Dahl, and Wilson, "Beneath the Tip of the Iceberg: A New Data Set of Failed and Foiled Terrorist Plots," 20.

[48] Mueller and Stewart, *Chasing Ghosts*, 30. The authors note that of the 62 Islamic extremist terrorism cases in the United States since 9/11 that they list, more than half are noted to have been crucially dependent on informants or operatives for their development. Mueller and Stewart also list eight cases that, without the help of an insider operative, would have disintegrated completely. Moreover, they note that the FBI "maintains some 15,000 official informants—ten times the number it had during the 1970s," some of whom have been incentivized more than $100,000 to garner terrorism-related convictions. See pages 31, 267–274.

Figure 4. Total Failed or Foiled Terrorism Plots in the United States (1993–2011).[49]



In sum, in contrast to the public's concern otherwise, this thesis argues that 9/11 does not appear to be an harbinger of any significant increase in the number of deaths caused by terrorism in the United States post-9/11 compared to pre-9/11. Given the 20-year snapshot presented above, 9/11 appears, thankfully, to be an outlier event in regard to the scale and intensity of the terrorist threat.[50] Thus, comparing pre and post-9/11, Americans' elevated and sustained fear of the terrorist threat post-9/11 does not appear to be based on an objective measurement of the scale and intensity of terrorist attacks in the United States. The remainder of this thesis seeks to identify the factors that might have contributed to this condition.

[49] Adapted from: Erik Dahl, email message to author, 11 July 2017. The database is an extension of an earlier version published in Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack* (Georgetown University Press, 2013).

[50] Not addressed in this thesis is the scholarly debate about the extent of so-called "new terrorism." Advocates for new terrorism argue that, starting in the 1990s, a marked difference developed between old and new terrorists, exemplified by the rise of groups such as Al Qaeda. These new terrorist groups are characterized by their conduct of ad hoc network structure, transnational operations, religious and apocalyptic fanaticism (including millenarianism), and indiscriminate and excessive use of violence, especially by means of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). See Martha Crenshaw, "The Debate Over "New" vs. "Old" Terrorism," (Paper prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, 30 August-2 September, 2007, accessed 7 June 2017 at http://www.start.umd.edu/sites/default/files/files/publications/New_vs_Old_Terrorism.pdf) and Isabelle Duyvesteyn, "How New Is the New Terrorism?" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, no. 27 (2004): 439–454, doi: 10.1080/10576100490483750 for the arguments refuting any increase in the likelihood of an indiscriminate weapons of mass destruction attack from fanatical terrorists compared to before 9/11.

D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

A survey of the terrorism-specific literature reveals that explanations for the pre and post-9/11 shift in Americans' perceptions of the terrorism threat involve a complex interaction of psychological, sociological, technological, political, and economic factors. This thesis has categorized those generally as revolving around the news media, popular culture, the Internet, political elites and other members of the so-called "terrorism industry." This section summarizes those arguments.

1. The News Media

Several works discuss the link between the news media landscape and Americans' perception of terrorism. In *Shock of the News*, Brian Monahan underscores the media's shift towards news stories that are dramatic and emotional—what Monahan calls "public drama."[51] Changing economic, technological, and cultural foundations are blamed for the shifts. First, Monahan notes that the accelerating transition to a for-profit model at the turn of the century directly impacted what kinds of content were considered news-worthy.[52] Second, the advent of 24-hour news channels and the Internet created more competition, access to information and images from around the globe, and the need to fill "news holes" with more content and coverage.[53] As a result, the "media logic" has shifted, blending hard and soft news with "emphasis on creating news that is an attractive product rather than a vehicle for public enrichment and substantive discourse."[54] The side-effect is that news as public drama shapes viewers' world views through oversimplified, single narratives that lack alternative points of view.[55]

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[51] Brian A. Monahan, *The Shock of the News: Media Coverage and the Making of 9/11* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 18.

[52] Ibid., 23–24.

[53] Ibid., 24.

[54] Ibid., 26.

[55] Ibid., 27; Monahan gives the example of 9/11 as "a melodramatic morality tale built on the struggle between good and evil and populated with villains, heroes, and victims."

Moreover, Joshua Woods, in his book *Freaking Out*, argues that the vast majority of Americans only experience terrorism indirectly through the media. Therefore, how the news media frames the terrorist threat especially affects public perceptions of the terrorist threat.[56] By using the frames of "terrorism," "radical Islamic," and "nuclear," the post-9/11 media activates a "preconceived set of ideas" that elevate threat perception because of their unfamiliarity, uncontrollability, and catastrophic potential.[57] Woods further contends that, because of the highly competitive capitalist system our media is subject to, the media has an incentive to operate within these fear-inducing frames that entice viewership.[58] Moreover, in matters of national security, Woods notes that top public officials are well positioned to set the national agenda, projecting that agenda through the media. Those officials are likewise incentivized to cultivate fear in order to "sell themselves as saviors."[59]

Additionally, Brigitte Nacos, Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, and Robert Shapiro, present one of the most comprehensive and representative works on the subject. In *Selling Fear*, the authors suggest that the news media failed to uphold their "watchdog" role to present independent critique and analysis of the government.[60] For a multitude of reasons, including a post-crisis rally-around-the-flag effect, market forces shifting hard news to "infotainment," and indexing or propaganda effects that make the news inherently vulnerable to government "news management" in times of crisis, the news media

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[56] Woods, *Freaking Out: A Decade of Living With Terrorism*, 65.

[57] Ibid., 67–69.

[58] Ibid., 131.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Brigitte L. Nacos, Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, and Robert Y. Shapiro, *Selling Fear: Counterterrorism, the Media, and Public Opinion* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), xii.

deferred to the government post-9/11 to set the public agenda.[61] As a result, the Bush administration was able to amplify and sustain Americans' elevated perception of the threat of transnational terrorism and pursue its policies virtually uncontested.[62] Furthermore, Nacos and her associates present evidence that the media's coverage of specific threats made by terrorists, such as by Osama bin Laden, and the government raising the terrorist threat alert levels, directly correlated to increases in public perceptions of the terrorist threat.[63]

2. Popular Culture

In addition to the news shaping Americans' world views, some research suggests that popular culture, especially film and television drama, is also an important source of information affecting public perceptions. Nacos, in *Mass-Mediated Terrorism*, provides a review of the relevant works, noting "Hollywood productions cannot be separated from the political realities of particular times."[64] In other words, the contemporary discourse on terrorism cannot be understood without also understanding how it is portrayed in movies and television. Moreover, Nacos relates that popular culture can act like "adult education," linking viewers' perceptions of reality with movie and television content.[65]

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[61] Ibid., 7–13, 183. See pages 7–8 for a discussion of "rally-around-the-flag" effects in the news media context: "rallies occur when the news reflects that opinion leaders (administration officials, members of Congress, and others) either support the president or abstain from criticism…In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 strikes, the news reflected a broad consensus on the need to suspend bipartisanship for the benefit of a united front…" See pages 8–9 for a discussion of the market forces shifting the media from hard news to infotainment. See pages 12–13 for a discussion of indexing and propaganda effects: "'indexing' speaks to the media's tendency to make news decisions based on their assessments of the power dynamics inside government…By relying mostly or solely on the most influential governmental insiders, the media allow them and their institutions to frame the news, set the range of the mass-mediated debate, and influence the politics of policymaking and the policies themselves;" the "propaganda or hegemony model considers the mainstream media as an instrument of America's power elite who include the top echelon of the economic, military, and political domains…'the media serve, and propagandize on behalf of the powerful societal interests that control and finance them.'"

[62] Ibid., 196.

[63] Ibid., 54–55.

[64] Brigitte Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: Mainstream and Digital Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, Third Edition (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2016), Kindle edition, loc 3813.

[65] Ibid., loc 3840.

This blurring of news and popular culture is especially salient when news outlets splice movie or television content into their broadcasts in order to provide dramatic visuals for a story.[66] Nacos further posits that popular culture, whether done intentionally or not, may propagate political agendas, such as public officials frequently citing Jack Bauer's successful use of torture to disrupt terrorist plots in the television show *24*.[67] Finally, supporting Nacos' review, Ian Lustick provides a useful list of terrorist-related films, novels, and television post-9/11, arguing that they both reflected Americans' perceptions of the threat and sustained it by affecting Americans' perceptions of reality.[68]

3. The Internet

The role the Internet plays in shaping Americans' fears about the terrorist threat is another burgeoning area of research. Martin Rudner focuses on exactly how terrorist groups, such as Al Qaeda, have used the Internet as part of a strategy to wage "electronic jihad."[69] Actions like publishing speeches of terrorist leaders, inciting violence, urging support for affiliated terrorist groups, disseminating propaganda, glorifying martyrs, threatening targeted communities or individuals, distributing tactical training materials, webcasting "news reports," and even publishing online magazines are all enabled by the Internet.[70] The result is that the Internet has become a "powerful catalyst for facilitating Al Qaeda-sponsored terrorist activities and operations…[and has] created a threat environment wherein terrorist activities can emanate from a large number of countries

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[66] Ibid., loc 3868.

[67] Ibid., loc 3925–3948.

[68] Ian S. Lustick, *Trapped in the War on Terror* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 24–27; Lustick's informal survey covering 2001–2005 identified at least seven blockbuster movies released with terrorism-related plots: *Collateral Damage*, *The Sum of All Fears*, *Face of Terror*, *Antibody*, *American Heroes*, *When Eagles Strike*, and *Blast!*; a sample of an airport bookstore in 2005 showed 20 percent of paperback novels were terrorism-related, including *Splinter Cell*, *State of Fear*, *Deception Point*, *London Bridges*, and *The Lazarus Vendetta*; made-for-television movies from 2001–2005 included *Winds of Terror*, *Operation Wolverine: Seconds to Spare*, *The President's Man 2: A Line in the Sand*, *Smallpox 2002: Silent Weapon*, *The Pilot's Wife*, *Counterstrike*, *Critical Assembly*, *Tiger Cruise*, and the highly popular docudrama *Dirty War*; television shows dedicated to terrorism-related topics included *The Agency*, *NCIS*, *Threat Matrix*, *Alias*, a mini-series called *Sleeper Cell*, and, of course, *24*.

[69] Martin Rudner, "Electronic Jihad: The Internet as Al Qaeda's Catalyst for Global Terror," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 40, no. 1 (February 2017): 11, doi: 10.1080/1057610X.2016.1157403.

[70] Ibid., 12.

and elements within countries."[71] In other words, the Internet diffuses the jihadist threat across the globe, inspiring and linking otherwise disparate violent extremists.[72]

Similarly, Gabriel Weimann's post-9/11 seminal work on the subject highlights the advantages the Internet poses for terrorists. Easy and cheap access, lack of censorship or government control, access to huge audiences, anonymity, rapid dissemination of information, the ability to post multimedia content, and the capacity to affect traditional mass media all make the Internet an "ideal arena" for terrorists.[73] Furthermore, terrorists use the Internet to target current and potential supporters, international public opinion, including journalists, and enemy publics. The latter target, enemy publics, is especially relevant as terrorists use the Internet to demoralize targeted citizens by threatening attacks as well as alter public opinion and spur lack of support for the government.[74] Among the terrorist uses of the Internet Weimann identifies, psychological warfare and publicity are the most pertinent to this thesis.[75] According to Weimann, terrorists "use the Internet to spread disinformation, to deliver threats intended to distill fear and helplessness, and to disseminate horrific images of recent actions."[76] Likewise, "the Internet has significantly expanded the opportunities for terrorists to secure publicity."[77] Terrorists no longer have to overcome news media "selection thresholds" and can instead control their own content.[78]

Weimann's more recent effort focuses on terrorists' successful incorporation of social media into their communication strategies. Weimann notes that social media

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[71] Ibid., 14.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Gabriel Weimann, *www.terror.net: How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, March 2004, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/sr116.pdf), 3.

[74] Ibid., 4–5.

[75] Ibid., 5–10; Weimann's analysis fully explores psychological warfare, publicity and propaganda, data mining, fundraising, recruitment and mobilization, networking, sharing information, and planning and coordination as post-9/11 terrorist uses of the Internet.

[76] Ibid., 5.

[77] Ibid., 6.

[78] Ibid.

differs from other communications methods in regard to its interactivity, reach, frequency, usability, immediacy, and permanence.[79] Moreover, "with social media, information consumers also act as communicators, vastly expanding the number of information transmitters in the communication market."[80] Furthermore, terrorists use social media because their intended audience does and it "allows terrorist organizations to be part of the mainstream."[81] Social networks, in addition to being user friendly and free to use, allow terrorists to actively initiate engagement with target audiences, as opposed to traditional websites that depended on visitors coming to them of their own accord.[82]

Finally, Nacos suggests that the Internet initially served as another platform for posting terrorist propaganda as a form of "mass self-communication" that eroded the role of traditional media gatekeepers, but that most people received news from television, newspapers, and magazines.[83] However, Internet use has become much more ubiquitous in the last decade, and groups like the Islamic State (ISIS) have mastered a communications strategy that takes advantage of all features of the Internet, especially social media, thus amplifying terrorists' abilities to mass self-communicate.[84] Moreover, though the Internet makes more information available from more numerous sources, people "do not necessarily survey the diversity of information and opinions available in the marketplace of ideas but rely solely or mostly on those sources that fit their own views…the result is a widening of the perceived 'us' versus 'them' divide."[85]

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[79] Gabriel Weimann, *New Terrorism and New Media* (Washington, DC: Commons Lab of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2014, http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/newterrorism-and-new-media), 4.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid., 5.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: Mainstream and Digital Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, Third Edition, loc 1584.

[84] Ibid., loc 249, 1639, 1784.

[85] Ibid., loc 296.

4. The Political Elite

Turning to the role of political elites' incentives in changing Americans' perceptions about the threat of terrorism post-9/11, the character of arguments ranges from conspiratorial to institutional. From the conspiratorial perspective, Lustick suggests "identifying the ruthless and calculated manipulation of post-9/11 anxieties that set off the spiral toward an extravagant and self-destructive War on Terror."[86] To this end, Lustick defines a set of "leading conservative Republican politicians with neoconservative activists, intellectuals, and journalists" as members of a cabal.[87] The cabal's aim was to establish American hegemony internationally and "conservative ascendency" domestically.[88] Lustick suggests the cabal manipulated Americans' anxieties post-9/11 to galvanize support for the "War on Terror," specifically focused on the invasion of Iraq, for ideological and political reasons.[89] More defensible, however, is Lustick's assertion that the War on Terror then "took on a life of its own," perpetuating itself beyond the control of any group or individuals—the public demanded more security and counterterrorism programs, companies, lobbyists, and politicians "identified the War on Terror as a key element in their own success."[90]

From an institutional standpoint, John Mueller suggests that politicians are incentivized to propagate fears about the terrorist threat in order to secure constituent support. For instance, President George W. Bush's approval ratings hit record highs immediately following 9/11 and saw bumps each time the Department of Homeland Security elevated the country's terrorism alert levels.[91] In addition, Mueller suggests politicians exaggerate terrorism threats at the expense of realistic assessments in order not

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[86] Lustick, *Trapped in the War on Terror*, 6.

[87] Ibid., 49.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid., 70–71.

[90] Ibid., 71.

[91] John Mueller, *Overblown: How Politicians and the Terrorism Industry Inflate National Security Threats, and Why We Believe Them* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 33.

to be labeled "soft on terrorism" during election bids.[92] This argument reflects Risen's assertion that "American leaders have learned that keeping the terrorist threat alive provides enormous political benefits. It lets incumbents look tough, and lends them the national attention and political glamor that comes from dealing with national security issues."[93] Finally, Mueller argues that, given the significant increases in counterterrorism and homeland security expenditures, politicians from all levels are incentivized to hike the terrorism threat in order to justify pork-barrel spending projects.[94]

Friedman likewise supports an institutional approach to explaining politicians' behavior regarding the terrorist threat, though describes the incentive as a means to garner support for particular policy agendas. First, Freidman argues that, because "people see threats as more legitimate justifications for policies than ideological ends," politicians are incentivized to justify foreign policy commitments under the guise of security.[95] Thus, "the search for enemies is constant."[96] Second, Friedman contends that stoking a sense of crisis overcomes so-called policy "veto players" that may be needed to support a politician's policy changes.[97] Policy makers can alarm veto players into supporting their policy changes or rouse the public to demand change. Thus, "policymakers, including the president, both generate and employ fear to make policy."[98]

5. The "Terrorism Industry"

Terrorism scholars have also studied how members of the "terrorism industry," such as bureaucratic organizations and other so-called "risk entrepreneurs," are compelled to participate in increasing the public's perceptions of the terrorist threat.[99]

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[92] Ibid., 34.

[93] Risen, *Pay Any Price: Greed, Power, and Endless War*, 225.

[94] Mueller, *Overblown*, 35–36.

[95] Friedman, "Managing Fear: The Politics of Homeland Security," 196.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid.

[99] John Mueller, "Inflating Terrorism," in *American Foreign Policy and the Politics of Fear: Threat Inflation Since 9/11*, ed. A. Trevor Thrall and Jane K. Cramer (New York: Routledge, 2009), 199.

Mueller's works, *Overblown* and *Chasing Ghosts*, are representative of this perspective. First, Mueller argues that threat analysts and bureaucrats leading intelligence organizations suffer from a "9/11 Commission Syndrome" which spurred an "obsession with the career dangers in failing to 'connect the dots.'"[100] As a result, "threats, fabrications, half-truths [and] vague warning" all were documented, assessed, and even briefed to the level of the president post-9/11.[101] Second, Mueller argues that undisciplined spending for homeland security measures created financial incentives to sustain public fears about terrorism for industry and government organizations alike that "would be out of business if terrorism were to be back-burnered."[102]

Lustick supports these arguments in *Trapped in the War on Terror*. He suggests that, in response to Americans' perceptions about being "threatened with highly potent terrorist pathogens that pose deadly but essentially unpredictable threats," government officials are pressured to respond in the most conservative manner, thus initiating or sustaining a positive feedback loop.[103] Lustick labels this the "cover your ass" mechanism, wherein fear of being blamed after an attack drives threat inflation. He applies the mechanism to the intelligence community, military, and law enforcement.[104] Moreover, Lustick outlines how the War on Terror enhanced bureaucratic interests to align government agencies' missions with counterterrorism in order to "increase or protect budget allocations."[105] Lustick extends the argument, showing that even organizations as disparate as the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges and the National District Attorneys Association "sought to use counterterrorism to advance their own particular interests or pet projects."[106] In other words, the scope of

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[100] Mueller and Stewart, *Chasing Ghosts*, 19.

[101] Phillip Mudd, quoted in Ibid., 19.

[102] Mueller, *Overblown*, 41.

[103] Lustick, *Trapped in the War on Terror*, 89.

[104] Ibid., 89–90.

[105] Ibid., 86.

[106] Ibid., 79–80.

agencies and organizations supposedly involved with counterterrorism served to expand the public's perception of the scope of the terrorist threat.

Regarding organizational incentives, Friedman explains that "threats fade, but the organizations that combat them remain, making today's fear tomorrow's."[107] Stated another way, once created, public organizations seek to execute and sustain their mission. Freidman argues that this is so because the hierarchy created within organizations is conservative in nature and views changes to the mission as threatening. Furthermore, organization members become "infused" with the organization's values, "making them servants of the organization's mission." Also, the organization's "way of doing business" tends to provide impetus to garner outside support, such as funding.[108] Accordingly, organizations with counterterrorism missions have an interest in "preserving the sense of threat that justified [the mission]."[109] Freidman notes that this effect is especially noteworthy because the Bush administration defined counterterrorism as a military mission. Thus, the Department of Defense, one of the largest and most well-respected government agencies, tends to frame its operations and budgetary needs in relation to counterterrorism efforts. He also extends the concept to academic institutions and think tanks receiving homeland security and defense funds that then propagate reports, articles, and books that justify their terrorism focus.[110]

Finally, another consideration regarding institutional incentives is the concept of the politicization of intelligence. Lowenthal describes politicization as the effect of analysts or intelligence officers injecting their preference for a certain policy outcome into their intelligence analysis.[111] Politicization can be either positive or negative. Positive politicization is when intelligence is intentionally altered in order to support

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[107] Friedman, "Managing Fear," 198.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Ibid., 200–201.

[111] Mark M. Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy*, Seventh Edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: 2017), Kindle edition, loc 339.

outcomes preferred by policy makers.[112] Lowenthal suggests motives for this type of politicization include "loss of objectivity regarding the issue at hand, a preference for specific options or outcomes, an effort to be more supportive, career interests, or outright pandering."[113] Negative politicization is when intelligence is produced to influence policy makers to change their policies.[114] Though Lowenthal acknowledges that measuring intelligence politicization is difficult, he does recognize that the stakes are significant for intelligence analysts whose careers "can rise or fall…as a result of which side of a debate they are on."[115]

6. Sociological and Psychological Response

The literature further suggests that 9/11 marked a turning point that "fundamentally changed the way Americans see the world."[116] Woods reviews some of these significant so-called "9/11 effects." First, in the first few months after 9/11, Americans across the country suffered short-term "severe psychological distress" as represented by the 45 percent of adults and 35 percent of children in a nationwide survey reporting substantial symptoms of stress due to 9/11.[117] In response to this national distress after 9/11, Americans "rallied around the flag" in support of the president, demonstrating increased levels of public trust in government and more patriotism. Americans also reported increased social and political engagement and greater interest in the news.[118] Furthermore, Americans appeared more willing to "punish those who violate conventional values" and support "leaders who displayed power, toughness, and an iron determination to confront the enemy."[119] According to Woods, these factors, stoked by

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112 Ibid., loc 4388.

113 Ibid., loc 4388.

114 Ibid.

115 Ibid., loc 4388–4414.

116 Woods, *Freaking Out: A Decade of Living With Terrorism*, 57.

117 Ibid., 27 & 57.

118 Ibid., 57

119 Ibid., 58

the media's so-called "dominant symbolic repertoire," then "harmonized with the government's aggressive foreign and domestic policies" to sustain American's fear of terrorism and subsequent support for counterterrorism policies beyond the initial psychological shock of the attacks.[120]

In addition to the shock effects of 9/11, Friedman also claims that, "Americans want more homeland security than they need" because "cognitive biases cause people to worry more about terrorists than they should."[121] In short, people use "mental shortcuts based on impressions," or heuristics, to assess danger, resulting in inaccurate estimates about the actual risk to life posed by terrorists.[122] For instance, people tend to focus on high-consequence events despite their low probabilities. Another example is the anchoring effect, wherein "people rely too heavily on initial impressions of risk and discount later information."[123] Representativeness effect is also applicable, as people use previous events to estimate the probability of future events. Related to this is the tendency for people to attribute intentionality and patterns to randomness.[124] The availability heuristic is considered especially pertinent in that people overestimate the probability of events when they can picture similar events that are "recent, when they create memorable images, and when they receive great publicity."[125] People also overestimate risks that are new or uncontrollable.[126] Friedman concludes that, when combined with threat inflated information created and disseminated by the government and associated elites, terrorism is a "perfect storm for provoking fear and overreaction" in the public.[127]

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[120] Ibid., 132–133.

[121] Friedman, "Managing Fear: The Politics of Homeland Security," 185.

[122] Ibid., 193.

[123] Ibid., 194.

[124] Ibid., 194–195.

[125] Ibid., 195.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Ibid.

Finally, a significant sociological concept serving to sustain Americans' fear of terrorism is the application of Stanley Cohen's "moral panic" framework. James Walsh explains the original moral panic framework as a term "meant to capture episodes—initiated by moral crusaders, perpetuated by media sensationalism, and reproduced through state practice–involving hysterical reactions and hyperbolic fear towards 'folk devils' conceived as threatening social order and communal values."[128] In other words, out groups are identified as socially disruptive, vilified by the media, and targeted by the state and within political discourse. Initiators of moral panics have conventionally been either the public at large, "moral entrepreneurs" attempting to eradicate a specific "moral evil," or elites trying initiate a propaganda campaign in order to "divert attention from and avoid solutions to deeper structural problems that threaten elite interests."[129] There is general agreement among sociologists that 9/11 initiated an extreme moral panic "defined by exaggerated threats, moralistic discourse, and disproportionate response."[130] Walsh further expands the concept's application by considering terrorists as agents actively cultivating moral panic in order to "inflat[e] their threatening status and induc[e] hysteria" in an effort to affect political change.[131]

E. SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENT

Previous broad studies answering this research question have emphasized various combinations of the factors discussed in the literature review above. Nacos and her colleagues, for example, concentrate on the interrelation of the news media and popular

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[128] James P. Walsh, "Moral Panics by Design: The Case of Terrorism," *Current Sociology*, (10 March 2016): 1–2, doi: 10.1177/0011392116633257. See also Malcom M. Feeley and Jonathan Simon, "Folk Devils and Moral Panics: An Appreciation from North America," in *Crime, Social Control and Human Rights: From Moral Panics to States of Denial*, edited by Christine Chinkin, David Downes, Conor Gearty, and Paul Rock (London: Wilem Publishing Company, 2007), 39–53. Feeley and Simon, in reference to the significant focus on crime laws in the United States that facilitated what they call an institutionalized "culture of control" in the decade before 9/11, argue that "moral panics are now a part of the manufactured background, a feature of the larger order of knowledge and power that never goes away or recedes, and that must be constantly guarded against (pg. 51)."

[129] Ibid., 4.

[130] Ibid., 2.

[131] Ibid., 2.

culture, the Internet, and political elites after 9/11. Mueller focuses on the nexus of politicians' and "terrorism industry" incentives. Woods and Freidman emphasize the sociological and psychological factors that made Americans more receptive to receiving and accepting inflated terrorist threat estimates. Lustick perhaps comes the closest to integrating all of these factors, but his analysis lingers on the notion of an actively conspiratorial cabal within the Bush administration post-9/11.

This thesis, however, analyzes these factors in combination, and also examines them from both a pre and post-9/11 perspective which no other prior work does. The argument made is that a specific combination of these factors, namely a changed media landscape, evolved popular culture focus, expanded use of the Internet, and increased incentives for politicians and members of the "terrorism industry" have worked together, positively reinforced by innate human sociological and psychological features, to produce a sustained collective psychosis, or culture of fear, that distorts Americans' perceptions of the threat of terrorism post-9/11.

This argument warrants further explanation. First, regarding the news media, the shifting emphasis from hard news to "infotainment" resulted in the media over-reporting terrorism-related content, thus forfeiting its "watchdog" role and allowing the government to set the public agenda and flaunt the terrorist threat to its advantage. Second, popular culture's increased focus on terrorism-related themes altered viewers' perceptions of reality, especially regarding the nature, scale, and scope of the terrorist threat. Third, expanded use of the Internet allowed Al Qaeda and its affiliates to directly propagate threats and messages to the public, thus bypassing traditional media "gatekeepers" and creating the illusion of a more widely distributed and capable Al Qaeda threat. Fourth, politicians, consciously or unconsciously, rhetorically elevated the terrorist threat in order to garner support for policies or for electoral purposes. Fifth, members of the "terrorism industry"—including security-related businesses, but especially government bureaucrats, intelligence analysts, academics, and think tanks—whose financial or career lifeblood depended on the government's continued focus on the terrorism threat, also facilitated an inflated sense of terrorist threat. Ultimately, these factors coalesced during and after 9/11 to create a collective psychosis among the

American public, triggering mass sociological responses that subsequently sustained a positively re-enforcing cycle responsible for inflating Americans' fear of terrorism for more than a decade.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW AND CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter I has reviewed the evolution of the terrorist threat and the public's perception of the threat in the United States before the OKC bombing and post-9/11 (approximately 1991–2011). This established that the scale and intensity of the terrorist threat did not necessarily change, though Americans' perceptions of the terrorist threat did change. Chapter II evaluates the changing news and popular culture landscape and expanding use of the Internet. This will reveal that the public was not only bombarded more by news reports, images, video, and social media feeds flaunting the terrorist threat post-9/11 than pre-9/11, but also that dissenting voices or countering perspectives were diminished or absent, thus facilitating an increased and prolonged public fear of the terrorist threat. The chapter will also expose the incentives that fostered the changing landscape. Chapter III investigates shifting political elite and other terrorism industry incentives. This will highlight how financial, political, and bureaucratic incentives translated into higher levels of rhetoric, policies, intelligence and government reporting, and punditry post-9/11 that propagated to the public an inflated threat of terrorism. The chapter will also explain why these incentives materialized post-9/11 and not after the OKC bombing. Chapter IV analyzes the impact of the proposed factors on producing a collective and sustained American psychosis, or culture of fear. This will tie together the interrelated aspects of the proposed factors to explain how the factors' collective presence post-9/11, and absence pre-9/11, explains Americans' distorted perceptions of the threat of terrorism. The chapter will close with policy and future research recommendations.

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II. ASSESSING THE EFFECTS OF THE NEWS MEDIA, THE INTERNET, AND POPULAR CULTURE

A generally agreed-upon theme among media scholars is that much of what Americans know about the world comes from what we watch and read rather that our personal experiences.[132] As such, how the mass media, including the news and film and television dramas, portray a subject and how effectively and broadly messages are propagated matters as to how Americans perceive that subject. That concept applies to Americans' perception of the terrorist threat as well. Indeed, as this thesis argues, it is likely that Americans' shifting perception of the terrorist threat is largely due to changes in the media landscape. The following sections reveal that changes to the way terrorism has been portrayed in the news media and film and television drama are clearly evident before and after 9/11. Similarly, use of the Internet has expanded greatly by both public consumers and those terrorist organizations seeking to propagate their threatening presence. As a result of these changes, Americans' fear about the terrorist threat has increased and remained elevated in relation to the scale and intensity of terrorism in the United States post-9/11.

A. ASSESSING THE NEWS

As discussed in Chapter I, research suggests that Americans' fears about terrorism have been elevated partially in response to the way the news media has portrayed the terrorist threat. This section examines the secondary literature to determine how, and to what extent, the news media's depiction of terrorism changed before and after 9/11. This section first considers evidence that the news has shifted away from hard news coverage of terrorism events to more dramatic and emotional coverage. It then studies the frames by which terrorism is portrayed in the news. Finally, this section analyzes whether the

[132] David L. Altheide, "Fear, Terrorism, and Popular Culture," in *Reframing 9/11: Film, Popular Culture, and the War on Terror*, eds. Jeff Birkenstein, Anna Froula, and Karen Randell (New York: Bloomsbury Academic and Professional, 2014): 11; Brigitte Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: Mainstream and Digital Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, Third Edition (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2016), Kindle edition, loc. 3840.

news media upheld its watchdog role during and after 9/11 or if it allowed political elites to set the news agenda.

1. News as Public Drama

As previously discussed, Brian Monahan, in *Shock of the News*, argues that the news media shifted before 9/11 to a focus on news as public drama, that is, "news that is fashioned into dramatic and emotional stories."[133] Other scholars appear to support Monahan's claim as evidenced below. Data clearly support the premise that news media has both made a dramatic shift towards soft news coverage and that market pressures have affected both news content and presentation.

First, data from a 1998 study by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism indicates that there has been a marked shift in both topics of the news and emphasis within the coverage itself: "there has been a shift toward lifestyle, celebrity, entertainment and celebrity crime/scandal in the news and away from government and foreign affairs…There is an even more pervasive shift toward featurized and people-oriented approach to the news, away from traditional straight news accounts (see Table 1)."[134] Reviewing the coverage of several media outlets, including the main network newscasts and frontpage coverage in major newspapers in 1977, 1987, and 1997, the study found that straight news coverage (i.e., "what happened yesterday") dropped 40 percent from 1977 to 1997. Moreover, in 1977, stories with traditional news emphasis were presented twice as often as feature or scandal stories (i.e., emphasis on "people, human interest and news you can use"), whereas in 1997 the ratio was reversed.[135]

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[133] Brian A. Monahan, *The Shock of the News: Media Coverage and the Making of 9/11* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 18.

[134] "Changing Definitions of News," Pew Research Center, Project for Excellence in Journalism, March 6, 1998, http://www.journalism.org/1998/03/06/changing-definitions-of-news/, 1.

[135] Ibid., 2–3. The report cites 52 percent of stories being reported as straight news in 1977 versus 32 percent in 1997. In 1977, 32 percent of stories had a traditional emphasis versus 15 percent presented as a feature. In 1997, 25 percent of stories were about "traditional hard news themes" whereas 40 percent emphasized soft or "more sensational themes."

Table 1. Shifting News Subjects and Emphasis (1977–1997).[136]

Subject of Stories by Year	*1977*	*1987*	*1997*
Government	34.3%	31.5%	21.2%
Military	1.4	1.3	1.7
Domestic Affairs	8.4	7.7	9.3
Foreign Affairs	22.2	21.8	16.7
Total Traditional	**66.3**	**62.3**	**48.9**
Entertainment/Celebrity	2.0	2.8	3.7
Lifestyle	2.7	2.9	4.2
Celebrity Crime	.4	1.1	3.2
Total Feature	**5.1**	**6.8**	**11.1**
Personal Health	.7	.6	3.5
Crime	8.4	6.1	11.4
Business/Commerce	6.6	8.8	6.8
Science	2.7	4.6	5.9
Religion	.5	3.1	3.7
Disaster-Natural/Manmade	8.0	4.1	5.7
Other	1.7	3.7	3.0
Total	100	100	100

Straight News as a Percent of Stories by Medium	*1977*	*1987*	*1997*
Newspapers	61.6%	33.1%	30.7%
TV Networks	51.4	32.9	34.3
Magazines	16.3	20.2	19.2

In addition to shifting themes, the subject of news reporting also shifted. Traditional subjects, such as government, military, and domestic and foreign affairs declined from 66 percent of coverage in 1977 to 49 percent of coverage in 1997. Simultaneously, reports with "feature" subjects, such as entertainment and celebrities, and lifestyle, increased from 5 percent to 11 percent. Other topics, such as science and religion, also received greater attention.[137]

While the above data covers long-term trends pre-9/11, other research suggests further changes in news coverage post-9/11, with a temporary bump in hard news coverage immediately after the attacks that quickly dissipated. For instance, a report by the Pew Research Center in 2002, focused on network television, noted that celebrity and lifestyle coverage had returned to pre-9/11 levels by the following summer and hard news

[136] Source: Ibid.

[137] Ibid., 3.

coverage was also on the decline (see Table 2).[138] The study concludes that "the findings seem to refute the idea that television journalism was somehow scared straight or fundamentally changed by the attack on America and the War on Terrorism."[139]

Table 2. Evening News Coverage (June 2001–April 2002).[140]

Topics in the Evening News
Percent of Total Stories

All Networks	June'01	Oct.'01	2002
Hard News	45.5%	80.2%	53.9%
Homeland Sec.	*na*	*na*	*4.5*
Celebrity/Entertainment	4.7	0	1.8
Crime/Law Courts	11.7	3.5	11.7
Business/Economy	14.1	4.5	11.2
Science/Technology	4.2	10.9	1.9
Lifestyle Features	18.3	1.0	17.5
Religion	1.4	0	2.0
Total	100	100	100

Another study conducted by the Pew Research Center, in coordination with Andrew Tyndall, also confirms the trend by comparing news time dedicated to various news subjects on the top evening news networks across two time periods, 1997–2000 and 2002–2005. The report found that, although terrorism and foreign policy stories essentially replaced other domestic coverage post-9/11, "the mixture of hard news and feature of lifestyle coverage, meanwhile, has remained virtually unchanged (see Table 3)."[141] All the data appear to support Monahan's assertion that the news media has softened. Moreover, 9/11 does not appear to have altered that trend in any definitive way.

138 "The War on Terrorism: The Not-So-New Television News Landscape," Pew Research Center, Journalism and Media Staff, 23 May, 2002, http://www.journalism.org/2002/05/23/the-war-on-terrorism/, 2.

139 Ibid., 2.

140 Source: Ibid.

141 "How 9–11 Changed the Evening News," Pew Research Center, Journalism and Media Staff, September 11, 2006, http://www.journalism.org/2006/09/11/how-9-11-changed-the-evening-news/.

Table 3. Minutes of Evening News Coverage by Subject and News Style (1997–2000 vs. 2002–2005).[142]

Subject Coverage	% Change
Terrorism	135%
US Foreign Policy	102%
Wars and Armed Conflict	69%
Foreign Dateline Stories	54%
DC Bureau Stories	1%
Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco	-66%
Space, Science & Technology	-50%
Crime, Penal Policy & Law Enforcement	-47%
Federal Domestic Politics	-17%
News Style	**% Change**
Hard News (fact-based, "reporting driven")	2%
Soft News (features, interviews, commentary)	-5%

Several scholars have also argued that the news media's shift to soft news is driven primarily by market or structural forces, especially in response to increasing competition from cable and online news.[143] The Pew Research Center suggests that, "clearly these shifts in topic and thematic emphasis represent the media covering a broader spectrum of news, searching for new relevant topics in the face of declining audience share."[144] Analysis of available data regarding news audiences and news interest supports these assertions.

During this thesis' focus period, news audiences increasingly received their news from multiple sources, fueling competition for audience among news sources. This is especially true considering the influx of news coming from online sources post-9/11. According to one Pew Research Center Report, only 13 percent of poll respondents said they received "most of [their] news about national and international issues" from the

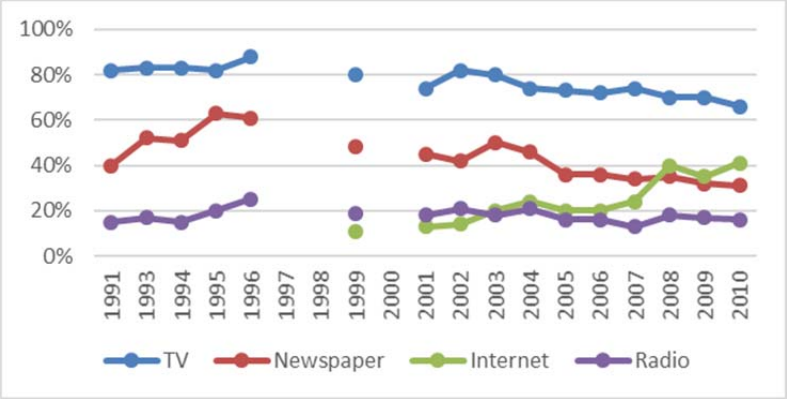
[142] Adapted from: Ibid.

[143] Monahan, *The Shock of the News*, 23–24; Brigitte L. Nacos, Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, and Robert Y. Shapiro, *Selling Fear: Counterterrorism, the Media, and Public Opinion* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 8–9.

[144] "Changing Definitions of News," 3.

Internet in 2001, while the percentage of respondents getting news from television and newspaper were 74 percent and 45 percent, respectively (respondents could give two main sources). By 2010, 41 percent of respondents were getting their news online, versus 66 percent and 31 percent of television viewers and newspaper readers, respectively (see Figure 5).[145]

Figure 5. Where Americans Get Most of their National and International News (2001–2010).[146]



Note: According to the Pew Research Center, "Figures add to more than 100 percent because respondents could volunteer up to two main sources."

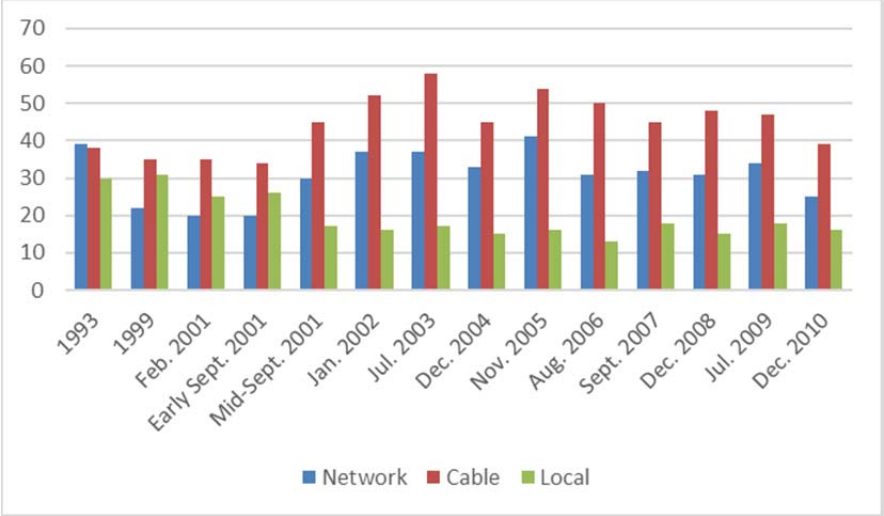
Moreover, though television clearly remained a dominant source of news during this period, viewership within the medium was fragmented. One survey data set compared network, cable, and local television news source trends before and after 9/11, from 1993–2003. The data shows that, in 1993, Americans nearly evenly got their news from a mix of network and cable news, with local news being a slightly less popular source. By 2003, cable news outpaced network and local news significantly. A

145 "Internet Gains on Television as Public's Main News Source," Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, January 4, 2011, http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/689.pdf, 2.

146 Adapted from: Ibid.

subsequent data set from Pew showed that cable continued to dominate through 2010 (see Figure 6).[147]

Figure 6. Where Americans Get Their Television News (1993–2003).[148]



Note: According to the Pew Research Center, "Figures add to more than 100 percent because respondents could volunteer up to two main sources."

Beyond Americans' changing preference for where they received their news, changes in the total volume of news consumption and the way people consumed news also occurred. In television, for example, evening news audience declined steadily from 1980 to 2010, losing nearly 29 million viewers total, or more than half of its audience.[149] At the same time, cable news primetime audience counts increased more than twofold,

147 "The State of the News Media 2005: Cable TV Public Attitudes," Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2005, accessed August 3, 2017, http://web.archive.org/web/20080929172858/http://www.stateofthemedia.org:80/2005/chartland.asp?id=232#; "Internet Gains on Television as Public's Main News Source." Notably, Pew presents its combined survey data in two different ways. This combined chart uses the 2011 source data through March 2003 which has a lesser disparity between data points for the years 2002 and 2003 than presented in the data from the 2005 source. The 2011 source shows the gap between cable and network news for 2002 and 2003 as 25 and 27 percent, respectively. This is likely due to the 2005 data for those years focusing more on where Americans get their news about terrorism. Furthermore, Pew considers cable news to generally consist of Fox, CNN, and MSNBC.

148 Adapted from: Ibid.

149 "State of the News Media 2011: Network By the Numbers," Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2011, accessed August 3, 2017, http://www.stateofthemedia.org/2011/network-essay/data-page-5/. Viewership was 52.1 million in 1980, declining to 23.2 million viewers in 2010.

from 1.7 million to 3.8 million from 2001 to 2009. This reflects similar trends in daytime cable viewership as well.[150] Additionally, newspaper circulation declined, with daily paper distribution declining 30 percent from 1990 through 2010.[151] Finally, though general interest in the news remained mostly unchanged pre and post-9/11, the way people consumed news shifted.[152] In line with increased cable news viewership and online news consumption, nearly 48 percent of respondents in a 2002 survey described themselves as "news grazers" who checked news in shorter intervals throughout the day compared to 49 percent of people who consumed news at habitual or regularly scheduled times.[153] In other words, two major structural factors were at play in the 1990s through the 2000s: first, generally speaking, fewer people were getting news from traditional news sources, such as television and newspapers, and second, within television, traditional evening news shows faced increasing competition from always-available cable news networks.

The above data supports Monahan's suggestion that the news media has shifted from a hard news focus to news as public drama during the time period studied in this thesis. As the Pew Research Center concluded in 2004, "a growing number of news outlets are chasing a relatively static or even shrinking audience for news…putting pressures on revenues and profits, which leads to a cascade of other implications."[154] Some of those implications were a focus on investing in news dissemination rather than

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150 "State of the News Media 2011: Cable By the Numbers," Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2011, accessed August 3, 2017, http://www.stateofthemedia.org/2011/cable-essay/data-page-2/.

151 "State of the News Media 2011: Newspapers By the Numbers," Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2011, accessed August 3, 2017, http://www.stateofthemedia.org/2011/newspapers-essay/data-page-6/. In 1990, daily paid circulation was 62.3 million compared to 42.4 million in 2010. Weekday morning and weekday evening papers followed a similar pattern. Sunday paper subscriptions, however, remained relatively constant at approximately 40 million.

152 "Public's News Habits Changed Little by Sept. 11," Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, June 9, 2002, http://www.people-press.org/2002/06/09/publics-news-habits-little-changed-by-september-11/, 7. In 1994, 90 percent of survey respondents consumed news "yesterday," compared with 85 percent in 1998, 83 percent in 2000, and 80 percent in 2002.

153 Ibid., 4.

154 "State of the News Media 2004: Executive Summary," Pew Research Center, Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2004, accessed August 3, 2017, http://www.stateofthemedia.org/2004/overview/executive-summary/, 5.

collection, a tendency to fill news holes with "raw elements of news" rather than quality reporting, varying journalistic standards within news organizations attempting to deliver news "across different programs, products, and platforms," and greater vulnerability to press manipulation "as more outlets compete for information" and "their stories contain fewer sources."[155]

In essence, throughout the period studied in this thesis, the news media assembled itself as a commodity, leading to the rise of news as infotainment, as described by Brigitte Nacos, Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, and Robert Shapiro in *Selling Fear: Counterterrorism, the Media, and Public Opinion*.[156]

> In the competition for audience share, even organizations once committed to quality public affairs news have moved increasingly away from reporting what professional journalists, editors, and producers deem *important* for the enlightenment of fellow citizens to what profit-oriented corporate managers consider *interesting* for the entertainment of news consumers. As a result, "hard" news has been crowded out by "soft" news and has become increasingly a blend of information and entertainment—"infotainment" in the guise of news reporting.[157]

In other words, it is fair to say that, due to market and structural forces, the news media landscape was primed to proliferate infotainment, or news as public drama, in order to boost market share when 9/11 occurred.

2. Reporting Terrorism in the News

The implication of the previous section's conclusion is that terrorism fits the requirements of public drama and infotainment, terms this thesis considers synonymous,

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155 Ibid., 5–6.

156 Nacos et al., *Selling Fear*, 8–9. Nacos and associates quote James Hamilton, stating that "'news is a commodity' and 'a product shaped by forces of supply and demand.'"

157 Ibid., 9.

particularly well.[158] Nacos and associates make this argument, especially as represented by so-called new terrorism as exemplified by 9/11 and the War on Terror.[159]

> Infotainment thrives on the images and themes that terrorist incidents offer: drama, tragedy, shock, fear, panic, grief…Similarly, news narratives and images that amplify the threat of terrorist violence and the war metaphor are likely to hold the attention of audience in targeted societies. Thus…media organizations' self-interest would be well served by magnifying and prolonging the fear and anger associated with the specter of war as expressed by "Attack on America" and "America's New War."[160]

This section explores whether or not the news media did present terrorism as infotainment, focusing on an examination of news frames used to present terrorism and the relative volume of terrorism reporting.

First, regarding the sheer volume of terrorism coverage in the news, 9/11 marks a clear break in reporting habits compared to before 9/11. For example, in one study examining newspaper content from 1977 to 2006, researchers found that the *Washington Post* printed an average of 525 terrorism-related articles per year until 9/11, whereas in 2003, the low-print year for terrorist articles post-9/11, the same newspaper published nearly 3,500 articles (see Figure 7).[161] Moreover, as one might expect, the prominence of terrorism-related articles also increased, with nearly a 41 percent increase in probability that terrorism-focused articles would be on the front page and word count expanded by an average 311 words per article.[162]

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158 This thesis uses infotainment and public drama more or less synonymously. Monahan defines public drama as "news that is fashioned into dramatic and emotional stories" and Nacos defines infotainment as "'soft' news [that] has become increasingly a blend of information and entertainment."

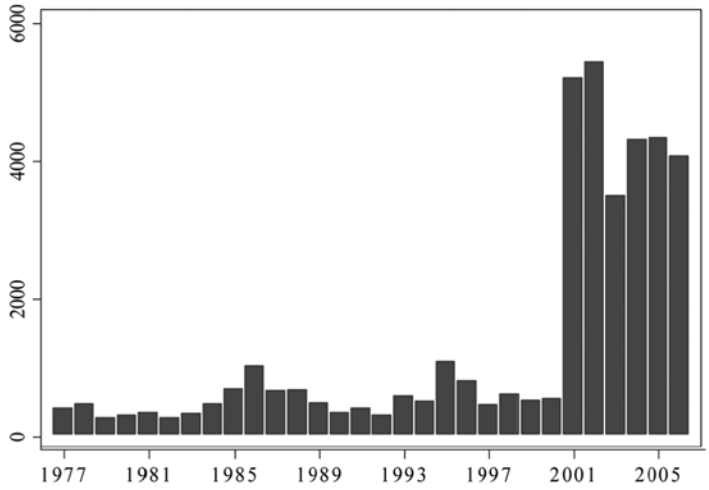
159 Ibid., 10, 13.

160 Ibid., 10–11.

161 Aaron M. Hoffman, Dwaine H. A. Jengelley, Natasha T. Duncan, Melissa Buehler, and Meredith L. Rees, "How Does the Business of News Influence Terrorism Coverage? Evidence From The Washington Post and USA Today," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 4, 2010, DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2010.493778, 568.

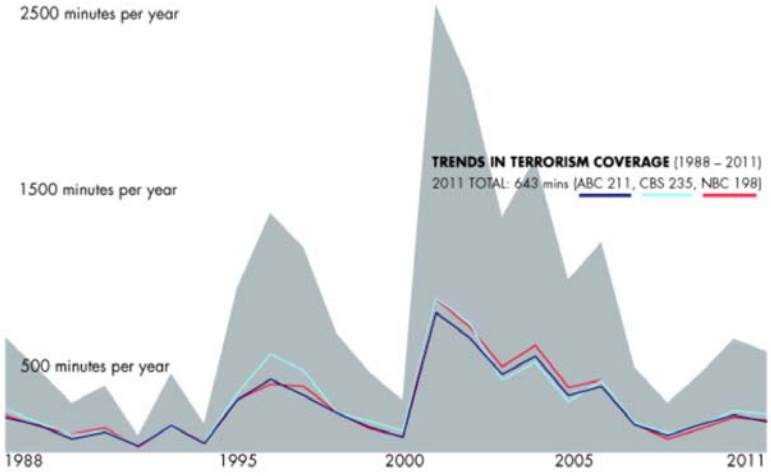
162 Ibid., 572.

Figure 7. Total Number of *Washington Post* Terrorism-Related Articles (1977–2006).[163]



Furthermore, according to the Tyndall Report, review of network evening news coverage also revealed a less dramatic, though still apparent, break in coverage pre- and post-9/11, with an extended peak of terrorism-related coverage surrounding the OKC bombing in 1995 as well as 9/11 (see Figure 8).[164]

Figure 8. Nightly News Terrorism-Related Coverage (1988–2011).[165]



[163] Source: Ibid.

[164] "Tyndall Report: 2011 Year in Review," The Tyndall Report, accessed August 6, 2017, http://tyndallreport.com/yearinreview2011/terrorism/.

[165] Source: Ibid.

While the total volume of terrorism news coverage appreciably increased after 9/11, the more telling revelation lies with an examination of the content of that coverage. For example, one study analyzing *New York Times* front page stories, from four months prior to four months after 9/11, found that not only did the volume of terrorism-related stories increase seven-fold, terrorism as the "highly central" or "integral point of the article" increased from 47 percent pre-9/11 to 68 percent post-9/11.[166] Moreover, the study noted that while 9/11 was the predominant topic of the highly central terror-themed article, it was not the only one, as coverage also included topics such as Afghanistan, bioterrorism, and coverage of the Middle East in general.[167] Furthermore, though government officials post-9/11 continued to be the predominant source of "terrorism attribution"—that is, the source identifying an article subject or an event as related to terrorism—a larger variety of sources became terrorism designators post-9/11.[168] Indeed, terrorism designations by non-government and non-*Times* "professionals, experts, critics, or advocates" increased from 3 percent pre-9/11 to 28 percent post-9/11.[169] In short, there were significantly more articles focused on terrorism and a larger variety of sources associating articles and subjects with terrorism after 9/11 than there were before 9/11.

Post-9/11, news media coverage also appears to have prioritized coverage of the terrorist threat in relation to other aspects of the subject. For example, Nacos and associates, in a study covering evening television news coverage for 39 months after 9/11, found that the news reported the threat of terrorism more than terrorism prevention

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166 Amani Ismail and Dan Berkowitz, "'Terrorism' Meets the Press System: The New York Times and China Daily before and after 9/11," *Global Media Journal* 4, no. 1 (2009): 19. The number of stories increased from 17 pre-9/11 to 120 post-9/11.

167 Ibid., 20.

168 Ibid., 21. Before 9/11, the government and the *Times* itself designated terrorism 64 percent and 33 percent of the time pre-9/11, respectively. Post-9/11, the percentages shifted downward to 43 percent for government designation, and 26 percent for the *Times* designation. All others (professionals, experts, critics, or advocates) designated terrorism 28 percent of the time post-9/11, up from just 3 percent before 9/11.

169 Ibid.

efforts by a ratio of nearly four-to-one.[170] Even within the segments focusing on prevention, messages emphasizing the terrorism threat outnumbered messages focused on security measures, issues, or problems by nearly the same ratio.[171] Furthermore, the study found that, when an assessment of prevention measures was reported, negative evaluations were five times more prevalent than positive ones, especially regarding federal prevention efforts.[172] Thus, Nacos and associates conclude that, as a result of the lack of relative attention paid to terrorist prevention compared to the terrorism threat, "the American public has come to have mixed confidence in the government's ability to prevent terrorist attacks."[173]

In a companion study of the evening news during the same 39-month period, Nacos and associates also found that "Americans' concerns about the threat of terrorism within their own borders remained quite high during the post-9/11 years and actually increased frequently in the wake of increases in reporting of threats and terrorism alerts."[174] Moreover, the study revealed that the news media over-reported the threats the public was most responsive to: terrorism alert warnings from the government and threats from Al Qaeda. Of the 23 national alert warnings issued during the study's time period, 100 percent of raised alert levels were reported as lead stories, averaging 5 minutes and 20 seconds of coverage. In contrast, only 13 percent of lowered alert warnings were lead stories, averaging only 1 minute and 34 seconds (see Figure 9).[175]

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[170] Brigitte Nacos, Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, and Robert Shapiro, "Prevention of Terrorism in Post-9/11 America: News Coverage, Public Perceptions, and the Politics of Homeland Security," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 1 (2007): 7, DOI: 10.1080/09546550701734028. 85 stories focused on prevention compared to 373 stories focused on the threat.

[171] Ibid. In the 85 prevention segments, 443 messages focused on security measures, etc compared to 1,725 focused on the threat.

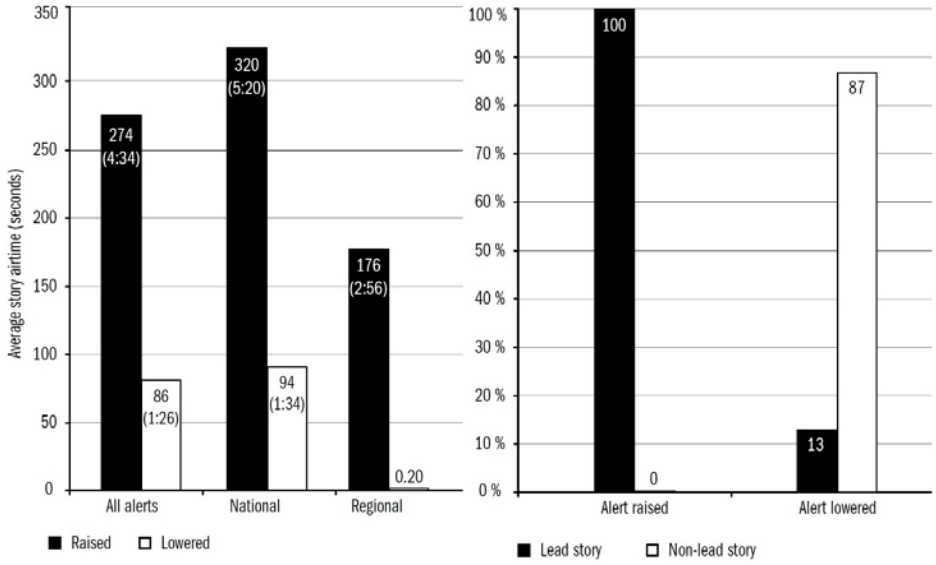
[172] Ibid., 9.

[173] Ibid., 20.

[174] Brigitte Nacos, Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, and Robert Shapiro, "Post-9/11 Terrorism Threats, News Coverage, and Public Perceptions in the United States," *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 1, no. 2 (2007): 124.

[175] Ibid., 112.

Figure 9. Terror Alert Warnings Coverage in the Evening News (2001–2004).[176]



Regarding direct threat coverage, over 50 percent of stories focused on Al Qaeda messages were lead stories averaging nearly four minutes. Furthermore, 28 percent of President George W. Bush's statements, 22 percent of terrorism experts' statements, and 100 percent of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officials' statements, were in response to messages from Al Qaeda leaders.[177] Ultimately, the study concludes that media coverage of the terrorism threat increased the public's concern about the terrorism threat generally, but that over-coverage of official terror alert warnings and threats from Al Qaeda led to intermittent spikes in concern about imminent terror attacks.[178]

Several studies also describe how the news media portrayed the nature of the terrorist threat post-9/11. Nacos and associates, for example, found that most post-9/11 evening news messages related to attack prevention assumed future attacks would resemble 9/11. 59 percent of news messages were concerned with aviation

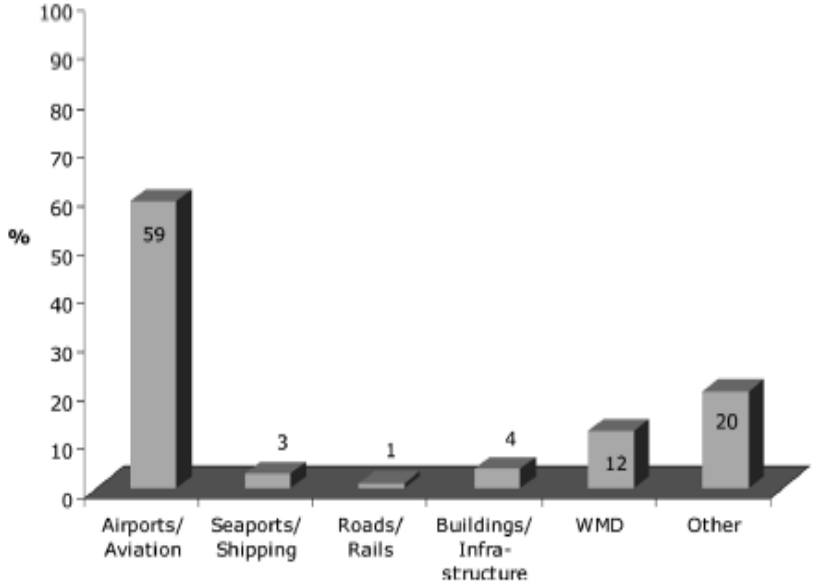
[176] Source: Ibid.

[177] Ibid. The study cited 305 instances of reporting on Al Qaeda or Osama bin Laden messages. Interestingly, bin Laden and Al Qaeda together are the primary source for 5 percent of total stories during the time period, more than both President Bush and Congress (3 and 4 percent, respectively).

[178] Ibid., 124–125. See Figure 10 and its associated discussion points on pages 121–122 for more detailed analysis.

and airport security and 12 percent focused on weapons of mass destruction; only 3 percent focused on seaports and shipping, 1 percent on roads and railroads, 4 percent on buildings and infrastructure, and 20 percent on general terrorism prevention (see Figure 10).[179]

Figure 10. Evening News Terrorism Prevention Focus Areas (2001–2004).[180]



The results of a study by Joshua Woods reviewing newspaper articles from 1997–2005 also found that post-9/11, one in five articles "associated the threat of terrorism with religion, and the great majority of these made references to Islam."[181] While Woods takes no position regarding the debate about the religious motivations for terrorism, he concludes that, in the press, "religious identities and motives were often associated with

[179] Brigitte Nacos, Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, and Robert Shapiro, "Prevention of Terrorism in Post-9/11 America," 9.

[180] Source: Ibid.

[181] Joshua Woods, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Terrorism: Elite Press Coverage of Terrorism Risk From 1997 to 2005," *Press Politics* 12, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 12. Due to the increase in volume of reporting about terrorism post-9/11, 75 percent of the associated articles in this study were printed after 9/11.

the most frightening portrayals of terrorism risk in the United States."[182] In essence, the news media post-9/11 appears to have framed reporting using elements of the new terrorism narrative by concentrating on prevention of future spectacular, 9/11-style attacks and the religious nature of the terrorist threat.

In summary, data from past studies shows that a) there was significantly more reporting related to terrorism post-9/11, b) the increased coverage was dedicated more to the threat of terrorism than to other related subjects, such as prevention efforts, and c) the nature of the terrorist threat was framed in terms of sensational 9/11-style attacks and linked to religious motivations. In combination with the previous evidence supporting arguments about the so-called softening of news coverage, this sub-section's data appears to bolster claims that the news media's coverage post-9/11 did present the terrorist threat as infotainment and public drama, at least partially.

3. Setting the News Agenda

As noted in the literature review, some scholars suggest that post-9/11, the news media failed to uphold its role as the government "watchdog," thus allowing the government to set the public agenda without the media's critical review or analysis of terrorism messaging and policies.[183] This section considers the validity of these claims, ultimately finding that post-9/11, the news media did defer to government sources.

David Altheide, in his review of the state of research on the topic through 2006, noted that "The role of the news media is very important in carrying selective news sources' messages..." and "…the White House influence on news content was aided by

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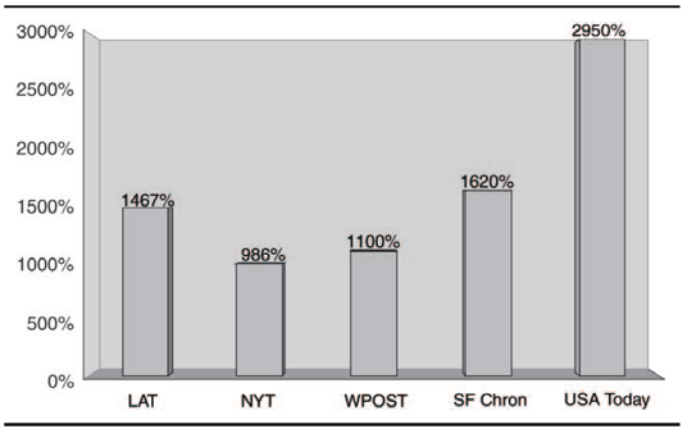
[182] Ibid. Interestingly, a 2003 study by Nacos and Torres-Reyna found that positive or supportive portrayals of Muslim-Americans actually increased significantly in the press post-9/11. However, according to Ibrahim, the news media discriminated between Muslim-Americans and foreign Islam, with the latter being framed as "fanatic, irrational, America-hating and violent oppressors of women (pg. 122)." See Brigitte Nacos and Oscar Torres-Reyna, "Framing Muslim-Americans Before and After 9/11," in *Reframing Terrorism: The News Media, The Government, and the Public*, eds. Pippa Norris, Montague Kern, and Marian Just (New York: Routledge, 2003), 148; Dina Ibrahim, "The Framing of Islam on Network News Following the September 11th Attacks," *The International Communication Gazette* 72, no. 1 (2010): 122.

[183] Joshua Woods, *Freaking Out: A Decade of Living With Terrorism* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012), 131; Nacos et al., *Selling Fear*, xii, 7–13.

other government and military officials who also dominated news reports about terrorism and fear."[184] Citing several reports outlining the media's reliance and deference to government officials, Altheide then analyzed newspaper content 18 months before and after 9/11, determining that associations between terrorism and fear increased by a minimum of nearly 1,000 percent in all five newspapers he examined (see Figure 11).[185] Altheide explains the implications of his study, which dovetails with this thesis' earlier findings: "Journalistic accounts about terrorism reflect news organizations' reliance on official news sources to provide entertaining reports compatible with long-established symbols of fear, crime, and victimization about threats to individuals and the United States in the 'fight against terrorism.'"[186]

Figure 11. Percentage Change in Occurrence of Newspaper Stories with "Fear" and "Terrorism" within Two-Words of Each Other (2000–2002).[187]



Note: LAT=Los Angeles Times, NYT=New York Times, WPOST=Washington Post, SF Chron=San Francisco Chronicle.

[184] David L. Altheide, "Terrorism and the Politics of Fear," Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies 6, no. 4 (2006): 423.

[185] Ibid., 431. Regarding dominance of government sources, Altheide cites data from the Tyndall Report showing that of the 414 evening news segments covering the build-up to the Iraq war, all but 34 were not sourced from the White House, Pentagon, or State Department (see page 424). Citing analysis from a 2003 Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting study, Altheide also notes that surrounding Colin Powell's address to the United Nations regarding the Iraq WMD threat, 75 percent of American guests (which made up 2/3s of the interviewees) were either current or former government or military officials, only one of which expressed a dissenting viewpoint (page 424).

[186] Ibid., 417.

[187] Source: Ibid., 431.

Altheide's assertions are also supported by data from the Pew Research Center. For example, one study analyzing media content between September and December 2001 found that "The percentage of stories that might be perceived as largely providing 'the other side,' or dissenting from the Administration point of view, never exceeded 10 percent."[188] In contrast, 62 percent of all relevant stories during the study period were counted as containing "All" or "Mostly" pro-official policy positions, compared to only 30 percent that were "mixed" and only 8 percent that were "mostly" or "all" dissenting (see Table 4).[189]

Table 4. News Media Viewpoints on Official United States Terrorism Response Policies (September–December 2001).[190]

Viewpoints in All Media (relevant stories)	Sept.	Nov.	Dec.	Total
All Pro-U.S.	54%	39%	47%	49%
Mostly Pro-U.S.	17	13	3	13
Mixed	20	38	42	30
Mostly Dissenting	6	4	3	5
All Dissenting	2	6	4	3
Total	100	100	100	100

The same study also found that, immediately after 9/11, the press used multiple sources while reporting, but that a return to using limited sources had declined significantly only months later (see Table 5). Notably, newspapers tended to use the most sources while as much as half of television news referred only to a single source.

188 "Return to Normalcy? How the Media Have Covered the War on Terrorism," Pew Research Center, Journalism and Media Staff, January 28, 2002, http://www.journalism.org/2002/01/28/return-to-normalcy/, 8.

189 Ibid.

190 Source: Ibid.

Table 5. Number of Sources Used by News Media (September–December 2001).[191]

Number of Sources	Total			Newspapers			Television		
	Sept.	Nov.	Dec.	Sept.	Nov.	Dec.	Sept.	Nov.	Dec.
One-Two	31%	37%	41%	18%	19%	24%	46%	53%	50%
Three	9	10	14	8	8	11	8	11	15
Four+	45	43	29	64	62	52	27	27	18
None	15	10	16	10	11	11	20	9	18
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Taken together, the data suggests that, post-9/11, the news media overwhelmingly propagated official policy, relied on fewer sources over time, and that the sources they did cite generally did not disagree with official policy. Relatedly, Nacos and associates found that "in the months and even years following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, officials in Washington—especially the president and members of his administration—were able to set the media agenda when that was their intention. As long as these political elites held news conferences, gave speeches, granted interviews, and otherwise went public, the television networks provided them with frequent and prominent coverage to make their case and in fact dominate the news."[192] Their analysis finds that, in regard to counterterrorism, the president and the administration received one-fifth of coverage about the terrorist threat, nearly as much regarding civil liberties policies, and nearly a quarter of all coverage concerning the build-up of the Iraq war case. Only when the administration had little interest in projecting a particular position, such as with terrorism prevention or preparedness, did other "experts" enjoy access to the media (see Table 6).

[191] Source: Ibid., 11.

[192] Nacos et al., *Selling Fear*, 183.

Table 6. Percentage of News Messages by Source.[193]

	Threat	Civil Liberties	Build-Up Iraq	Prevention	Preparedness
	%	%	%	%	%
President/Administration	21	18	26	8	5
Members of Congress	5	12	1	7	5
Experts	16	10	6	22	20
Local/State Officials	8	4	—	5	8
Other Domestic	9	23	6	6	17
Public/Public Opinion	9	7	—	15	3
Media	33	26	35	36	43

Note: The table does not include foreign sources, thus percentages may not add up to 100 percent.

As Shana Gadarian explains in her post-9/11 study about the influence of terrorism news on public opinion, "In times of crisis, citizens turn to the government and mass media for answers, comfort, and protection."[194] Post-9/11, as this section has demonstrated, the news media projected the threat of terrorism perhaps more than was warranted. This was likely due to the increasingly competitive nature of the news media landscape, which employed infotainment to capture audience attention. It was also likely due the news media's tendency to uncritically allow the government to set the news agenda post-9/11. Ultimately, as Nacos and associates conclude, the media "did not inform the public fully about the most important events, developments, issues, and problems concerning counterterrorism; they did not provide a forum for real debate; and they did not scrutinize the selling of fear and the so-called War on Terrorism."[195] However, as the next sections will demonstrate, factors within the news media itself were not the only source responsible for elevating Americans' perceptions about the post-9/11 terrorism threat.

[193] Source: Ibid., 184.

[194] Shana Kushner Gadarian, "The Politics of Threat: How Terrorism News Shapes Foreign Policy Attitudes," *The Journal of Politics* 72, no. 2 (2010): 481.

[195] Nacos et al., *Selling Fear*, 197.

B. TERRORISM, THE INTERNET, AND MASS SELF-COMMUNICATION

Americans' perception of the terrorist threat was also affected by terrorists' use of the Internet to spread propaganda and threats. As Nacos explains in her comprehensive work *Mass-Mediated Terrorism*, traditionally, the news media "are not simply neutral and passive information and communication conduits but control the most important space in the triangle of communication [between the media, public, and government]. From this perch, media gatekeepers include and exclude, magnify and minimize."[196] In other words, the news media has traditionally taken an active role in shaping terrorists' efforts at communicating through "propaganda by deed."[197] However, Nacos notes that the so-called digital revolution has eroded the news media's gatekeeper role and enabled so-called mass self-communication:

> …today the Internet hovers over, circumvents, and connects with the triangular mass communication model. Instead of depending solely on traditional media or traditional alternative media, individuals and all kinds of groups and organizations, including terrorists, now have direct, easy, and fairly inexpensive access to computer-aided communication, most of all social media networks.[198]

Moreover, besides terrorists' ability to directly mass-communicate through the Internet, conventional news media tend to amplify terrorists' Internet messages by, for example, showing terrorist groups' online videos on network television.[199] This section explores the data available to support the above argument, ultimately finding that 9/11 did mark the beginning of a significantly increasing terrorist online presence that likely increased Americans' fear of the terrorist threat in the United States.

1. Americans' and Terrorists' Use of the Internet

As Gabriel Weimann, Nirit Weiss-Blatt, Germaw Mengitsu, Maya Mazor Tregerman, and Ravid Oren highlight in their review of the role of digital media in mass

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196 Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism*, loc. 913.

197 Ibid., loc. 974.

198 Ibid.

199 Ibid., loc. 993.

communication, American Internet use increased dramatically beginning in the mid-1990s, from 14 percent of the population in 1995 to 81 percent in 2012.[200] Furthermore, citing Pew Research Center polling data from 2012, the authors found that a rapidly growing number of Americans received their news through online sources, especially through social media after about 2008.[201] Indeed, Pew data shows that, in 1996, only 2 percent of Americans went online for news three or more days per week; by 2012, 46 percent of Americans did so, with 20 percent of news coming from social media sites (see Figure 12).[202] As noted, social media became popular in about 2008 and has grown exponentially since then. In fact, in July 2011, Americans collectively spent 88 billion minutes using social media; by July 2012, that had increased an astonishing 37 percent to 121 billion minutes.[203] Weimann cites one report that states Americans, in 2013, individually spent nearly 23 hours per week emailing, texting, and using social media.[204] Moreover, 87 percent of Americans polled reported logging into Facebook, the most popular social media service, at least weekly.[205] YouTube, a video sharing service, boasts equally impressive penetration: an average of one billion users watch six billion hours of video per month, with nearly a third of that traffic coming from the United States alone.[206]

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[200] Gabriel Weimann, Nirit Weiss-Blatt, Germaw Mengitsu, Maya Mazor Tregerman, and Ravid Oren, "Reevaluating 'The End of Mass Communication?'" *Mass Communication & Society*, 17 (2014): 807.

[201] Ibid.

[202] "Trends in News Consumption: 1991–2012, In Changing News Landscape, Even Television is Vulnerable," The Pew Research Center for the People and The Press, September 27, 2012, http://www.people-press.org/2012/09/27/in-changing-news-landscape-even-television-is-vulnerable/.

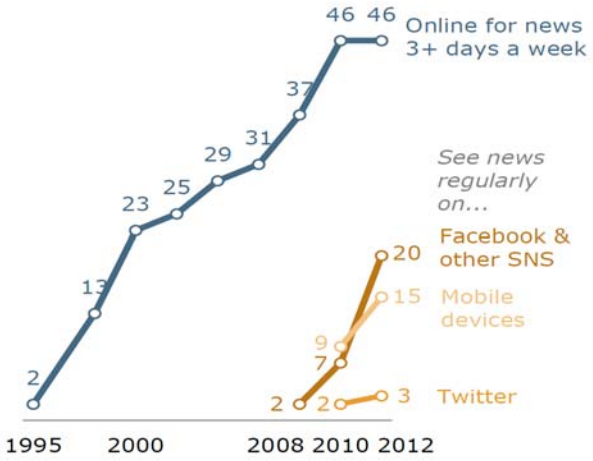
[203] Gabriel Weimann, *New Terrorism and New Media* (Washington, DC: Commons Lab of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2014), 2, http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/newterrorism-and-new-media.

[204] Ibid.

[205] Ibid.

[206] Ibid., 10.

Figure 12. Percentage of Americans Accessing News Online (1995–2012).[207]



Given Americans' affinity for widely accessible online news and social media, Weimann and associates argue that, "people can form their own agendas and then find groups with similar agendas. The Internet makes it possible for people all around the globe to find others with similar agendas and collaborate with them."[208] However, Weimann and associates note that the results of multiple studies are mixed as to whether online sources, such as blogs, can set the public agenda as a whole.[209] That being said, the authors agree that online media, such as blogs, "are sometimes able to influence what counts as newsworthy."[210] Moreover, Weimann and associates posit that, because of the relatively low cost and ease of access to the Internet, traditional gatekeepers' authority has been undermined:

> In the conventional media, the institutional gatekeepers could determine who and what are worthy of exposure and publicity. However, in the new media environment, it is enough for a person to have a computer, Internet access, and fundamental proficiency in language and online communication in order to produce content and proliferate it on virtual platforms and social networks.

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[207] Source: "Trends in News Consumption: 1991–2012, In Changing News Landscape, Even Television is Vulnerable."

[208] Weimann, et al., "Reevaluating 'The End of Mass Communication?'" 808. The authors cited a 2009 study conducted by Ragas and Roberts.

[209] Ibid., 810.

[210] Ibid.

In other words, traditional news media's ability to set the public agenda has been undermined by widespread Internet use.

Focusing on political violence and the Internet, Weimann found that terrorists' exploitation of the Internet mirrored the online trends discussed above. For example, in 1998, only about 15 of 30 terrorist groups on designated "Foreign Terrorist Organizations" by the United States had a dedicated website. By 2000, all of those groups did. By 2004, Weimann's count of terrorist group and supporter pages number in the hundreds.[211] Exemplifying the exponential growth of terrorist Internet activity, by 2008 Al Qaeda and its affiliates alone operated nearly 5,600 websites in various formats with estimates that 900 more would appear every year.[212]

2. Propagating the Terrorist Threat through the Internet

As mentioned in Chapter I, Internet use offered, and continues to offer, several advantages for terrorists. Some of those advantages are operational, such as disseminating tactically valuable information for conducting attacks. However, in the context of this thesis, the advantages regarding mass self-communication have been invaluable for terrorists in the aftermath of 9/11. For example, as Naval Postgraduate School professor Dorothy Denning describes, post-9/11 terrorist websites, specifically those associated with Al Qaeda, included, "writings and audio and video recordings of Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and other al-Qa'ida leaders and operatives; horrific videos of bombings, beheadings, and other terrorist acts; fatwas (religious edicts); electronic magazines; training manuals and videos; news reports; calls to join the

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[211] Gabriel Weimann, *www.terror.net: How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace*, March 2004, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/sr116.pdf), 2. Weimann notes that accurate accounting of terrorist websites and other online presence is a "herculean effort." As such, completely accurate accounting is virtually impossible, though Weimann did "conduct numerous systematic scans of the Internet."

[212] Gabriel Weimann, "Al-Qa'ida's Extensive Use of the Internet," *Combating Terrorism Center* 1, no. 2 (January 2008): 1, https://ctc.usma.edu/posts/al-qaida%E2%80%99s-extensive-use-of-the-Internet. Formats include "websites, forums, chat rooms, electronic boards, and blogs."

jihad; [and] threats to 'infidels…'"[213] Moreover, Al Qaida cleverly set up several "media centers" that operated as "quasi-official production and distribution entities that 'brand' jihadist media and provide an authorized channel for distribution on approved websites."[214] These refined products, especially video clips, were translated into multiple languages, uploaded in easily distributable digital formats, and were of sufficient quality to be re-broadcast by major news outlets, such as CNN.[215]

As a result of terrorists' extensive use of the Internet for gathering and publishing materials, the post-9/11 terrorist threat appears to have metastasized dramatically. For example, as Martin Rudner explains, "the Internet has become a powerful catalyst for facilitating Al Qaeda-sponsored terrorist activities…[and] has created a threat environment wherein terrorist activities can emanate from a large number of countries and elements within countries."[216] In other words, the Internet-enabled availability of terrorist propaganda, especially from Al Qaeda, facilitated the affiliation of small terrorist groups across the globe. Combined with the concerted effort to refine and brand terrorist material published online, the terrorist threat appears to have dramatically increased, even though, in reality, the scale and intensity of the threat remained the same.

A staff report presented by the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs in 2008 demonstrates the domestic impact of these trends. The report asserts that "the use of the Internet by al-Qaeda and other violent Islamist extremist groups has expanded the terrorist threat to our homeland…the threat is now increasingly from within, from homegrown terrorists who are inspired by violent Islamist ideology to

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[213] Dorothy E. Denning, "Terror's Web: How the Internet is Transforming Terrorism," *Handbook of Internet Crime*, eds. Yvonne Jewkes and Majid Yar (Cornwall, United Kingdom: Willan Publishing, 2010), 196.

[214] Ibid., 197.

[215] Ibid.

[216] Martin Rudner, "Electronic Jihad: The Internet as Al Qaeda's Catalyst for Global Terror," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 40, no. 1 (February 2017): 14, doi: 10.1080/1057610X.2016.1157403.

plan and execute attacks where they live."[217] The staff report projects concern that the Internet's ability to bypass traditional filters of terrorist ideology has enabled so-called homegrown terrorism to grow and thrive. The Internet, in other words, has injected the wider terrorist threat directly into the United States and has linked otherwise isolated individuals with a global terrorist campaign.[218] However, by the report's own admission, "to date, cells detected in the United States have lacked the level of sophistication, experience, and access to resources of terrorist cells overseas."[219] Moreover, the data from Chapter I indicates lack of an increased terrorism threat since 9/11. Thus, while the terrorism threat seemed to have increased because of the Internet post-9/11, that expansion was in appearance only.

The rise of social media use by terrorists has only exacerbated the issue described above. As Weimann explains, "with social media, information consumers also act as communicators, vastly expanding the number of information transmitters in the communication market."[220] Rather than the "one-to-many" construct of traditional media, including websites, social media networks are "highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify content."[221] As Weimann puts it, terrorists use social media to "virtually 'knock on the doors'" of target audiences as terrorists and their supporters can actively engage with people globally and make their content "part of the mainstream."[222] In other words, not only has the Internet allowed terrorist groups to circumvent traditional media gatekeepers, social media has enabled a whole new form of communication wherein terrorist threats and propaganda can be widely spread in novel ways. As an example of the potential expanse of the social media landscape, a 2009 analysis of YouTube coverage of Anwar al-Awlaki, a prominent

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[217] Susan Collins and Joseph I. Lieberman, "Violent Islamist Extremism, the Internet, and the Homegrown Terrorist Threat," United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs (May 8, 2008): 15, https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=485776.

[218] Ibid., 10.

[219] Ibid., 3.

[220] Weimann, *New Terrorism and New Media*, 2.

[221] Ibid.

[222] Ibid., 3.

Al Qaeda propagandist, revealed 1,910 of his videos, one of which had been viewed 164,420 times.[223]

While it is difficult to gauge the extent of terrorists' online reach, it is undeniable that terrorists exploited the Internet to propagate the terrorist threat and Americans' use of the Internet increased significantly coincident with 9/11. This has had two major effects. First, whereas traditional news media was able to filter terrorist propaganda and set the public agenda in the recent past, especially before 9/11, widespread Internet use has eroded that barrier between the public and terrorist organizations. Second, Internet-enabled affiliations among otherwise disparate terrorist organizations and even individuals has given the impression that the expanse of groups like Al Qaeda is far greater than it actually is. For Americans this gives credence to the notion that the United States has indeed been drawn into a Global War on Terror and that the terrorist enemy could be anywhere, including within the United States itself. Therefore, this thesis concludes that the rapid expansion of Internet use coincident with 9/11 contributed significantly to Americans' fear of terrorism post-9/11.

C. TERRORISM IN POPULAR CULTURE

As outlined in Chapter I, some research suggests that popular culture has been an important source of influence on Americans' perception of the terrorist threat. This section explores that assertion. It first reviews themes in the literature relating terrorism and popular culture. It then examines depictions of terrorism in American film and television before and after 9/11.[224] Ultimately, this thesis argues that popular culture has

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[223] Ibid., 11.

[224] For the sake of brevity and focus, this thesis omits discussion about popular culture expressions beyond film and television drama. However, some research suggests that the effects of non-terrorism television, as well as documentaries and books, are not insignificant contributors to Americans' perception of terrorism. See, for example, Janet McCabe, "In Debate: Remember 9/11—Terror, Trauma and Television 10 Years On," *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies* 7, no. 1 (2012): 79; Stacy Takacs, "Entertainment Formats and the Memory of 9/11," *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies* 7, no. 1 (2012): 87; and Gary R. Edgerton and Katherine C. Edgerton, "Pathologizing Post-9/11 America in Homeland: Private Paranoia, Public Psychosis," *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies* 7, no. 1 (2012): 90.

influenced Americans' perceptions of the terrorist threat, starting well before 9/11. American movies established Americans' stereotypical understanding of the terrorist threat as fanatical, vicious, and prevalent, and television sustained and even amplified that understanding after 9/11.

1. Related Themes in Terrorism and Popular Culture Literature

A general theme in literature about popular culture and terrorism is that there is a link between the depiction of terrorism in film and television and the public's general perceptions about terrorism. David Altheide, for example, states that, "we learn about the world and how the world is run through the mass media and popular culture."[225] Nacos' research supports Altheide, leading her to liken popular culture to "adult education," meaning that television and film inform the viewer's perception rather than reflect it.[226] Citing a 1994 study by Carpini and Williams, Nacos observes that, "participants in focus groups referred slightly more often to fictitious TV shows than news programs in political discourse."[227]

Moreover, this phenomenon is not limited to members of the general public. Nacos highlights three prominent examples of Jack Bauer, the television show *24*'s lead character, being referenced by public officials. For example, John Yoo, author of the Bush administration's 2002 Torture Memos, asked "what if, as the popular Fox television program *24* recently portrayed, a high-level terrorist leader is caught who knows the location of a nuclear weapon in an American city. Should it be illegal for the president to use harsh interrogation short of torture to elicit this information?"[228] Similarly, Supreme Court Justice Scalia during a 2007 panel discussion on counterterrorism said, "Jack Bauer

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[225] Altheide, "Fear, Terrorism, and Popular Culture," 11.

[226] Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism*, loc. 3840. Nacos borrows this term from an Intelligence Science Board report which is, in part, about the public's expectations about the efficacy of interrogation techniques vis-à-vis terrorism suspects. See *Intelligence Science Board, Educing Information: Interrogation: Science and Art Foundations for the Future, Phase I Report* (Washington, DC: National Defense Intelligence College, 2006), ix.

[227] Ibid., loc. 3850.

[228] Quoted in Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism*, loc. 3948.

saved Los Angeles. . . . He saved hundreds of thousands of lives. Are you going to convict Jack Bauer? Say that criminal law is against him? Is any jury going to convict Jack Bauer? I don't think so!"[229] Finally, Michael Chertoff, Department of Homeland Security Secretary, said that Jack Bauer's need to make risk assessments in *24* "reflects real life."[230]

Another common theme in the academic literature on popular culture is that popular depictions of terrorism and terrorists are rarely nuanced or explained in any depth. Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard, for example, argue that terrorism became a "vital source of narratives, fantasies, and myths" for popular culture years before 9/11, especially in film, due to its "international intrigue, exotic settings, graphic violence, and the putative conflict between good and evil."[231] Boggs and Pollard note that, starting in the 1980s, entertainment media focused on the Middle East as the "perfect backdrop" to portray a "simplistic 'madman' thesis of global terrorism, obsessed with small pockets of evildoers…prepared to destroy Western values."[232] As such, the secular and political motivations for international terrorism is usually ignored which has led to "caricatured jihadic (sic) terrorism" in entertainment media.[233] Furthermore, in Yvonne Tasker's exploration of "Terror TV," she describes the general theme of terrorism-related popular culture surrounding 9/11:

> The characteristic narrative and thematic elements of Terror TV include the figuring of the United States as a nation under threat, personal bravery on the part of men and women operating in dangerous situations, deployment of racial and ethnic stereotypes alongside an evocation of the state itself as benignly multicultural, and a drive toward a somewhat perverse reassurance that the forces of the state can be relied on.[234]

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229 Quoted in Ibid., loc. 3961.

230 Quoted in Ibid., loc. 4002.

231 Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard, "Hollywood and the Spectacle of Terrorism," *New Political Science* 28, no. 3 (2006): 335.

232 Ibid., 336.

233 Ibid., 348.

234 Yvonne Tasker, "Television Crime Drama and Homeland Security: From Law & Order to 'Terror TV,'" *Cinema Journal* 51, no. 4 (Summer 2012): 47.

In other words, popular culture projects an existential danger facing the United States emanating from non-American "others" that can only be protected by brave agents of the state taking extraordinary measures.

A third argument in the literature is that its content and frames are subject to influence by the government and large corporations, especially in film. Termed the "Hollywood Propaganda Model" by Matthew Alford, this model closely mirrors Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's propaganda model for the news media.[235] In essence, dissenting or critical narratives that challenge government or corporate interests are unlikely to gain traction in film or television drama.[236] Alford notes that there are very few major movie studios and cites statements by studio executives explaining their tendency to avoid unfamiliar political narratives. For example, David Kirkpatrick, former president of Paramount, said that, "you need a homogenized piece of entertainment…something that is not particularly edgy [or] particularly sophisticated."[237] Moreover, Alford argues that manufacturers paying for product placement in movies put filmmakers "under pressure to avoid raising 'serious complexities and disturbing controversies' because this would interfere with the 'buying mood' in the media outlet."[238] Finally, Alford highlights the "vast and well-funded public relations divisions" of government bureaucracies that "offer special access to the media."[239] By granting access to advice and material, government agencies gain some leverage over the content of the media they are supporting.

In conclusion, we can say that popular culture, specifically film and television drama, does influence the public's perception of the terrorist threat. Furthermore, it only shallowly represents the complexity of the terrorist threat. Moreover, that representation

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[235] Matthew Alford, "Why Not a Propaganda Model for Hollywood?" in *Screens of Terror*, ed. Phillip Hammond (Bury St. Edmonds, UK: Arima Publishing, 2011), 1. The author's copy of the text accessed August 25, 2017 at http://opus.bath.ac.uk/33607/.

[236] Ibid.

[237] Quoted in Ibid., 3.

[238] Ibid.

[239] Ibid., 4.

of terrorism is affected by certain government and corporate influences. The remainder of this section analyzes how these assumptions manifest themselves in specific representations of terrorism in film and television drama.

2. Terrorism in Film

According to Thomas Riegler, "the perception of what terrorism means, how it can be understood, is shaped by cinematic images…movies reproduce, charge, and disseminate interpretations, ideologies, and world views in contemporary society by constructing and filling an imaginary space."[240] Aside from *The Sum of All Fears*, which was in production before 9/11 and is decidedly a Cold War-era effort, no film depicting the attacks was released until *United 93* in April 2006.[241] Therefore, understanding Hollywood's treatment of the terrorist threat in movies before 9/11 is necessary to explain Americans' reaction to terrorism in the years after 9/11. This section argues that the terrorist threat in movies shifted from depictions of the Cold War terrorists of the 1970s to the more modern concept of so-called "radical Islamic terrorists" represented in movies like 1998's *The Siege* and commonly associated with the post-9/11 new terrorism threat.

Riegler argues that depictions of terrorism in film "correlates with the waves and historical development of political violence."[242] As such, during the 1970s, terrorism-related movies in the United States tended to reflect Cold War themes and increased in prominence in parallel with news coverage of global terrorist attacks. The terrorists in these films usually were far-left radicals (e.g., *The Enforcer*, 1976), insurgent guerillas (e.g., *Victory at Entebbe*, 1976), or of the homegrown variety, either psychopaths

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[240] Thomas Riegler, "Through the Lenses of Hollywood: Depictions of Terrorism in American Movies," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 4, no. 2 (May 2010): 35.

[241] Boggs and Pollard, "Hollywood and the Spectacle of Terrorism," 344. IMDB.com describes the plot of *The Sum of All Fears*, released May 2002, as follows: "CIA analyst Jack Ryan must stop the plans of a Neo-Nazi faction that threatens to induce a catastrophic conflict between the United States and Russia's newly elected president by detonating a nuclear weapon at a football game in Baltimore." See "The Sum of All Fears (2002)," IMDB.com, accessed August 26, 2017 at http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0164184/?ref_=nv_sr_1.

[242] Riegler, "Through the Lenses of Hollywood: Depictions of Terrorism in American Movies," 35.

(e.g., *Airport*, 1970) or post-war soldiers (e.g., *Twilight's Last Gleaming*, 1977). Riegler notes that, "where Middle Eastern terrorists appeared, their background was primarily secular, [with] national liberation on their agenda."[243]

Events such as the Iran hostage crisis in 1979, the 1983 Beirut Marine barracks bombing, and other American encounters with terrorism in the Middle East shifted Hollywood's portrayal of terrorism.[244] According to Boggs and Pollard, terrorism in and from the Middle East began to supplant Communists as movies' favored villains.[245] More importantly, however, encapsulated by the *Delta Force* franchise (1986–1991), the new terrorist enemy "was seen as semi-civilized, violent, shady, beyond redemption, capable of horrendous crimes—traits making them suitable for extermination."[246] As Riegler explains, "[the terrorist] was finally established as a sworn public enemy of everything America stands for."[247] That being said, the terrorists during the 1980s, though they typically remained state-sponsored, were often portrayed as caricature Arabs. Riegler describes their portrayal in *Delta Force*:

> When the terrorists are first introduced, they are shown in an extreme low angle shot, which further distorts their already shabby appearance with their loosened ties, unkempt hair, and maniacal stare. Their savage "otherness" is a mixture of ethnicity and psychosis.[248]

Thus, the 1980s marks the confluence of movies' projection of terrorism as both a security threat on par with Communism and its association with maniacal Arabs. *Navy Seals* (1990) exemplifies this racially-charged image as the movie's Arab terrorists are referred to as "scumbags" and Beirut is described as a "shithole" full of "ragheads."[249]

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[243] Ibid., 36–37, 42.

[244] Ibid., 37.

[245] Boggs and Pollard, "Hollywood and the Spectacle of Terrorism," 338.

[246] Ibid.

[247] Riegler, "Through the Lenses of Hollywood," 42.

[248] Ibid., 38.

[249] Quoted in Boggs and Pollard, "Hollywood and the Spectacle of Terrorism," 339.

The 1990s witnessed another change in the depiction of terrorists in movies, largely in parallel to the end of the Cold War. Rather than featuring state-sponsored terrorists, new, decentralized asymmetric threats emerged. Formerly stereotypical villains driven by ideology became either associated with crime syndicates or otherwise driven to "kill and maim for money."[250] This kind of terrorism figured prominently in the 1990s action movies exemplified by films such as the *Die Hard* franchise (1988–1995), *Speed* (1995), and *The Rock* (1996). In addition to these "apolitical gangsters," as Riegler calls them, "radical Islamic terrorists" were depicted as fanatically driven to "achieve spectacular violence against highly symbolic targets while also inflicting mass casualties."[251] Moreover, Boggs and Pollard note that films like *True Lies* (1994), *Executive Decision* (1996), and *The Siege* (1998) portray Islamic terrorists devoid of any political depth or context as a "personality type [that] exists beyond history, beyond politics, beyond psychology; a type so irredeemably evil and irrational that no normal mode of interpretation is possible."[252] Even *The Siege*, which offers at least surface-level political rationale for its Islamic terrorists, ends up emphasizing the random and morally unrestrained violence committed by the terrorists.[253] Tellingly, Boggs and Pollard quote a line from *The 9/11 Commission Report* that could be a description for any number of terrorism-related movie plots pre-9/11: "a new breed of Islamic terrorist has emerged from the downtrodden societies of the Middle East. Attached to no nation but infiltrating many, its strategy is to inflict mass casualties and their aim is to attack no less than the heart of Western civilization."[254] Finally, as a notable aside, Boggs and Pollard highlight that homegrown, right-wing extremists were virtually absent from any major film releases during this time.[255]

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250 Riegler, "Through the Lenses of Hollywood," 38–39, 42.

251 Ibid., 39, 42.

252 Boggs and Pollard, "Hollywood and the Spectacle of Terrorism," 350.

253 Ibid., 343–344.

254 Quoted in Ibid., 336–337.

255 Ibid., 347.

Post-9/11, aside from *The Sum of All Fears* as mentioned earlier, mainstream Hollywood films tended to avoid direct depictions of terrorism-related themes in response to the shock of the attacks. Instead, movies focused on escapist themes, fantasy and science fiction, and family entertainment. The World Trade Center towers were even edited out of most films already in production during 9/11.[256] When Hollywood finally breached the subject with *United 93*, films became focused on realistic depictions of the battle against terrorists. However, despite these films' cinematic realism, Islamic terrorism was still conveyed as existing in a "starkly polarized world where cruel, sadistic terrorists filled with irrational hatred attack innocent Americans."[257] Not only did Hollywood fail to present a critical or contextualized narrative about the post-9/11 terrorism threat immediately after the attacks, once resumed, post-9/11 movies continued to perpetuate stereotypes and simplistic "good versus evil" narratives.

3. Terrorism in Television Drama

The terrorist threat surrounding 9/11 as depicted in television generally resembles cinema's as outlined above—the necessity of combating terrorism as a grave threat to the United States is a pervasive theme as is television's stereotypical depiction of Islamic terrorism. However, in contrast to Hollywood movie production, the number of television shows directly concerned with terrorism actually increased immediately after 9/11. This section briefly discusses the different so-called waves of terrorism-related shows in the decade post-9/11, explores how those shows potentially influenced Americans' perceptions of the terrorist threat, and finally outlines some of the specific methods and tropes used to project the terrorist threat.

Largely absent before 9/11, as Stacy Takacs explains, terrorism-focused television evolved in waves starting in 2001. The first of these waves, exemplified by the shows *24* (2001–2014), *The Agency* (2001–2003), and *Threat Matrix* (2003–2004), "offered melodramatic narratives of U.S. victimization, valor, and vengeance designed to reassure

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[256] Riegler, "Through the Lenses of Hollywood," 40.

[257] Boggs and Pollard, "Hollywood and the Spectacle of Terrorism," 346. See also: *Body of Lies* (2008) and *The Kingdom* (2007).

a nervous public that security could be guaranteed through strength."[258] Takacs' second wave, which included later seasons of *24* and *Sleeper Cell* (2005–2006), evolved somewhat in response to the Iraq war, sometimes depicting the government as either responsible for terrorism itself or as overreacting to it in some way.[259] Finally, the last wave shifted to a focus on the "devolution of the War on Terror," where global counterterrorism efforts were run less by politicians than "by intelligence agencies, data analysts, and computer technicians."[260] While these shifting perspectives clearly reflect the political discourse of their times, terrorism depictions post-9/11 were still ultimately offered as "evil by association with foreign territories or people."[261] As Tasker relays in her analysis, "the terrorist is a type to which the viewer is given explicit cues, which include religion, ethnicity, appearance, and behavior…"[262] In other words, although terrorism was approached from different outlooks during the various post-9/11 "waves" of terrorism-focused television, the source of evil remained constant in its depiction of radical Islamic terrorism.[263]

Beyond reinforcing the source of the terrorist threat, television shows also continually emphasized the expanded scope and nature of the threat. For example, terrorist attacks in television shows were often portrayed as occurring in shopping malls, in buses, against infrastructure, and in other busy, public locations. As Tasker argues, "television terrorism thus affects ordinary life in extreme or violent ways—with the nation and its urban and civic spaces repeatedly under attack."[264] In other words, terrorist

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[258] Stacy Takacs, "The Changing Shape of Our Fears," *Cinema Journal* 56, no. 1 (Fall 2016): 124. Interestingly, Tasker notes that both *24* and *The Agency* were in production before 9/11, along with another show called *Alias* (2001-2006), indicating that popular concerns about terrorism were emerging even before 9/11. Tasker also points out the emergence of terrorism-specific episodes in post-9/11 crime dramas, such as *Law & Order* (1990-2010), *Law & Order: Criminal Intent* (2001-2011), *Bones* (2005-), and others. See Tasker, "Television Crime Drama and Homeland Security,"44, 46.

[259] Ibid.

[260] Ibid., 125.

[261] Ibid., 128.

[262] Tasker, "Television Crime Drama and Homeland Security," 48–49.

[263] Ibid., 44.

[264] Ibid., 45.

attacks were depicted as happening anywhere, at any time, to anyone. Similarly, the expanse of the terrorist threat in television shows is depicted as so extraordinary as to justify coercion and torture in response. As Bloch-Elkon and Nacos put it, "post-9/11 entertainment productions…spread the message that extraordinary threats require extraordinary responses."[265] Indeed, as an indicator of the extent of the portrayed threat, Nacos cites data from Human Rights First showing that there were only 47 torture scenes in primetime network television from 1997–2000, but 624 torture scenes from 2002–2005.[266] As one might expect, 9/11 was also frequently referenced in terrorism television shows. In one example from a 2003 episode of *Threat Matrix*, a main character is vindicated after killing a terrorism suspect during a torture session when her defense team appeals to the prevention of another 9/11-style attack as justification for torture. As Tasker describes the outcome, "the court ultimately recognizes the validity of the outcome [and] the techniques are pronounced legitimate."[267] The effect of referencing 9/11 thus propagates the understanding that 9/11 was not an isolated, outlier event, and that extraordinary measures are justified to prevent more attacks on the scale of 9/11.

Finally, terrorism television shows post-9/11 relied on presentation styles and devices, or tropes, that furthered terrorist stereotypes. For example, Tasker argues that when television shows, especially crime dramas, depict terrorism, they often rely on the tropes of disguise and deception.[268] In other words, the terrorist hides among us. However, invariably, the shows reinforce stereotypes as the characters are able to ferret out the terrorist and identify him or her, usually by associating them with stereotypical "markers of ethnicity and religion." Moreover, the structure and pace of the shows themselves may also oversimplify or distort the terrorist threat. As Hoskins and O'Laughlin argue, "dramas such as *24* and *Spooks* (2002) prioritize immediacy and excitement over comprehension or reflection, and may serve to reinforce certain

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[265] Yaeli Bloch-Elkon and Brigitte L. Nacos, "News and Entertainment Media: Government's Big Helpers in the Selling of Counterterrorism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 8, no. 5 (October 2014): 20.

[266] Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism*, loc. 4110.

[267] Tasker, "Television Crime Drama and Homeland Security," 51.

[268] Ibid., 58.

assumptions about terrorist threats."[269] In other words, terrorists are depicted stereotypically and the causes of terrorism depicted in isolation from broader contexts because the shows' formats are oriented towards fast-paced and exciting action.

In sum, terrorism-related television shows surrounding 9/11, like movies, projected an image of terrorism consistent with Americans' perceptions of the terrorist threat. Despite approaching terrorism from multiple perspectives, television shows continued to propagate the stereotypical terrorist as a fanatical Islamic extremist. Moreover, the shows presented terrorism as an extraordinary threat that justified extreme countermeasures. Furthermore, terrorist attacks were depicted as likely to happen in any place at any time. Finally, the devices and structures of television shows served to only reinforce existing stereotypes and limit contemplation about the broader contexts of terrorism.

D. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter argued that Americans' perceptions of the terrorist threat are affected in large part by what they read and see in the news, on the Internet, and in popular culture, such as in film and television drama. The news made a dramatic shift towards soft news coverage and news as public drama, in large part due to structural factors such as increased competition for audience share among traditional news sources, cable news networks, and the Internet. Moreover, news organizations failed to uphold their watchdog role post-9/11. As a result, news audiences were subjected to less-than-objective reporting about the terrorist threat post-9/11. Regarding the Internet, terrorist organizations exploited the technology, especially social media, to successfully bypass traditional media gatekeepers and self-mass communicate their threats and propaganda. The Internet also enabled otherwise disparate groups to appear to be connected to a larger, even global, movement targeting the United States. Finally, popular culture affected Americans' stereotypical understanding of the terrorism by only superficially

[269] Andrew Hoskins and Ben O'Loughlin, *Television and Terror: Conflicting Times and the Crisis of News Discourse* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 140.

representing the threat. Film drama began framing terrorists as fiendish, vicious, and prolific well before 9/11 and television drama sustained and amplified depictions of the threat well beyond 9/11. In combination, all of these factors caused Americans to fear the post-9/11 terrorist threat more than before 9/11.

III. ASSESSING TERRORISM INDUSTRY INCENTIVES—POLITICIANS, BUREAUCRATS, AND OTHERS

This chapter explores the incentives politicians, bureaucrats, and other members of the terrorism industry, such as security contractors, think tanks, and even academics, face with regard to elevating and sustaining the American public's concern about the terrorism threat. As discussed in Chapter I, some scholars argue that political elites have used 9/11 as a tool to further political agendas and garner support from their electorate. The first section of this chapter assesses those arguments in contrast to the pre-9/11 political environment. The second section of the chapter examines subsequent arguments made about the incentives created in the wake of 9/11 for bureaucrats and other terrorism industry members to justify their activities and spending under a counterterrorism umbrella. Ultimately, the chapter concludes that, though members of the terrorism industry may not choose to elevate and sustain the perception of the terrorist threat in every case, there are strong incentives for them to do so and they likely have actively done so.

A. POLITICAL INCENTIVES

Political elites, especially the president, his or her inner circle, and members of congress, are in a position to affect the public's perception of the terrorist threat. As David Altheide explains, "decision makers, who serve as key news sources, can shape perceptions of mass audiences."[270] Post-9/11, President George W. Bush continually emphasized the threat terrorism posed to the United States, claiming that "the advance of liberty is opposed by terrorists and extremists — evil men who despise freedom, despise America, and aim to subject millions to their violent rule," even referring to the "War on Terror" as the "defining ideological struggle of the 21st century" as late as 2008.[271]

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[270] David L. Altheide, "Terrorism and the Politics of Fear," *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies* 6, no. 4 (2006), 417.

[271] George W. Bush, "State of the Union Address to the 110th Congress, Second Session," (speech, United States Capitol, Washington, DC, January 28, 2008), accessed at https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf, 533.

Likewise, in 2009, former Vice President Dick Cheney, in reference to the possibility of a terrorist attack using "a nuclear weapon or a biological agent of some kind" that "would involve the deaths of perhaps hundreds of thousands of people," said, "I think there's a high probability of such an attempt."[272] Both of these statements were made despite the lack of a major terrorist attack in the United States since 9/11 or even of credible evidence that terrorists could launch a nuclear attack. Given the link between the political elite and public perception, the question is why would political elites emphasize, even inflate, the threat posed by terrorism in the United States? This section argues that political elites tend to inflate the terrorism threat because they are incentivized to, either in order to help propel their political agenda or in order to garner support from their electorate.

1. Terrorist Threat Inflation

Threat inflation has been recognized as a means for political elites to further their agenda. Thrall and Cramer define threat inflation as "the attempt by elites to create concern for a threat that goes beyond the scope and urgency that a disinterested analysis would justify."[273] In their model, threat is first perceived by elites, then communicated and subjected to countering narratives from other elites and the media (known as the marketplace of ideas), before affecting the public's perception of the threat, which, in turn, drives support for policy or the elites themselves.[274] Though there is some debate about the best theoretical approach to take for determining what, when, or why threats get inflated, as Thrall and Cramer note, "most scholars…acknowledge that threat inflation has multiple and interacting causes."[275] In explaining elites' inflation of the terrorist threat, this thesis tends to favor a domestic political approach, wherein elites are

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[272] Quoted in Mike Allen, John F. Harris, and Jim Vandehei, "Cheney Warns of New Attacks," Politico, February 4, 2009, http://www.politico.com/story/2009/02/cheney-warns-of-new-attacks-018390.

[273] Trevor A. Thrall and Jane K. Cramer, ed., *American Foreign Policy and the Politics of Fear: Threat Inflation Since 9/11* (London, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2009), 1.

[274] Ibid., 3.

[275] Ibid. See pages 2–11 for an overview discussion of the various theoretical approaches, including realist, psychological, domestic political, and constructivist.

incentivized to inflate particular threats in order to "achieve material, policy, and electoral goals."[276]

The incentives promoting elites' terrorist threat inflation have been documented by several scholars. For example, Leonie Huddy, Stanley Feldman, Charles Taber, and Gallya Lahav found that, "as perceived threat increased, there was heightened support for a wide range of domestic and international government actions to combat the threat of terrorism, including overseas military action, a curtailment of civil liberties, and increased surveillance and tighter immigration restrictions for Arabs."[277] In other words, elevated public perceptions about the threat of terrorism promote support for "aggressive national security policy."[278] Benjamin Friedman likewise argues that, "people see threats as more legitimate justifications for policies than ideological ends."[279] Thomas Dolan and Nathan Ilderton's work supports this assertion, finding that, "perceived personal threat from terrorism is a powerful and consistent predictor that survey respondents will make terrorism their first policy priority" whereas other variables, including ideology, had "mixed relationships with policy salience."[280] Moreover, in order for elites to ensure their policies are enacted, Friedman argues that elites create a "sense of crisis that either alarms other veto players into supporting change or convinces them that because the public thinks so, compliance is necessary."[281] Ronald Krebs and Jennifer Lobasz apply this argument when explaining congressional Democrats' lack of "vigorous opposition" to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 "because the fixing of the War on Terror as the dominant discourse after September 11 had deprived [Democrats] of winning arguments, of

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[276] Ibid., 7.

[277] Leonie Huddy, Stanley Feldman, Charles Taber, and Gallya Lahav, "Threat, Anxiety, and Support of Antiterrorism Policies," *American Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 3 (July 2005), 604.

[278] Ibid.

[279] Benjamin H. Friedman, "Managing Fear: The Politics of Homeland Security," in *Terrorizing Ourselves: Why U.S. Counterterrorism Policy is Failing and How to Fix It*, eds. Benjamin H. Friedman, Jim Harper, and Christopher Preble (Washington, DC: CATO Institute, 2010), 196.

[280] Thomas M. Dolan and Nathan Ilderton, "Scared into Demanding Action: The Effects of the Perceived Threat from Terrorism on Policy Salience," *Polity* 49, no. 2 (April 2017), 245.

[281] Friedman, "Managing Fear," 196.

socially sustainable avenues of reply." Furthermore, as John Mueller and Mark Stewart note, exaggerating the terrorism threat is rarely an accountable offense for politicians, whereas a politician with a more modest perspective may find him or herself being labeled "soft on terrorism" or blamed if an attack does occur.[282] Finally, Veronique de Rugy extends the argument to encompass congressional counterterrorism-based pork-barrel spending, wherein "members of Congress have a strong incentive to steer federal money to their districts or to reward particular industries; by contrast, they have little incentive to reduce wasteful federal spending."[283] In sum, it is clear that incentives exist for politicians to use the terrorist threat to further political agendas. The next section examines evidence of politicians actually doing so post-9/11.

2. The Terrorism Threat and Political Agendas

During the time period examined in this thesis, 1991 to 2011, a significant shift in political elites' reaction to the terrorist threat became apparent. As Gabriel Rubin and others have highlighted, President William J. Clinton generally relied on a limited, law enforcement frame (i.e., treating the attacks as crimes) in response to terrorist attacks in the United States, whereas President Bush relied on a global war frame in response to terrorist attacks during his administration.[284] For example, after the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, in response to a reporter's question about the attack potentially changing Americans' way of life, Clinton responded, "I have put the full resources of the Federal Government, every conceivable law enforcement information resource we could

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[282] John Mueller and Mark G. Stewart, "Balancing the Risks, Benefits, and Costs of Homeland Security," *Homeland Security Affairs* 7, no. 1 (2011), https://www.hsaj.org/articles/43.

[283] Veronique de Rugy, "The Economics of Homeland Security," in *Terrorizing Ourselves* (see note 279), 135.

[284] Gabriel Rubin, "Balancing Fear: Why Counter-Terror Legislation was Blocked After the Oklahoma City and London Bombings," *Historia Actual*, no. 22 (Spring 2010), 127. See also: Lorna Y. Atmore, "Fear Factors In: Political Rhetoric, Threat Inflation, and the Narrative of September 11," (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2014). Notably, Chin-Kuei Tsui outlines that political rhetoric concerning so-called new terrorism emerged during the 1990s to replace elites' traditional emphasis on Cold War threats. According to Tsui, President Clinton's messaging evolved over his presidency and "stressed the danger of catastrophic terrorism that involved rogue states, weapons of mass destruction and cyber-terrorism." This rhetoric, in turn, was a starting point for President Bush's War on Terror. See Chin-Khuei Tsui, "Framing the Threat of Catastrophic Terrorism: Genealogy, Discourse, and President Clinton's Counterterrorism Approach," *International Politics* 52, no. 1 (2015), 67.

put to work on this, we have. I'm very concerned about it. But I think it's also important that we not overreact to it."[285] Clinton had a similar response to the OKC bombing. On the day of the attack, he said the government had deployed "the world's finest investigators to solve these murders." Two days later he stated that, "I think Americans can be secure that our country has able law enforcement officials, that we work together well, that we have prevented terrorist activities from occurring, that, obviously, every civilized society is at risk of this sort of thing."[286] In contrast, in the span of 24 hours, Bush went from "direct[ing] the full resources of our intelligence and law enforcement communities to find those responsible and bring them to justice," on September 11th, 2001 to "the deliberate and deadly attacks which were carried out yesterday against our country were more than acts of terror. They were acts of war…Freedom and democracy are under attack" on September 12.[287]

An argument can be made that this shift was made in response to the incentives discussed above. Supporting this argument, Rubin explains that, because Clinton chose to use the law enforcement frame, the president's political agenda, at least in regard to counterterrorism, failed to gain immediate traction. Assailing militia groups and right-wing extremists while seemingly downplaying the wider terrorist threat to the United States, Clinton's legislation faced an unlikely coalition of House Republicans, the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Rifle Association, and various Arab and Muslim groups who were able to maneuver politically to block passage of the president's

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[285] William Clinton, "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session," (press remarks, Adult Learning Center in Brunswick, NJ, March 1, 1993), https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/WCPD-1993-03-08/pdf/WCPD-1993-03-08-Pg332.pdf.

[286] William Clinton, "Remarks on the Oklahoma City Bombing," (press remarks, Briefing Room in the White House, Washington, DC, April 19, 1995), https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/WCPD-1995-04-24/pdf/WCPD-1995-04-24-Pg662.pdf; William Clinton, "Remarks and an Exchange with Reporters on the Oklahoma City Bombing," (press remarks, Briefing Room in the White House, Washington, DC, April 21, 1995), https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/WCPD-1995-04-24/pdf/WCPD-1995-04-24-Pg673.pdf.

[287] George W. Bush, "Address to the Nation on the Terrorist Attacks," (speech, Oval Office in the White House, Washington, DC, September 11, 2001), https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/WCPD-2001-09-17/pdf/WCPD-2001-09-17-Pg1301-2.pdf; George W. Bush, "Remarks Following a Meeting With the National Security Team," (press remarks, Cabinet Room in the White House, Washington, DC, September 12, 2001), https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/WCPD-2001-09-17/pdf/WCPD-2001-09-17-Pg1301-2.pdf.

"anti-terror legislation" for more than a year.[288] Even when passed, the bill was significantly amended and watered down, leading Democrat Chuck Schumer to call it the "better-than-nothing anti-terrorism bill."[289] Rubin surmises that Clinton's policy failure was due in large part to the lack of overwhelming personal threat from terrorism exhibited by the public after the OKC bombing and the relatively low (in comparison to post-9/11) presidential approval ratings which enabled political maneuvering room by Clinton's opponents. This reasoning is supported by Carol Lewis who argues that the OKC bombing failed to resonate politically because the public considered the attack to be a crime directed at a small segment of the population, namely government employees in the workplace.[290] She concludes that, like crime, "domestic terrorism is likely to be seen as important in general and in the abstract, but with low personal risk, little impact on individuals' routine behavior and, consequently, low political salience. An act of terrorism is seen as likely to happen—but to someone else."[291]

In contrast, the Bush administration was able to leverage the War on Terror to not only launch a campaign in Afghanistan against Al Qaeda, but also push through the Patriot Act, justify "enhanced interrogations," and, most pertinently, invade Iraq.[292] For instance, according to a 2007 report by the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency, links between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda and 9/11 did not exist.[293] However, as Amy Gershkoff and Shana Kushner convincingly argue, "[the reason] the American public supported the war was that the Bush administration successfully convinced them

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288 Rubin, "Balancing Fear," 135–136.

289 Ibid.

290 Carol W. Lewis, "The Terror That Failed: Public Opinion in the Aftermath of the Bombing in Oklahoma City," *Public Administration Review* 60, no. 3 (May, 2000), 208–210.

291 Ibid., 209.

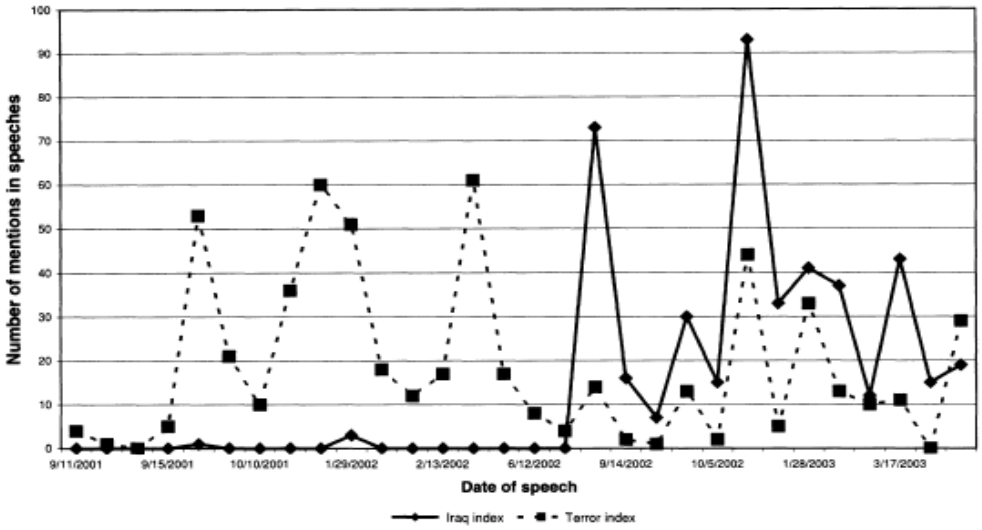
292 "Overview of the War on Terror," EBSCO Host Connection, accessed September 14, 2017 at http://connection.ebscohost.com/us/war-terror/overview-war-terror.

293 Mike Mount, "Hussein's Iraq and al Qaeda Not Linked, Pentagon Says," CNN.com, March 13, 2008, accessed at http://www.cnn.com/2008/US/03/13/alqaeda.saddam/. The news report cites and links to the redacted Institute for Defense Analysis paper titled, "Saddam and Terrorism: Emerging Insights from Captured Iraqi Documents, Vol. 1." The report's executive summary says that though Saddam used state terrorism against Iraqi citizens and support pan-Arab terrorist groups, it also states that "This study found no 'smoking gun' (i.e., direct connection) between Saddam's Iraq and al Qaeda."

that a link existed between Saddam Hussein and terrorism generally, and between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda specifically. Framing the war on Iraq in this way connected it intimately with 9/11, leading to levels of support for this war that stretched nearly as high as the levels of support for the war in Afghanistan."[294] In other words, the Bush administration was able to tap into Americans' personal concern about the threat from Al Qaeda in order to justify its agenda with regard to Iraq.

Gershkoff and Kushner conducted extensive content analysis of Bush administration rhetoric to support their argument. The authors found that the number of terrorism-related word mentions (e.g., terror, Afghanistan, Taliban, bin Laden, and Al Qaeda) in administration speeches increased to nearly the same levels during the build-up to the Iraq invasion as immediately after 9/11 (see Figure 13), but also that, "the subjects of terrorism and Iraq were intertwined on a regular basis" and Iraq and 9/11 often were juxtaposed.[295]

Figure 13. Iraq and Terrorism Indices (September 11, 2001–March 17, 2003).[296]



[294] Amy Gershkoff and Shana Kushner, "Shaping Public Opinion: The 9/11-Iraq Connection in the Bush Administration's Rhetoric," Perspectives on Politics 3, no. 3 (September 2005), 525.

[295] Ibid., 526–527.

[296] Source: Ibid., 527.

The point is most clearly made through the analysis of then-Secretary of State Colin Powell's speech to the United Nations explaining the United States' rationale for invading Iraq in 2003. Polling data shows that an additional 10 percent of respondents supported the invasion of Iraq after Powell's speech and claimed that the speech changed their minds. Before the speech, only 38 percent respondents linked Iraq with Al Qaeda, whereas 68 percent did so after the speech.[297] This is most likely due to Powell's emphasis on the terrorism connection and not on the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) issue as subsequent polling found that 82 percent of Americans supported invading Iraq whether or not any WMD were found.[298] Most tellingly, perhaps, is that a Gallup poll conducted days after Powell's speech found that 48 percent of polled Americans were very or somewhat worried about becoming the victim of a terrorist attack, 13 points higher than the post-9/11 low a year before the speech, six points higher than immediately after the OKC bombing, and the highest since the weeks after 9/11 itself.[299]

Regardless of the underlying agenda for invading Iraq, it is clear the Bush administration successfully used the War on Terror frame to garner public support for the war.[300] By shifting away from the limited, law enforcement frame used by Clinton to the unlimited, War on Terror frame, the Bush administration was able to drive policy salience for a public concerned about Saddam Hussein's support for future 9/11-style Al Qaeda terrorist attacks. The Iraq invasion case exemplifies the incentives for political

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[297] Ibid., 531.

[298] Ibid. To further support the point, Gershkoff and Kushner found that, from January 2002 to May 2003, President Bush's speeches referenced WMD a mean of 2.3 times per speech, but referenced terrorism 12.2 times per speech. Furthermore, an October 7, 2002 Bush speech titled "Outlining the Iraqi Threat" referred to WMD seven times, but terrorism 35 times.

[299] "Terrorism in the United States: Gallup Historical Trends," Gallup, accessed 20 May 2017, http://www.gallup.com/poll/4909/Terrorism-United-States.aspx.

[300] There are a wide variety of opinions about the Bush administration's impetus for the Iraq invasion. Ian Lustick, for example, argues that the Iraq invasion was central to a neo-conservative strategy to establish American global hegemony and lasting conservative political power domestically. See Ian Lustick, *Trapped in the War on Terror* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, PA, 2006), 63. Other examples include realist Jack Synder who has argued that a preventive attack strategy (and associated threat inflation) is a common phenomenon among powerful empires. See Jack Snyder, "Imperial Myth and Threat Inflation," in *American Foreign Policy and the Politics of Fear* (see note 273), 52–53.

elites to inflate the threat of terrorism for the public in order to push their political agenda.

3. Using the Terrorism Threat for Electoral Gain

Another aspect to consider regarding political elites' incentives is the individual-level advantages politicians stand to gain from inflating the terrorism threat. From presidential approval ratings to congressional elections and intra-party politics, political elites likely see little incentive to "inform the public honestly and accurately" as Mueller and Stewart implore them to do.[301] This section explores how the so-called marketplace of ideas broke down post-9/11 as individual politicians benefited from inflating the terrorism threat.

The president is in the unique position to both somewhat control and benefit politically from crisis events like terrorist attacks in the United States. Chaim Kaufmann suggests that the administration plays a key role in shaping political debate about the response to an attack by choosing how to frame the issue, by controlling the selective public release of intelligence, and by using its authority positions (such as being able to mobilize the armed forces) to set the debate agenda.[302] Marc Hetherington and Michael Nelson explain that a president can benefit from "rally effects" that bump the president's approval ratings "in response to certain kinds of dramatic international events involving the United States."[303] For example, after 9/11, President Bush experienced the largest-ever public approval bump of this kind, going from 51 percent on September 10th to 86 percent on September 15th.[304] Craig Stapley extends the argument to include domestic

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[301] Mueller and Stewart, "Balancing the Risks, Benefits, and Costs of Homeland Security."

[302] Chaim Kauffman, "Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas," in *American Foreign Policy and the Politics of Fear* (see note 273), 109–110. See also Thrall and Cramer in the introduction to *American Foreign Policy and the Politics of Fear*, page 9. See Ian Lustick's *Trapped in the War on Terror*, chapter 4, for an argument about how the Bush administration used the post-9/11 War on Terror frame and selective intelligence to boost support for the Iraq invasion.

[303] Marc Hetherington and Michael Nelson, "Anatomy of a Rally Effect: George W. Bush and the War on Terrorism," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 36, no. 1 (January 2003), 37.

[304] Ibid.

terrorism events like the OKC bombing as well.[305] In this case, President Clinton's approval bump was more moderate, going from 48 percent to 58 percent before and after the attack.[306]

Evidence further suggests that the Bush administration was incentivized to sustain the public's perception of the terrorist threat well beyond 9/11 for political purposes. For example, Gallup's Lydia Saad notes how the initial Iraq invasion, justified as part of the War on Terror, elevated Bush's approval rating by 13 points, up from 58 percent to 71 percent.[307] Helmut Norpoth and Andrew Sidman even contend that the Iraq war served to prolong the original 9/11 rally effect, helping secure Bush's 2004 re-election victory by keeping the topic of terrorism salient for the public.[308] Furthermore, Brigitte Nacos, Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, and Robert Y. Shapiro found in a four-year study of Bush's statements about terrorism and the administration's raising of terror alert levels that "as the administration issued terror alerts and otherwise magnified the threat of terrorism, the president's approval ratings benefited."[309] Moreover, Nacos and associates point out that exit polls and other survey data from the 2004 presidential election found that "Bush

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[305] Craig S. Stapley, "The Domestic Rally Effect and Terrorism," *Global Security Studies* 4, no. 4 (Fall 2012), accessed at http://globalsecuritystudies.com/Stapley%20Rally%20FINAL.pdf, 14.

[306] Ibid., 17.

[307] Lydia Saad, "Iraq War Triggers Major Rally Effect," Gallup, March 25, 2003, http://www.gallup.com/poll/8074/Iraq-War-Triggers-Major-Rally-Effect.aspx.

[308] Helmut Norpoth and Andrew H. Sidman, "Mission Accomplished: The Wartime Election of 2004," *Political Behavior* 29, no. 2 (June 2007), 194.

[309] Brigitte Nacos, Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, and Robert Y. Shapiro, *Selling Fear: Counterterrorism, The Media, and Public Opinion* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, 2011), Kindle edition, 54. Interestingly, Nacos and associates highlight that upon resigning as Secretary of Homeland Security in 2005, Tom Ridge told reporters that "There were times when some people were really aggressive about raising [the color-coded terror alert level], and we said 'For what?' (see page 57)." In other words, Ridge insinuates that the administration was actively manipulating the terror alert level for political purposes. See Brigitte Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism*, chapter 10. See also Mueller, *Overblown*, pages 33–34, for a discussion about Karl Rove's intent to use the terrorism threat as a central campaign theme and Tom Ridge's concerns about the terror alert levels. Lastly, according to the Department of Homeland Security, from March 2002 to April 2011 when the system was replaced, the Homeland Security Advisory System never lowered its threat level below yellow, indicating an "elevated" terrorist threat with "significant" risk of terrorist attack. See "Chronology of Changes to the Homeland Security Advisory System," DHS, September 13, 2017, https://www.dhs.gov/homeland-security-advisory-system and "Terror Alert System Fast Facts," CNN, August 28, 2017, http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/30/us/terror-alert-systems-fast-facts/index.html.

benefited from voters most concerned with terrorism."[310] This thesis does not speculate about the administration's intentions post-9/11, but it is apparent that elevating and sustaining the terrorism threat benefited the Bush administration politically.

Beyond the president, evidence suggests other political elites after 9/11 were incentivized to elevate and sustain the terrorist threat, or at least disincentivized from opposing the president's position regarding terrorism. As Jane Cramer argues when explaining congressional support for the Iraq invasion, "most Democrats and many Republicans deferred to the executive branch not on the merits of the case, but because they did not want to appear weak on defense or unpatriotic."[311] Cramer explains that Congress' passage of the Iraq War Resolution was not a certainty as the bill faced serious bipartisan opposition in the Senate. This opposition survived until presidential hopeful House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt (D-Mo) sided with Bush on Iraq. Gephardt apparently made this move because he was "conforming to the norm to be 'strong' on national defense" and because "he contended that Democrats had no choice but to go along with Bush on Iraq and they had to try to keep Iraq from becoming the defining issue in the upcoming elections."[312] Once Gephardt staked his position, Republicans felt they "could not afford to 'be to the left of Dick Gephardt'" and Democrats facing re-election "decided they also needed to be 'strong' on national security and support the commander-in-chief."[313] Thus, because of political incentives, opposition voices that could have tempered the president's War on Terror agenda were ultimately silenced.[314]

Post-9/11 political elites' concerns about the negative consequences of being labeled soft on terrorism turned out to be prescient. A notable example of this phenomenon is the direct impact Senator John Kerry's remarks about terrorism had on

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[310] Ibid., 55.

[311] Jane K. Cramer, "Militarized Patriotism and the Success of Threat Inflation," in *American Foreign Policy and the Politics of Fear* (see note 273), 137.

[312] Ibid., 143–142.

[313] Ibid., 143.

[314] Cramer notes that during subsequent debate over the Iraq War Resolution act, less than 10 percent of Senators and Members of Congress even attended and less than a half dozen Senators or Congressmen even reviewed the classified National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq. See pages 144–145.

his 2004 presidential election bid.[315] In an unusually candid interview with the *New York Times* in early October 2004, Kerry said that, "we have to get back to the place we were, where terrorists are not the focus of our lives, but they're a nuisance." He went on to draw a parallel between the terrorism threat and other crimes like prostitution, illegal gambling, and organized crime. The Bush campaign railed against Kerry on multiple fronts. Vice President Cheney called Kerry's remarks "naïve and dangerous" and the Bush campaign released television commercials that asked, "How can Kerry protect us when he doesn't understand the threat?"[316] Kerry immediately backtracked from his comments, stating in the presidential debate just days later that he would "do a better job of waging a smarter, more effective War on Terror and guarantee that we will go after the terrorists. I will hunt them down, and we'll kill them, we'll capture them. We'll do whatever is necessary to be safe."[317] Unfortunately for Kerry, the political damage had been done—exit polls from the presidential election indicated that, of the 19 percent of total respondents that considered terrorism to be "the one issue that mattered most in deciding how you voted for president," 86 percent said they voted for Bush.[318] The "soft on terrorism" lesson was likely internalized by other political elites. As Lustick surmises, the post-9/11 War on Terror "transformed its critics into its vassals, more anxious than ever to declare their fealty to the war, its necessity, and its expansion."[319] In other words, given the public's reaction to Kerry's candor, other politicians post-9/11 were unlikely to address the terrorist threat as anything other than grave.

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[315] Another example to consider is the case of former Senator Max Cleland from Georgia. Cleland, a decorated triple amputee Vietnam veteran lost his Senate seat in 2002, in large part because his opponent challenged Cleland's patriotism based on his record of voting against the Patriot Act. See David M. Halbfinger, "The 2002 Campaign: Georgia; Veteran Battles Charge He's Soft on Defense," *New York Times*, October 28, 2002, http://www.nytimes.com/2002/10/28/us/the-2002-campaign-georgia-veteran-battles-charge-he-s-soft-on-defense.html.

[316] Richard W. Stevenson, "Bush Faults Kerry on Terrorism Remarks," *New York Times*, October 12, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/12/politics/campaign/bush-faults-kerry-on-terrorism-remarks.html.

[317] Quoted in Lustick, Trapped in the War on Terror, 117.

[318] David W. Moore, "Moral Values Important in the 2004 Exit Polls," Gallup, December 7, 2004, http://news.gallup.com/poll/14275/Moral-Values-Important-2004-Exit-Polls.aspx. Notably, terrorism ranked nearly as importantly as moral values (22 percent) and the economy/jobs (20 percent) and more importantly than Iraq (15 percent), healthcare (8 percent), taxes (5 percent) and education (4 percent).

[319] Lustick, *Trapped in the War on Terror*, 118.

Lastly, political elites have been incentivized to propagate the terrorism threat because of the massive amount of federal funds made available post-9/11 for counterterrorism projects. As de Rugy explains, according to public choice theory, "in the political process…the people buying [security] are rarely the ones paying for it. As such, they have less incentive to balance costs and benefits."[320] Per her example, a Congressman from a low population, low risk state has little incentive to admit that his state and his constituency is not a likely terrorist target or to shunt federal grant funds to other states based on their higher risk. Instead, because pooled federal tax monies are distributed to states by the Department of Homeland Security rather than through state budgets, politicians "insist that the federal government should pay for their respective state response capacities and that federal grants to state and local governments be allocated based on a formula that guarantees every state an equal minimum amount of funds, regardless of risk or need."[321] As a result of this incentive structure, politicians have used the threat of terrorism to justify a litany of state and local expenses, such as $180,000 for a port servicing less than 20 ships annually, $202,000 for an 80-camera surveillance system in an Alaskan town with 2,400 residents, $30,000 for a defibrillator used for a high school basketball tournament, and many others.[322] As an example of the overall scale of this type of spending, one group, Citizens Against Government Waste, calculated that the 2004 Department of Homeland Security bill alone included at least $423 million in wasteful spending. Moreover, the 2005 bill included $896 million added over the president's original request.[323] Using the terrorism threat to justify federal spending on counterterrorism measures has proven to be lucrative for political elites.

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[320] De Rugy, "The Economics of Homeland Security," 134.

[321] Ibid., 136.

[322] John Mueller, *Overblown: How Politicians and the Terrorism Industry Inflate National Security Threats, and Why We Believe Them* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 36. Mueller's examples are taken from an extensive report outlining homeland security and counterterrorism spending from 2001 through 2006; see Veronique de Rugy, "What Does Homeland Security Spending Buy?" (AEI Working Paper #107, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Washington, DC, October 29, 2004), https://politicalscience.osu.edu/faculty/jmueller/DERUGY.PDF.

[323] de Rugy, "What Does Homeland Security Spending Buy?" 30. Notably, Citizens Against Government Waste also found $22.5 billion in wasteful spending and 8,000 "pork items" attached to the 2003 February Omnibus bill.

Ultimately, normative judgements about politicians' appropriate responses to terrorism before and after 9/11 are not this thesis' focus. Instead, this section has attempted to make the argument that political elites are faced with significant incentives to inflate the terrorist threat. The point is that, given these political incentives, it seems unreasonable to assume that political elites can be relied on to relay an objective or "disinterested analysis," as Thrall and Cramer put it, of the terrorism threat to the public. As such, it is certainly possible, if not likely, that political elites have actively inflated Americans' perception of the terrorist threat beyond 9/11.

B. BUREAUCRATS AND INDUSTRY

Similar logic applies to the remainder of the terrorism industry, such as bureaucrats, security contractors, academics, and think tanks. First, 9/11 heralded a massive increase in federal counterterrorism fund availability that was doled out with questionable concern for effectiveness or affordability. This provided a significant incentive for organizations, corporations, and individuals to sustain perceptions about the terrorist threat for economic benefit. Second, certain institutional factors inherent in the American political system, such as rent seeking for federal funds, and in security-oriented organizations, such as probability neglect during risk analysis, also contributed to elevated and sustained perceptions of the terrorism threat. This section explores those topics, concluding that natural responses to incentives, not malicious intent *per se*, likely contributed to the public's understanding of the terrorist threat post-9/11.

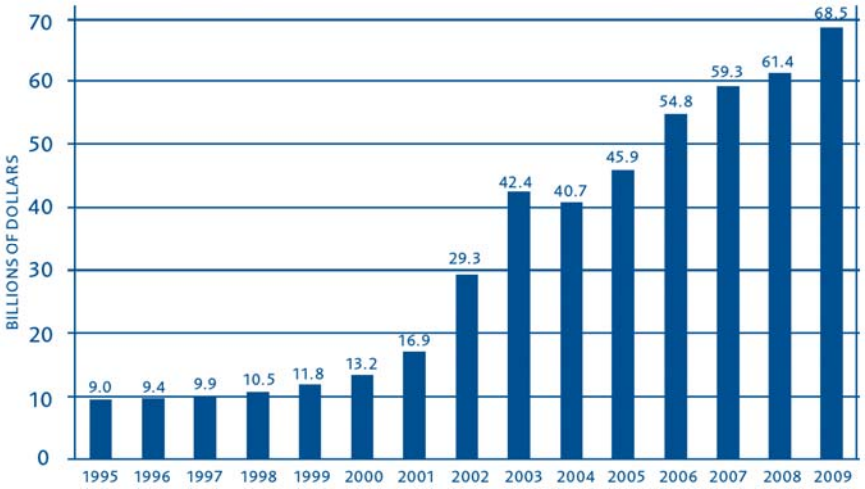
1. Economic Incentives

While this thesis avoids any normative judgement about how much money should be spent on homeland security, it is clear that spending aimed at terrorism has grown at a phenomenal rate.[324] For example, in her review of federal homeland security budget data, economist Veronique de Rugy found that, between 2001 and 2009, annual spending

[324] For arguments about the optimal level of homeland security or counterterrorism spending, see John Mueller and Mark G. Stewart, "Evaluating Counterterrorism Spending," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 28, no. 3 (Summer 2014). They argue, for example, that to justify $75 billion in spending, counterterrorism efforts would have to prevent three 9/11-scale attacks every four years; page 241.

increased by 305 percent, from at least $16.9 billion per year to $68.5 billion (see Figure 14).[325] Moreover, more than $419 billion was specifically appropriated for preventing terrorism during the same time period.[326] On a similar scale, homeland security scholars John Mueller and Mark Stewart have calculated that pre-9/11 annual counterterrorism expenditures were about $25 billion (in 2010 dollars), increasing by $75 billion per year by 2010.[327] All told, Mueller and Stewart tally more than $1 trillion in homeland security spending, excluding the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, between 2001 and 2011. Citing de Rugy, Mueller and Stewart note that the majority of this spending was focused on preventing terrorism.[328]

Figure 14. Homeland Security Federal Spending (FY1995-FY2009).[329]



Note: Data before 1998 are estimated as the Office of Management and Budget did not collect data on this subject then.

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325 Veronique de Rugy, "Facts and Figures About Seven Years of Homeland Security Spending," (Working Paper 08–02, Mercatus Center, George Mason University, Arlington, VA, 2008), 2.

326 Ibid.

327 John Mueller and Mark G. Stewart, "Evaluating Counterterrorism Spending," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 28, no. 3 (Summer 2014), 238. The authors calculate a $50 billion increase in counterterrorism spending by federal agencies such as the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Justice, estimate a $15 billion increase in intelligence community spending on counterterrorism, and approximate $10 billion in state and local spending on homeland security.

328 John Mueller and Mark G. Stewart, "Balancing the Risks, Benefits, and Costs of Homeland Security," *Homeland Security Affairs* 7, no. 1 (2011), 2.

329 Source: de Rugy, "Facts and Figures About Seven Years of Homeland Security Spending," 2.

The increase in post-9/11 security spending significantly incentivized members of the terrorism industry to align their cause, effort, or products with the Bush administration's War on Terror. Benjamin Friedman, for example, notes that the Department of Defense was rewarded with a 40 percent budget increase (excluding direct war spending in Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom) between 2001 and 2010 by using the threat of terrorism, at least in part, to justify its spending.[330] De Rugy's data from the Office of Management and Budget supports this assessment: in 2009 the Department of Defense received 26.1 percent of all homeland security funds doled out to federal departments, second only to the Department of Homeland Security itself (51.9 percent).[331] Moreover, even as late as 2011, the *National Military Strategy* listed the fight against terrorism as the first of its four National Military Objectives: "There are no more vital interests than the security of the American people, our territory, and our way of life. This is why we are at war…The Nation's strategic objective in this campaign is to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaida and its affiliates."[332] Conspiracies aside, there appears to have been an incentive post-9/11 for the military to uphold terrorism as a continuing threat. Friedman even goes so far as to argue that terrorism replaced Cold War enemies for the military-industrial complex.[333]

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) provides another example of the potential incentives government agencies have to align themselves with a focus on terrorism. At its inception, DHS's "founding principle and…highest priority" was (and remains) "protecting the American people from terrorist threats."[334] Indeed, DHS's 2010 *Quadrennial Homeland Security Review* lists "preventing terrorism and enhancing security" as "Mission 1" and states that, "preventing terrorism in the United States is the

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330 Friedman, "Managing Fear," 200.

331 de Rugy, "Facts and Figures About Seven Years of Homeland Security Spending," 4.

332 Michael G. Mullen, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America, 2011: Redefining America's Military Leadership* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2011), 5.

333 Friedman, "Managing Fear" 200.

334 "Prevent Terrorism and Enhance Security," Department of Homeland Security, May 6, 2016, https://www.dhs.gov/prevent-terrorism-and-enhance-security.

cornerstone of homeland security."[335] In light of the post-9/11 emphasis on preventing terrorism, DHS's budget increase from $31.2 billion in 2003 to $50.5 billion in 2009 appears to align with counterterrorism spending generally.[336] However, it is important to consider that DHS was composed of 22 separate federal departments and agencies, not all of whom focused on terrorism.[337] Given that fact, one would expect to see a disparity between budget increases for agencies responsible for preventing terrorism and those that did not. As de Rugy illustrates, this was not the case. For example, after being aligned with DHS, a food and shelter program for the poor received an unprecedented $153 million budget increase.[338] De Rugy cites multiple examples of similar unrelated spending increases within DHS, ultimately concluding that "programs that Congress might not approve if they were outside of DHS may likely sail through because of their DHS affiliation."[339] As such, because non-terrorism oriented agencies in DHS benefited from DHS's terrorist-related budget increase, they also had an incentive to support DHS's campaign against terrorism.

Of course, including the pork-barrel spending mentioned in the previous section, financial incentives to support War on Terror efforts extend beyond federal agencies. For example, in 2006, the federal government budgeted $8 billion in homeland security grant money for states, cities, and local first-responders, up from $2.7 billion in 2001.[340] This increase spurred significant lobbying efforts, such as from the 3,000 local officials that descended on Washington, DC, on March 4, 2004, followed by an equally robust cohort

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335 Janet Napolitano, *Quadrennial Homeland Security Review Report: A Strategic Framework for a Secure Homeland* (Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security, February 2010), 38.

336 de Rugy, "Facts and Figures About Seven Years of Homeland Security Spending," 5. Notably, DHS only spent about $35 billion of its budget on homeland security related activities in 2009. It spent $15.5 billion on non-homeland security activities and non-DHS organizations spent an additional $33.5 billion on homeland security activities. Thus, similar incentives to align with homeland security extend beyond DHS. See page 2, Figure 2 of de Rugy's article for a more complete breakdown.

337 "Who Joined DHS?" Department of Homeland Security, 15 September 2015, https://www.dhs.gov/who-joined-dhs.

338 de Rugy, "What Does Homeland Security Spending Buy?" 11.

339 Ibid. Most notably, the Senate attached $2.9 billion is disaster aid for farmers suffering from drought and floods in the 2005 Homeland Security bill.

340 Ibid., 14.

of firefighters less than two weeks later.[341] It also incentivized grant-seekers to creatively link their proposals with homeland security, such as one port's use of a $1 million grant to install a system that was primarily an anti-theft system, or the Washington, DC, mayor's $100,000 expenditure on a summer jobs program. One senator described the process as follows: "I have heard from individual departments that spending initiatives that were pending previously that were not approved, once they were given the label of homeland security, whether or not they fit the description, sailed through."[342] In other words, because of the financial incentives created by federal homeland security grants post-9/11, programs and organizations that might otherwise not be concerned whatsoever with homeland security, suddenly found themselves soliciting for funds using that justification.

This phenomenon also appeared in unexpected ways. For example, Ian Lustick cites a 2005 report from the Small Business Administration (SBA) that found that 85 percent of businesses granted counterterrorism loans underwritten by the government under the 2002 Supplemental Terror Activity Relief program "failed to establish their eligibility."[343] For example, later audits found that $22 million was loaned to Dunkin' Donuts franchises in nine different states in the name of supporting small businesses "adversely affected by the [September 11] attacks." All told, more than 7,000 questionable loans worth over $3 billion were underwritten by the SBA.[344] In a similar twist, multiple professional organizations also used the terrorism threat to support various agendas. For example, in 2002, the National District Attorney's Association issued a policy both defining terrorism as a crime and decrying its members to engage with their legislatures in order "to insure that prosecutors are included in any funding legislation."[345] Likewise, in 2003, the Association of American Veterinarian Medical

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[341] Ibid., 24.

[342] Ibid., 22.

[343] Lustick, *Trapped in the War on Terror*, 75.

[344] Ibid., 76.

[345] Quoted in Ibid., 80.

Colleges called for "the national leadership of America…to recognize and nurture the potential of the veterinary profession…to meet a national agenda for biosecurity" by increasing national funding at veterinary schools.[346] Lustick cites similar examples from professional pharmaceutical organizations, pediatricians, psychiatrists, and even opposing interest groups, such as the gun control lobby and the National Rifle Association, who all sought to gain by aligning their cause with preventing terrorism.[347]

Academics and think tanks have also benefited from increased spending related to terrorism. For instance, the 2006 federal budget allocated $132 billion for scientific research, up 34 percent from 2001. Within that increase, defense and counterterrorism funding increased 51 percent compared to just 16 percent for all other categories.[348] Other academic institutions also saw a significant post-9/11 jump in both total approved grant proposals and total funding related to terrorism research. The National Science Foundation, for example, awarded $47.7 million for 135 terrorism research grants from 2002–2005 compared to just $1.5 million for only eight proposals from 1997–2001.[349] Homeland security and other terrorism-related degree programs also proliferated across American educational institutions post-9/11. As early as 2005, the National Consortium for Homeland Security listed more than 200 member institutions.[350] In 2004, Mel Bernstein, then Director of University Programs for DHS, attributed the increase in programs to the burgeoning homeland security industry: "If you look across the country, almost every company or agency has something they call a 'homeland security initiative,' and they will need people."[351] DHS also contributed to the academic focus on terrorism by establishing multiple Homeland Security Centers of Excellence (there were 12 in

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346 Quoted in Ibid., 81.

347 Ibid., 82–83.

348 Ibid., 92.

349 Ibid., 91.

350 Henry A. Giroux, "The Militarization of U.S. Higher Education After 9/11," *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 5 (2008), 64.

351 Quoted in Julia Neyman, "Colleges Embrace Homeland Security Curriculum," *USA Today*, August 25, 2004, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/educate/college/education/articles/20040829.htm.

2008) wherein DHS grants funded academic research projects, most of which were specifically focused on terrorism-related topics.[352]

Finally, private industry and even individuals have benefited from the post-9/11 War on Terror environment. Companies like General Atomics, the maker of the Predator and Reaper remotely piloted aircraft, have seen profits soar as a result of their participation in the War on Terror. In their case, the company earned $110 million in 2001 while profits exceeded $1.8 billion in 2012.[353] Others, such as military contractor CACI, saw profits as high as $3.7 billion as late as 2012.[354] At the individual level, Evan Kohlmann made upward of $60,000 from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for consulting on terrorism investigations dating to 2003 and was routinely paid $300-$400 per hour for providing his expert testimony in as many as 24 cases.[355] As a final example, the 2012 Counter Terror Expo in Washington, DC showcased more than 100 companies courting potential buyers. Keynote speakers at the event included top Transportation Security Administration officials and even the former National Counter Terrorism Center director.[356] James Risen quotes one vendor who exemplifies the breadth of the industry saying "the heightened sense of security absolutely helped our product lines (high-security fencing) grow. Prior to 9/11, people were just going with chainlink fences." All told, according to Risen, some research has estimated that, by 2022, the terrorism industry in the United States will be worth $546 billion.[357]

In summary, this section has not attempted to prescribe the optimal level of spending for preventing terrorism. Rather, the point is that, post-9/11, significant

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[352] Giroux, "The Militarization of U.S. Higher Education After 9/11," 64. As an example of the scale of these institutions, the first Center of Excellence was established at the University of Southern California with a $12 million grant from DHS which, at the time, had a $70 million annual research and scholarship budget.

[353] James Risen, *Pay Any Price: Greed, Power, and Endless War* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2011), 56.

[354] Ibid., 64. Notably, CACI maintained its profitability, even increasing its profits despite being involved in the Abu Ghraib scandal in which contracted guards abused Iraqi detainees.

[355] Ibid., 222.

[356] Ibid., 228.

[357] Ibid., 229.

spending increases related to homeland security generally, and terrorism specifically, created an incentive for the beneficiaries of that spending to continue to propagate the threat of terrorism in order to justify it. The next section considers factors beyond financial incentives that may also contribute to the terrorism industry elevating and sustaining the threat.

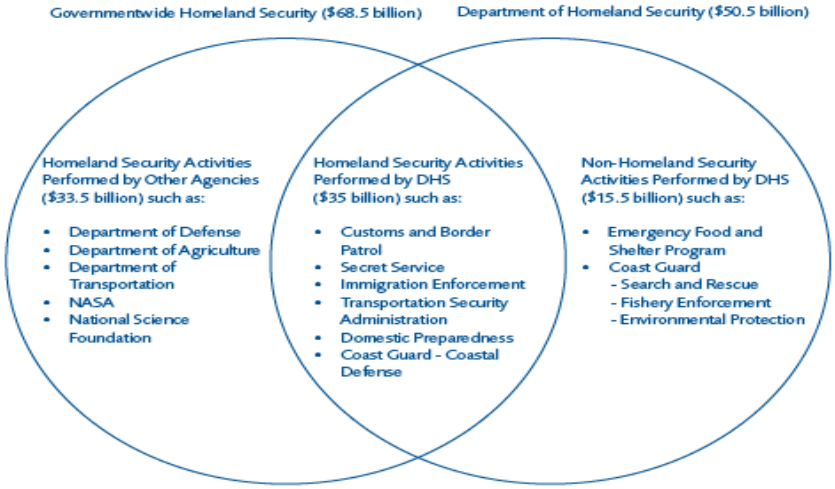
2. Institutional Factors

In addition to the rapid increase in spending related to terrorism post-9/11, several institution factors either already existed or were created in response to 9/11 that may have contributed to Americans' inflated perception of the terrorist threat. This section broadly considers the way in which spending decisions were made post-9/11 and how threats were tracked and relayed to senior government officials. The conclusion reached is that, even without considering malicious intent, members of the terrorism industry were incentivized by institutional factors to propagate the terrorist threat post-9/11 and it is possible, even likely, that they did so.

Considering the way spending decisions were made post-9/11, two major institutional factors can be identified: the decision to spread homeland security funds across multiple federal departments and the lack of effective risk-based fund distribution by DHS. Regarding the former, de Rugy notes that homeland security funding was split between upward of 200 accounts within the federal budget. Moreover, much of the funding was allocated within accounts not specifically directed towards homeland security (see Figure 15).[358]

[358] de Rugy, "What Does Homeland Security Spending Buy?" 8.

Figure 15. Homeland Security Spending across Federal Departments (FY2009).[359]



In addition, homeland security spending both inside and outside of DHS increased at similar rates post-9/11 (see Figure 16). As a result of this funding arrangement, not only was "tracking and analyzing [homeland security] spending…proven to be difficult," as the Congressional Budget Office admits, but also the "competition of interests" normally inherent to the institutional design of federal agencies failed.[360] As Friedman explains, "institutional design is the arrangement of tradeoffs among competing risk preferences."[361] In this thesis' context, for example, one can imagine the Department of Defense framing the terrorist threat quite differently had all post-9/11 counterterrorism funding gone to the Justice Department rather than being shared across departments. Likely, the Department of Defense would have focused its budget narrative on the importance of preparing for inter-state conflict rather than the counterterrorism mission.[362] Instead, counterterrorism funding was made widely available across

[359] Source: de Rugy, "Facts and Figures About Seven Years of Homeland Security Spending," 2.

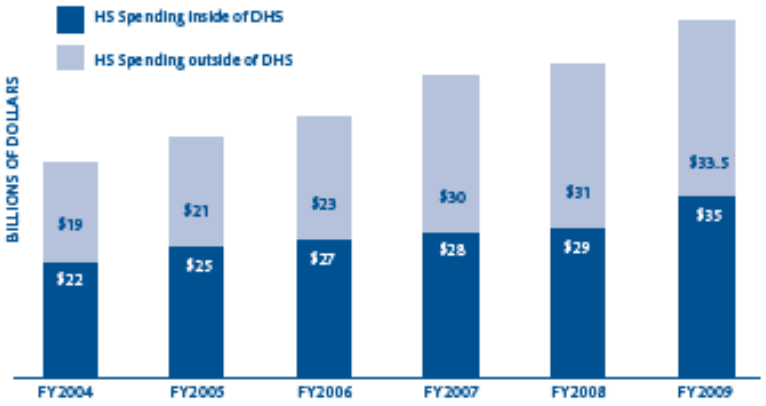
[360] de Rugy, "What Does Homeland Security Spending Buy?" 8; Friedman, "Managing Fear," 207.

[361] Friedman, "Managing Fear," 207.

[362] Ibid., 208. Friedman says "if the White House tells the military—in strategy documents, decisions, and speeches—that it is no longer an agent of counterterrorism, except on rare occasions, it will discourage services from hyping the threat. If they lost budget to the agencies that fight terrorism, the services might even publicly downplay the danger and encourage their agents to do so."

departments, thus limiting competition across mission sets and even incentivizing collective agreement about the scale of the terrorist threat.

Figure 16. Homeland Security Spending Inside vs. Outside DHS (FY2004–FY2009).[363]



A second major institutional issue regarding federal spending was, and arguably still is, the lack of an effective risk-based approach to allocating homeland security funds. This stems, in part, from political pressure and Congressional precedent that, "provides every state with a guaranteed minimum amount of state grants regardless of risk or need."[364] An example of this issue is the State Homeland Security Grant Programs (SHSGP). As de Rugy outlines, before 9/11, each state received under $1 million; after 9/11, as the program ballooned from $97 million total in 2001 to $2.1 billion by 2003, the minimum guaranteed amount received by every state was $15.5 million.[365] This accounted for 40 percent of that program's total budget. The remaining 60 percent was then distributed based on state population, not risk. This political formula led to a situation where less populated states were granted more homeland security funds per capita than more populated states. For example, California received 7.95 percent of the

[363] Source: de Rugy, "Facts and Figures About Seven Years of Homeland Security Spending," 2.

[364] de Rugy, "What Does Homeland Security Spending Buy?" 15. According to de Rugy, the initial Patriot Act included a guarantee that each state would receive .75 percent of the total amount appropriated to DHS for states to counter terrorism. In effect, 40 percent of DHS funds were "divided up equally among the states, regardless of size, risk, or need."

[365] Ibid.

grant money while its population was 12 percent of the nation's population; Wyoming accounted for .17 percent of the population and received .85 percent of the grant money. This translates to $4.97 per capita in California and $37.74 per capita in Wyoming.[366] As such, de Rugy notes that officials from rural and small states thus have a vested interest in arguing that their states are as threatened by terrorism as any other places, including Washington, DC, or New York City.[367] Indeed, subsequent efforts to adopt risk-based strategies were rejected by Congress using that very argument.[368]

Within DHS itself, proven risk-based strategies for making decisions about homeland security spending and focus of effort, outside of natural disasters, have been documented as dismally lacking. One 2010 report commissioned by Congress from the National Research Council of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine exemplifies the point: "[the committee] did not find any DHS risk analysis capabilities and methods that are yet adequate for supporting DHS decision making." Furthermore, "only low confidence should be placed in most of the risk analyses conducted by DHS."[369] A major contributing issue is that, as a 2007 Congressional Research Service report outlines, from at least 2001 through 2007, DHS neither captured nor used data in a meaningful way in order to assess "identifiable and empirical risk reductions" gained from the nearly $12 billion spent on countering terrorism to that point.[370] As a result, DHS was able to only base its spending and effort focus on the assessment of relative risk rather than absolute risk.[371] Given this structure's lack of any

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366 Ibid., 15–16.

367 Ibid., 15.

368 Lustick, *Trapped in the War on Terror*, 77. In response to a Senator from California's request to "ensure that covered grants are allocated based on an assessment of threat, vulnerability, and consequence to the maximum extent possible," a Senator from Maine responded that "the potential of terrorist attacks against rural targets is increasingly recognized as a national security threat."

369 Quoted in Mueller and Stewart, "Balancing the Risks, Benefits, and Costs of Homeland Security," 3.

370 Todd Masse, Siobhan O'Niel, and John Rollins, *The Department of Homeland Security's Risk Assessment Methodology: Evolution, Options, and Issues for Congress* (CRS Report No. RL33858) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2007), 14, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homesec/RL33858.pdf.

371 Ibid., 15.

objective threat standard, those potentially receiving funds are thus incentivized to inflate their terrorism risk in order to outrank competitors for the funds. As de Rugy explains regarding the issue, "the economic incentive does not seem to favor a proper evaluation of [terrorism] risks. Financial stakes are high for state officials who might feel that if their state is seen as a non-risk state, no money would be coming their way."[372]

Other than incentives based on post-9/11 spending increases on homeland security, institutional factors related to how post-9/11 terrorist threats were identified, tracked, and relayed to senior officials also likely contributed to inflating the terrorist threat. One of the most pointed examples of this is the so-called "threat matrix" that was used to track and communicate the terrorist threat at the highest levels of government after 9/11. Mueller and Stewart describe it as "an itemized catalogue of all the 'threats'——or more accurately, 'leads'—needing to be followed up."[373] The contents of the threat matrix were briefed daily to the FBI Director, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director, and ultimately formed a portion of the president's daily brief.[374] Originally conceived as a working document, however, much of the information within the threat matrix was often, as journalist Garret Graff described it, "whispers, rumors, and vacuous, unconfirmed information."[375] Indeed, one analyst, Philip Mudd, who worked with the document explained it as follows:

> [Included is] everything from unvetted walk-ins around the world—people who simply walked into an embassy, for example, and volunteered information—to nuts who wrote into U.S. government websites, to second-rate sources who made up tales to make a paycheck. All this was read by the president, in a document intended initially to serve as a working-level draft. What was initially a simple, almost inevitable way of tracing threats—it had to be done somewhere—became a means by which

[372] de Rugy, "What Does Homeland Security Spending Buy?" 29.

[373] Mueller and Stewart, *Chasing Ghosts*, 18.

[374] Ibid.

[375] Quoted in Ibid.

> senior policymakers reviewed raw material that many of us, myself included, thought was 'below threshold' for them.[376]

Until at least 2013, the government relied on the threat matrix, populating it daily with hundreds of selections from the nearly 5,000 terrorism leads per day pursued by the federal government after 9/11.[377] Mueller and Stewart attribute the popularity and status of the list to a "9/11 Commission Syndrome" where, because of "an obsession with the career failures to 'connect the dots,' it is in no one's interest to reduce the length of the list."[378]

Given the nature of the threat matrix, perhaps it is unsurprising then that, as former National Security Advisor and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice says, "[the threat matrix] had a huge effect on our psyches."[379] Another Bush administration member, Jack Goldsmith, explains that, "it is hard to overstate the impact that the incessant waves of threat reports have on the judgement of people inside the executive branch who are responsible for protecting American lives."[380] This effect, dubbed "institutionalized paranoia," aligns with comments made by senior officials regarding the post-9/11 terrorist threat. For example, in 2005, then FBI Director Robert Mueller testified before Congress that he was "very concerned about what we are not seeing" despite the FBI having also reported that it had not found evidence of a single terrorist sleeper cell in the United States.[381] Likewise, in 2007, the CIA Director testified that his "operational presumption is that they infiltrated a second or third wave into the United States at the time of 9/11. Can I prove it to you? No. It's my operational intuition."[382]

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376 Quoted in Ibid., 19.

377 Ibid., 18–19. Notably, in 2008 the FBI acknowledged receiving its two millionth terrorism tip from the public. A very small number ("a few hundred") of these tips have actually resulted in terrorism-related prosecutions.

378 Ibid., 18.

379 Quoted in Ibid., 20.

380 Quoted in Ibid., 20.

381 Ibid., 23. Reports immediately after 9/11 suggested there were anywhere from 2,000–5,000 al Qaeda operatives in the United States.

382 Quoted in Ibid., 23.

Thus, regardless of incentives to inflate the terrorist threat, it also appears plausible that at least some senior officials actually believed that the United States faced a massive, even existential, terrorist threat post-9/11 because of the intelligence community's fear of being accused of a "failure of imagination."[383]

The last issue this section considers is politicized intelligence regarding the terrorist threat. As explained in Chapter I, politicization is the effect of analysts or intelligence officials injecting their preference for a particular policy outcome into their intelligence analysis.[384] There could be many reasons to politicize intelligence, ranging from an analyst's career interests to his or her personal preference for a policy outcome, or even in response to pressures from policy makers.[385] Intelligence politicization can also be a top-down endeavor by politicians. As Daniel Byman relays, politics in the United States is an exemplary arena for intelligence politicization as "cherry picking and the selective use of evidence are inherent in domestic politics and political campaigning."[386] Joshua Rovner further argues that, in domestic politics, incentives are prevalent for "policymakers to oversell the amount and quality of information on security threats" particularly because "intelligence is a uniquely effective public relations vehicle [that] carries an aura of secrecy…[P]oliticians can use the intelligence imprimatur to invoke the national interest without having to be specific."[387] In other words, because the intelligence community controls classified information, the community and its products are subject to political pressure and even manipulation by politicians seeking to garner support for their policies.

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383 National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, *The 9/11 commission report: Final report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), 336, 339.

384 Mark M. Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy*, Seventh Edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, 2017), Kindle edition, loc 339.

385 Ibid., loc. 4386–4388.

386 Daniel Byman, "Intelligence and Its Critics," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 39, no. 3 (2016), 271.

387 Joshua Rovner, *Fixing the Facts: National Security and the Politics of Intelligence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 11.

While politicization incentives are nothing new, an argument can be made that the intelligence community's vulnerability to politicization has increased since the 1980s.[388] Rovner argues that the "expanding marketplace for information and analysis" available to policymakers puts pressure on the intelligence community to "provide the firm and unequivocal estimates they need to keep pace with their private sector competitors."[389] As evidence, Rovner cites the rapid growth of "alternative sources for news and commentary" such as cable news, the Internet, and social media who "all compete with intelligence agencies for policy attention."[390] Analytical competition has also increased as the number of think tanks has nearly doubled since the 1980s, with Rovner listing more than 180 studying national security as of 2011, many producing reports rivaling official intelligence estimates. Of course, this private analysis explosion also lures away quality analysts who are likely to be paid higher salaries in the private sector.[391] As a result of these factors, Rovner suggests that intelligence officials are more likely to "err on the side of boldness," making them "more willing to overstate the quality of potentially dubious data and to draw unequivocal inferences from uncertain information."

Of course, as Mark Lowenthal argues, proving politicization is a difficult task and "the size or persistence of the politicization problem is difficult to determine."[392] For example, some prominent scholars have concluded that, "the Bush administration encouraged excessive certainty in analysis, eroding nuances" in order to justify the Iraqi invasion based on Iraq's supposed possession of weapons of mass destruction.[393] However, multiple formal reviews have found that blatant politicization of intelligence

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388 Lowenthal, for example, cites the repercussions against State Department analysts and officials in the 1940s and 1950s who "'lost' China to the communists" as an indication of the political frictions involved in policy processes. Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy*, loc. 4410.

389 Rovner, *Fixing the Facts*, 203.

390 Ibid., 200.

391 Ibid., 200–201.

392 Lowenthal, *Intelligence*, loc. 4393.

393 Byman, "Intelligence and Its Critics," 271. Byman cites Jervis in this case. Byman also cites Pillar who argues that, in regards to Iraq, "the constant pushing led analysts to be 'bent by the policy wind.'" See Paul R. Pillar, "Intelligence, Policy, and the War in Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 2 (March-April 2006): 15–27.

estimates did not occur prior to the Iraq War.[394] That said, Lowenthal does acknowledge that politicization within the intelligence community is possible and that "analysts' careers can rise and fall…as a result of which side of a debate they are on."[395] Certainly, as documented by Uri Bar-Joseph, Michael Rubin and others, cases of generally agreed-upon intelligence politicization are available in American history.[396]

In researching this thesis, however, no definitive proof of intelligence politicization regarding the terrorism threat post-9/11 appears readily available. That may not be unexpected however, given, as Marina Caparini explains, "[post-9/11] there are significant grounds for doubting whether legal safeguards and oversight and review mechanisms have kept pace with the developing methods and capacities of the intelligence community. Furthermore, there has been little debate on some of the assumptions and assertions used to justify the [War on Terror]."[397] Central to Caparini's argument is that intelligence agencies tend to over-classify information, that is, "engage in indiscriminate classification," and are slow to declassify information. As a result, accountability measures, such as oversight by Congress or public debate by watchdog groups like the media are difficult to employ.[398] Indeed, in 2007, a subcommittee of the

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394 Lowenthal, *Intelligence*, loc. 4427. Notably, Pillar argues that these investigations themselves were politicized and flawed in their manner of investigation; page 21–22.

395 Ibid., loc. 4410.

396 See Uri Bar-Joseph, "The Politicization of Intelligence: A Comparative Study," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 26, no. 2 (2013): 347–369. Bar-Joseph cites, for example, the position of then-Director of Central Intelligence Robert Gates from 1991–1993 (Gates was later the Secretary of Defense under Presidents Bush and Obama), "who preached for the need to sacrifice analytical purity in order to make intelligence more relevant to policymakers (pg. 398)." Bar-Joseph equates this philosophy with the "Team B" mentality wherein specialized intelligence teams were commissioned by various administrations, starting with the Ford administration in 1976, to produce official intelligence perspectives that aligned with the administration's policy positions. (page 351). This approach was supposedly taken to inflate the Soviet threat for President Reagan, temper post-Cold War cooperation with Russia for President George H.W. Bush, and, with the purpose-built Office of Special Planning, justify the invasion of Iraq by producing intelligence about WMD and Sadaam Hussein's link to al Qaeda for President George W. Bush (pages 352–353). See Michael Rubin, "The Temptation of Intelligence Politicization to Support Diplomacy," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 29, no. 1 (2016): 1–25, for similar examples.

397 Marina Caparini, "Controlling and Overseeing Intelligence Services in Democratic States," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (January 2008), 23, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265221667.

398 Ibid., 20.

House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security investigating the issue noted that in 2001, eight million new classification actions occurred compared to 14 million in 2005. Similarly, in 2001 nearly 100 million documents were declassified compared to only 29 million in 2005. Additionally, 28 "pseudo-classification" policies existed at the time of the hearing for the protection of "sensitive but unclassified" information. Subcommittee chair, Representative Jane Harmon, concluded that "a recurrent theme throughout the 9/11 Commission's report was the need to prevent widespread over-classification by the federal government…The numbers tell us we are still not heeding the commission's warning."[399] Thus, the unclassified nature of this thesis is a limitation in regard to definitively identifying intelligence politicization as a factor in elevating the public's perception of the terrorist threat; however, there does appear to be incentive and precedent for politicization regarding security threats.

C. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter argues that all told, considering the institutional factors affecting the terrorism industry, it is definitely possible, if not likely, that members of the industry aligned themselves in support of the justifications for the War on Terror for their own benefit. Political elites gained agenda and electoral support, bureaucrats advanced their organizations or their own careers, state and local entities won grants, and commercial industry and individuals made money. Discounting malicious intent, the industry as a whole contributed to elevating and sustaining Americans' perception of the terrorist threat beyond what it might otherwise have done had the War on Terror not been declared post-9/11. As Lustick surmises, "The mechanisms that power this whirlwind are not under the control of any group or collection of individuals…this imperative justified the attitude of emergency and defined the situation as a nation mobilizing for war. Opportunities were thereupon created for every group, every company, every sector of

[399] *The Over-Classification and Pseudo-Classification: Part I, II, and III: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing, and Terrorism Risk Assessment of the Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives*, 110th Cong., (April 2007) (statement of Representative Jane Harmon, California, Subcommittee Chair).

society, and every lobbyist to advance its product or preference as crucially important for success in the War on Terror."

The next, and final, chapter will discuss the implications of the previous two chapters, offering suggestions for how best to counter Americans' inflated perception of the terrorist threat in the future.

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IV. CONCLUSION

This thesis has demonstrated that Americans' fear of the terrorist threat increased significantly and remained elevated during the decade after 9/11. Before 9/11, terrorist attacks in the United States provoked public fear that receded relatively quickly after the attack. After 9/11, however, the public responded to the attack and public fear levels did not return to pre-9/11 levels as one might expect. Several factors influenced that shift. First, the news media landscape shifted dramatically due to structural factors such as increased competition for audience share among traditional news sources, cable news networks, and the Internet. A shifting emphasis from hard to soft news and news as public drama ensued, resulting in the media over-reporting terrorism-related content while allowing political elites to set the public agenda and flaunt the terrorist threat to their advantage. Second, the Internet allowed terrorist organizations, especially Al Qaeda and its affiliates, to directly propagate threats and messages to the public, thus bypassing traditional media gatekeepers and creating the illusion of a more widely distributed and capable terrorist threat. Third, popular culture, especially film and television drama, affected Americans' stereotypical understanding of terrorism by only superficially representing the threat. Film began framing terrorists as fiendish, vicious, and prolific well before 9/11 and television sustained and amplified depictions of the threat well beyond 9/11. Finally, politicians and members of the terrorism industry were incentivized after 9/11 to inflate concerns about the terrorism threat: political elites used the threat to garner support for policies or for electoral purposes, bureaucrats advanced their organizations or their own careers, state and local entities won grants, and commercial industry and individuals made financial gains.

However, these factors did not affect Americans' perceptions of terrorism independently. Rather, the factors coalesced, influencing each other to inflate Americans' fear. Furthermore, innate human psychological and sociological characteristics amplified Americans' reactions to these factors. Given this combination, Americans suffered a prolonged collective psychosis, or culture of fear, regarding their perceptions of the terrorist threat, initiated by 9/11, and sustained by the above-outlined factors. The

National Institute of Health explains that "psychosis" is used to "describe conditions of the mind where there has been some loss of contact with reality."[400] This thesis therefore uses collective psychosis to describe the apparent shift in the public's fear about the post-9/11 terrorist threat despite the lack any significant change in the scale and intensity of the terrorist threat within the United States. The remainder of this chapter expands on this notion and closes with recommendations to potentially counter that psychosis.

A. CREATING AND SUSTAINING A COLLECTIVE PSYCHOSIS

The development of each of the major factors explored in this thesis partly explains Americans' shifting perceptions of the terrorist threat before and after 9/11. However, this thesis argues that the interdependence of these factors is critical to understanding the dramatic extent to which Americans' fear of terrorism changed and was sustained over time. Moreover, ordinary human psychological and sociological tendencies in reaction to 9/11 amplified the effect. An expanded explanation of the interdependence of factors and the psychological and sociological phenomena working to create and sustain that collective psychosis follows.

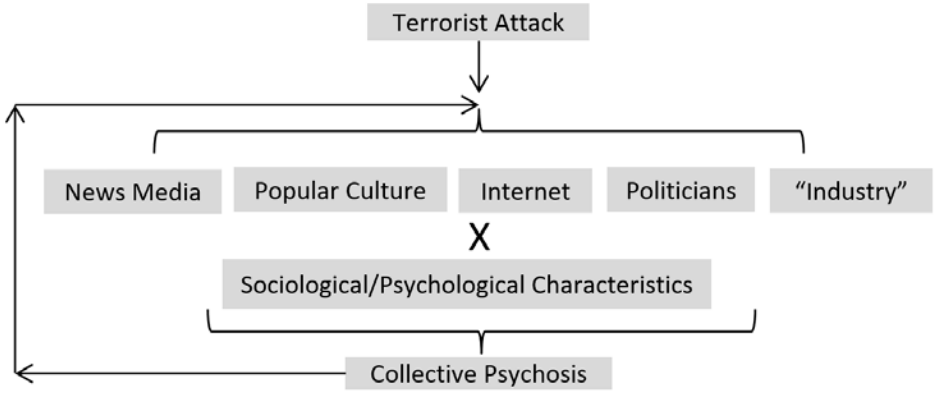
The factors described in this thesis operated both individually and in concert to affect Americans' perception of the terrorist threat. For example, terrorist organizations took advantage of the Internet to directly propagate their threats through social media, thereby bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. However, because of the news media's shift towards soft news, infotainment, and public drama, news outlets also rebroadcast terrorists' latest threats and propaganda from the Internet onto mainstream media platforms. In turn, political elites reacted to the continuously propagated terrorist threat, likely using the threat to bolster their position and policies. The news media in turn broadcast these political messages, often failing to uphold the media's watchdog role. Indeed, many of the analysts and experts the news media relied on were members of the terrorism industry themselves, coming from think tanks and government bureaucracies

[400] National Institute of Mental Health, accessed October 30, 2017, https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/schizophrenia/raise/what-is-psychosis.shtml.

with a vested interest in inflating the terrorist threat. Simultaneously, popular culture, especially television drama, reflected these themes in its programming, some of which then made its way back into the political discourse. As the previous chapter pointed out, even national political elites felt compelled to reference fictional characters, such as Jack Bauer from television's *24*, when they needed to defend a particular position.

When combined with innate human psychological and sociological characteristics described in Chapter I, it is unsurprising that the public's perceptions of the terrorist threat shifted in response to the factors described in this thesis evolving during the 1990s and 2000s. For example, given people's natural tendency to rally around the President and take greater interest in the news after a crisis, it follows that the public would be highly responsive to the Bush administration's framing of 9/11 as an act of war. Moreover, people's inherent cognitive biases, such as overestimating the probability of events when they can picture similar events that are recent, memorable, and receive great publicity, make it unlikely that they would question the assumption that 9/11 "changed everything." This is especially true since evidence to the contrary was not forthcoming from either the news media, politicians, or government officials. (see Figure 17).

Figure 17. Post-9/11 Public Collective Psychosis Cycle.



It appears that 9/11 initiated a collective psychosis within the American public as the public initially relied on the news media, political elites, and their own inherent understanding of terrorism to make sense of the attack. The public watched 9/11 live on television and was bombarded with news about the attacks. The Bush administration

quickly framed the attack as an act of war and a struggle of good against evil. This frame aligned with Americans' concepts of terrorism as depicted in popular culture. Furthermore, opposition voices were nearly silent, or at least not represented in news media. This sequence heralded the War on Terror, which led to the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and significant financial, political, and bureaucratic incentives for political elites and the terrorism industry to continuously propagate the terrorist threat both to the public and within the government itself. Concurrently, terrorists themselves mastered mass self-communication through the Internet, issuing propaganda and threats that would be both accessible by an increasingly tech-savvy public and rebroadcast by traditional news media desperately competing for audience share. In addition, popular culture depictions of terrorism mimicked the War on Terror frame, superficially depicting terrorists as fanatical, evil and bent on destroying the United States. In reaction, Americans' perception of the terrorist threat divorced itself from reality. This cycle of collective psychosis sustained itself for years after 9/11 as large numbers of Americans feared becoming the victims of terrorism despite the lack of any significant increase in the scale and intensity of the threat compared to before 9/11.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

In December 2015, Gallup polls showed that 51 percent of Americans were either very or somewhat worried about becoming victims of terrorism.[401] This is the highest since immediately after 9/11 and represents a steady climb since 2011. Furthermore, 55 percent of poll respondents in 2016 said they were dissatisfied with security from terrorism, up from just 27 percent in 2014.[402] Recent attempts to cut counterterrorism funding from the 2017 Department of Homeland Security budget by President Donald

401 "Terrorism in the United States: Gallup Historical Trends," Gallup, accessed 20 May 2017, http://www.gallup.com/poll/4909/Terrorism-United-States.aspx.

402 Jim Norman, "Majority in U.S. Now Dissatisfied With Security From Terrorism," Gallup, January18, 2016, http://news.gallup.com/poll/188402/majority-dissatisfied-security-terrorism.aspx.

Trump faced significant political backlash.[403] Clearly, Americans' perception about the terrorist threat remains a relevant topic. This section therefore briefly offers recommendations for countering the American public's inflated fears about the threat of terrorism.

1. Risk Communication

One promising area of research regarding the public's reaction to terrorism is risk communication. William J. Burns explains that risk communication is essentially "talking about risks in a way that promotes understanding and that dispels fear."[404] Key to this effort is targeting gaps in public knowledge and enhancing risk communicators' ability to effectively interface with the public.[405] For example, Burns' research suggests that so-called "risk domain experts" should be well versed in risk-related information, such as "probabilities, consequences, causal mechanisms, and possible mitigation strategies."[406] Furthermore, Burns argues that the public responds best to risk communication efforts when communicators have deeply established lines of communication and trust with the public.[407]

Of course, as Priscilla Lewis outlines, because of the power of fear to influence people's thinking and the many incentives and other factors driving wide-spread public fear of terrorism, "promoting a more constructive public conversation about terrorism and responses to terrorism is one of the toughest communications challenges facing responsible opinion leaders today."[408] That said, Lewis argues that some frames and

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[403] Mark Berman, "Trump's Dept. of Homeland Security Budget Would Dramatically Cut Counterterrorism Programs, Report Says," *Washington Post*, July 13, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/07/13/trumps-dhs-budget-would-dramatically-cut-counterterrorism-program-report-says/?utm_term=.2d8567b21c2a.

[404] William J. Burns, "Communicating About Threat," in *Terrorizing Ourselves* (see note 279), 245.

[405] Ibid., 250–252. Example of risk communicators include public officials, first responders, and community leaders.

[406] Ibid., 250.

[407] Ibid., 251.

[408] Priscilla Lewis, "The Impact of Fear on Public Thinking about Counterterrorism Policy," in *Terrorizing Ourselves* (see note 279), 221–222.

themes, when properly employed, have been shown to have a calming effect on public fears. Specifically, Lewis notes that messages crafted to explain that "when we overreact to terrorism, we hurt ourselves" have a measurable impact at both the individual and collective levels.[409] The public appears to relate to this type of message, which, as Lewis explains, "can calm fears without sounding as if it counsels inaction."[410] Furthermore, the message apparently engages people intellectually rather than emotionally, therefore activating the audience's "critical faculties."[411] Ultimately, Lewis concludes that effective messaging should be "easy to think," be concrete and actionable rather than abstract, calm fears and "[reduce] submissiveness to authority," and suggest a better response rather than "simply negate unhelpful responses."[412]

More research is called for in regard to effective risk communication and the public's reaction to the terrorist threat. Aligning effective narratives with appropriate responses to the terrorist threat appears key to easing Americans' overreaction to the terrorist threat. Perhaps a cross-case study comparing the United States with certain European countries could yield some insight. For instance, despite recent experiences with terrorism in the United Kingdom, 69 percent of those polled in 2016 said their chances of being personally affected by terrorism were low or non-existent.[413] Furthermore, efforts should be made to not only understand the public's knowledge gaps regarding terrorism, but also how these gaps are formed to begin with. Research should also consider how cognitive processes are affected by those knowledge gaps. Additionally, understanding how and why so-called "fear mongers" exploit those knowledge gaps is critical to understanding how risk communicators can counter that

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[409] Ibid., 226.

[410] Ibid.

[411] Ibid., 227.

[412] Ibid., 228.

[413] Matthew Smith, "Terrorist Attack in Britain Expected by 84% of People," YouGov, August 4th, 2016, https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/08/04/terrorist-attack-britain-expected-84-people/. 55 percent of respondents considered their chances of being personally affected as "low" and another 14 percent considered their chances of being affected "non-existent." As the title notes, 84 percent of respondents thought terrorist attacks were "likely" and 74 percent thought the threat of terrorism had increased over the past five years.

exploitation. Future research should be done with full consideration of the various incentives or disincentives affecting risk communicators, especially the media, political elites, and members of the terrorism industry. Taken together, targeted and contextualized risk communication should be studied as a means to both counter fear-based messaging and drive critically considered public reactions to terrorism.

2. Counterterrorism Economics

Another promising area of research is the economics of counterterrorism. Veronique de Rugy, for example, argues that policymakers should focus "more on how the political process distorts spending decisions."[414] De Rugy takes the position that applying an economics perspective to homeland security spending can overcome public choice failures. She argues that using sound cost-benefit analysis and other risk management techniques can overcome political elites' and the terrorism industry's incentives to inflate fear.[415] De Rugy explains that, "efficient expenditures concentrate limited resources on the most cost-effective measures rather than simply on the effective ones."[416] For example, the cost of installing hijacker-proof cockpit doors in airliners is both cheaper and more effective than either the federal air marshals program or airline baggage screening programs.[417] In other words, "more security spending does not always mean more security."[418] Furthermore, de Rugy suggests that, because homeland security is a mix of public and private goods, policymakers should consider the appropriate level for homeland security spending. Spending that benefits the entire country, such as intelligence gathering and border security, should be done federally and spending that

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[414] Veronique de Rugy, "The Economics of Homeland Security," in *Terrorizing Ourselves* (see note 279), 121.

[415] Ibid., 128–129.

[416] Ibid., 127.

[417] Ibid., 127–128. De Rugy notes that the cost to retrofit cockpit barrier doors is between $300–$500 million over ten years compared to the $7.8 billion spent on TSA's passenger and baggage screening in 2010 alone. This contrast is especially stark considering that the program's primary goal appears to be preventing hijacking since both carry-on luggage and air freight were not systematically checked for explosives at the time. Mueller and Stewart also note that federal air marshals cost $966 million in 2012, yet only rode on five percent of flights in the United States. See Mueller and Stewart, *Chasing Ghosts*, 207.

[418] Ibid., 128.

benefits a particular state or locality, such as most infrastructure (e.g., bridges and water treatment plants), should be done at the state or local level.[419] Since, as de Rugy explains, states theoretically do not run budget deficits, state and local officials have more incentive to consider the costs and benefits of security spending.[420]

Similarly, Benjamin Friedman proposes that competition for resources can be an effective means to curb counterterrorism overreaction when applied to the Department of Homeland Security and other federal agencies. By simultaneously distributing counterterrorism missions across agencies whose primary focus is not counterterrorism and maintaining a "revenue neutral" or zero-sum approach to spending, Friedman argues that bureaucratic competition could diminish incentives to hype the terrorist threat.[421] Likewise, removing the counterterrorism mission and funding from certain entities, especially the Department of Defense, could lead to similar results.[422] The goal, ultimately, is to "create a more functional marketplace of ideas about security dangers [within the federal government], thereby improving public threat perception."[423]

Of course, the challenge in implementing any of the above strategies is overcoming the incentives that created the situation in the first place. Research should focus on effective means of both preventing and overcoming economic incentives derived from federal security spending. For instance, research should consider how risk communication principles might apply within bureaucratic organizations or how the federal regulatory review system could be most effectively applied to counterterrorism spending. In any case, understanding how and why federal counterterrorism spending has

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[419] Ibid., 129–130. De Rugy suggests that purely private property protection should be the responsibility of the property owner. See pages 130–131 for a brief discussion about mixed goods, such as privately owned chemical storage or nuclear facilities, that could have widespread impact if successfully attacked. Potential solutions in this case involve heavy government regulation.

[420] Ibid., 135.

[421] Benjamin H. Friedman, "Managing Fear: The Politics of Homeland Security," in *Terrorizing Ourselves* (see note 279), 207–208. Friedman argues that dismantling the Department of Homeland Security is the most effective means of accomplishing this strategy.

[422] Ibid., 208.

423 Ibid.

grown, and who potentially benefits from it, is essential to understanding how to disrupt threat inflation.

3. Intelligence Transparency

Enhancing intelligence transparency may also help dissuade threat inflation. Daniel Byman, in his recent review work about intelligence community challenges and failures, compiles several promising solutions. First, he recommends that intelligence products should include alternative hypothesis and "make their methods more explicit."[424] Second, the intelligence community should engage in "competitive analysis" and an "adversarial approach" that can highlight the range of a debate.[425] Third, analysts should convey uncertainty and fully explain "confidence levels."[426] Finally, Byman relays that an external, blind, and critical peer review could be an ideal process to "identify flaws and weaknesses" in analysis, much as academics do.[427] By institutionalizing these policies, political elites and the terrorism industry may be less able to uncritically inflate terrorist threats. Additionally, the intelligence community may be less likely to engage in politicization or even unconscious bias in its analysis.

Furthermore, Claudia Hillebrand argues that the news media can enhance intelligence transparency. For instance, the news media can transmit intelligence information to the public, be an intelligence community "substitute watchdog," and be a legitimizing institution for intelligence.[428] In the first case, engaged news media can "contribute to, or trigger, a public debate on the content, objectives and limits of intelligence work more broadly."[429] Members of the intelligence community can also use

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424 Daniel Byman, "Intelligence and Its Critics," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* no. 39, 3 (2016): 272.

425 Ibid., 272–273.

426 Ibid.

427 Ibid., 273.

428 Claudia Hillebrand, "The Role of News Media in Intelligence Oversight," *Intelligence and National Security* 27, no. 5 (2012): 705.

429 Ibid., 696; Hillebrand notes that most commonly, the media's role is to bring government activities, especially human rights infringements, potential abuses of powers or lack of accountability to light without the government's cooperation. See pages 693–695.

the news media to potentially rouse formal oversight bodies as well as to help propagate official reports in more accessible formats.[430] Lastly, the intelligence community can foster legitimacy through the news media by "demonstrating that intelligence performance is overseen…independently" and by ensuring reporting of successful operations.[431] In essence, a synergistic relationship between the media and the intelligence community may help drive public discourse about the adequacy and necessity of counterterrorism programs and spending. This, in turn, could serve to better inform Americans about the terrorist threat while curbing incentives to inflate the threat.

Further research is warranted regarding how liberal democracies can and should balance the need for intelligence transparency and security. Again, as in the previous recommendations, this research should take into consideration the various incentives affecting the intelligence community and the consumers and users of counterterrorism intelligence. The research should also be multi-disciplinary, such as considering the above-mentioned aspects of risk communication with an economic perspective. Lastly, media studies should further consider the interdependencies between the intelligence community, mass media, including popular culture and the Internet, and public threat perception.

C. CLOSING REMARKS

This thesis has argued that Americans' perceptions of the terrorist threat have not remained proportional to the scale and intensity of terrorism in the United States post-9/11 compared to pre-9/11. That is not to say that terrorism is a non-existent threat, to dismiss the suffering of victims of terrorism, or to discount the valiant efforts of those involved in counterterrorism. Rather, the point is that Americans' reaction to terrorism post-9/11 was affected by factors beyond the actual scale and intensity of threat. Moreover, as a result of that reaction, the American public was willing to make

430 Ibid., 698; Hillebrand notes that "leaking" is the most common form of the intelligence community interfacing with the media to spur public debate and formal oversight review. See pages 697–698.

431 Ibid., 699.

significant sacrifices, in terms of blood, treasure, and civil liberties, in the name of security. This thesis aims to illuminate that shift and some of its underlying causes so that Americans can better understand the forces that affected their perceptions of the terrorist threat. This thesis makes no judgement about the policies the American public supported, but it does strive to ensure that Americans, in at least some small way, make future decisions in response to the threat of terrorism with as much awareness as possible.

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