If It Was Not For Terrorism
If It Was Not For Terrorism: 
Crisis, Compromise, and Elite Discourse 
in the Age of “War on Terror”

Edited by

Banu Baybars-Hawks and Lemi Baruh
# Table of Contents

List of Figures and Tables ................................................................. viii

Foreword ............................................................................................... ix
Yonah Alexander

Acknowledgements ............................................................................. xi

Chapter One .......................................................................................... 1
Introduction: Taking Sides in a Perpetual “War on Terror”
Banu Baybars-Hawks and Lemi Baruh

Part I. “War on Terror”, Elite Rhetoric, and Collective identity

Chapter Two ........................................................................................ 12
Defining “Terrorism”: The 1972 General Assembly Debates
on “International Terrorism” and their Coverage by the *New York Times*
Rémi Brulin

Chapter Three ..................................................................................... 31
Politics of Identity in Reactionary Post 9/11 Documentary
Yiannis Mylonas

Chapter Four ....................................................................................... 50
The Myth of the “Blitz Spirit” in British Newspaper Responses
to the July 7th Bombings
Darren Kelsey

Chapter Five ....................................................................................... 66
The Media War in Northern Ireland: A Comparative Case Study
of the PIRA and the UDA
Mark Hayes and Paul Norris
## Table of Contents

Chapter Six .......................................................................................................................... 78  
A Framing Analysis: How Three Prominent Turkish Newspapers Addressed Terrorism  
Bilge Narin

Chapter Seven ..................................................................................................................... 87  
Framing the War in Afghanistan: A German Perspective  
Gabriele M. Murry

### Part II. Media Frames, Compromises, and Resistance

Chapter Eight ...................................................................................................................... 104  
Influences of News Media Framing on Public Acceptance of Civil Liberty and Press Freedom Restrictions in Japan  
Catherine A. Luther

Chapter Nine ...................................................................................................................... 117  
A Day of “Monumental Chaos” … For Trade?: Canada, the United States and the Disparate Meanings of 9/11  
Robert Teigrob

Chapter Ten ....................................................................................................................... 130  
Media’s Response to Terrorism and its Effects on the Coverage of Social Movements: An Analysis of Media Frames Employed in Anti-Globalization Movement Coverage  
Gonca Noyan

Chapter Eleven .................................................................................................................. 149  
Surveillance as News: Mainstream Newspapers’ Coverage of Privacy and Surveillance in the Post 9/11 Age of “War on Terror”  
Lemi Baruh

Chapter Twelve ................................................................................................................ 175  
Responding to Terrorism in the Era of the Governance State  
Jim Jose

Chapter Thirteen ................................................................................................................. 191  
Media’s War of Terror  
Susan Dente Ross
Chapter Fourteen ............................................................................................................. 204
Cyberterror a la turca
Murat Akser and Banu Baybars-Hawks

Contributors ..................................................................................................................... 213
LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 7-1. Afghanistan ISAF RC and PRT Locations .............................. 90

Table 7-1. Data from Bevölkerungsbefragung des Sozialwissenschaftlichen
Instituts der Bundeswehr (2006) ............................................................. 92

Figure 10-1. Distribution of news articles (Pre-9/11 vs. Post-9/11) ........ 138

Figure 10-2. Episodic/Thematic Frames .............................................. 139

Figure 10-3. Master frames ................................................................. 140

Table 11-1. Categories and Definitions of Surveillance Activities........ 160

Table 11-2. Pearson Correlations: Type of Surveillance Activity
and Type of Institution ........................................................................ 161

Table 11-3. Change in Type of Government Agency ............................. 162

Table 11-4. Republican Slant and Change in Number of Articles
Identifying Government Surveillance Activities ................................. 163

Table 11-5. Regression: Increase in Number of Articles Focusing
on Government Surveillance Activities .............................................. 164
Modern terrorism is characterized by an ideological and theological fanaticism coupled with rapid technological advancements in communications (e.g. the Internet), transportation (e.g. modern international air travel), as well as conventional and unconventional weaponry to create a truly lethal threat. Indeed, this threat has become much more decentralized as it now emanates not only from established organizations, but also from freelance individuals with the motives, means, and opportunity to visit harm upon civil society. As a result of these developments, contemporary terrorism presents a multitude of threats to safety, welfare, and civil rights of ordinary people; the stability of state systems; the health of national and international economic systems; and the expansion of democracies.

One area of security concern pertains to the relationship between terrorism and the media. More specifically, in some ways, terrorists and the media have a symbiotic relationship. Accordingly, terrorists need a platform to get their message out to the world, as any act of terror will likely prove futile if no one hears about it. The media needs big stories to cover, which terrorists provide far too often. Information is quickly becoming one of the most contested battlegrounds, and state and non-state actors are rushing into it. Increasingly, states, are seeking to and often are able to lock down the flow of information in their respective territories, ensuring that only their messages get across to their people. Conversely, terrorist organizations such as al-Qa’ida have their own media production fronts and disseminate information throughout the world in order to reach those across borders.

It is not surprising therefore that interface between terrorism and the media presents difficult ethical and professional challenges to democracies. This book If It Was Not for Terrorism: Crisis, Compromise, and Elite Discourse in the Age of “War on Terror” is a welcome academic contribution to the media, policymakers, and the public in general on these issues. The material included in this study are based on selected papers presented at a conference titled “Societies Under Siege: Media, Government, Politics, and Citizen’s Freedom in an Age of Terrorism” (held at Kadir
Has University in Istanbul in April 2009) as well as relevant works solicited from additional scholars.

While a free media is considered one of the hallmarks of democratic society, too much leeway in the realm of covering terrorism may be dangerous. If terrorist organizations are able to abuse media to promote their messages, or even recruit others at live events, then the media is not even “free”, rather it is hijacked by a terrorist organization. Certainly, the contributors to this volume are highly divided about how the balance between state control and free media can be achieved and even about whether such a balance is necessary.

The volume consists of a wide variety of perspectives and useful analytical case studies, focusing on particular national experiences such as Afghanistan, Canada, Germany, Iran, Japan, Northern Ireland, Turkey, and the United States. Numerous important topics are discussed, including the global threat of terrorism (e.g. attack on Mumbai), media coverage issues (e.g. press freedom, civil liberties, governmental restrictions), propaganda (e.g. intercultural demonization), responses to terrorism (e.g. unilateral, regional, and global), and the future strategic communication outlook (e.g. cyber terrorism).

Although no definitive conclusions are offered in this useful study, two observations seem to emerge. First, terrorist organizations have broken away from their place within the formerly bipolar world, and have become multidirectional, causing further complications to our technologically vulnerable societies. These new developments have enhanced the threats and capabilities of terrorists groups to the degree in which they could forever alter our planet’s experience. And second, the debate over the role of media and their coverage of terrorism demonstrates differences of opinion that are difficult to reconcile. However, areas of common ground do exist on which compromise and cooperation may be established between governments and media, given adequate understanding and respect for other’s views and concerns.

Notes

1 Yonah Alexander is Professor Emeritus of International Studies, State University of New York and currently Director of the Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies (a consortium of universities and think tanks in over 40 countries). He has published over 100 books and founded and edited four international Journals: Terrorism; Political Communication and Persuasion; Minority and Group Rights; and Partnership for Peace Review.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This edited volume is based on selected papers presented at a conference titled “Societies Under Siege: Media, Government, Politics, and Citizen’s Freedom in an Age of Terrorism” (held at Kadir Has University in Istanbul in April 2009) as well as relevant work solicited from additional scholars. We appreciate all the support we received from Kadir Has University and Koç University, as well as our colleagues at the Faculty of Communications. We are also thankful to TÜBİTAK (The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey), which provided funding to support the conference and the ensuing edited volume.

We would also like to thank all participants of the conference, whose presentations and discussions played a crucial role in shaping the structure of this edited volume.

Very special thanks to all of our contributors, for the quality of the chapters in this volume, for their timely and kind response to our every request, and their willingness to share their ideas with us while we were working on the volume. We would like to extend our gratitude to each, in order of appearance: Remi Brulin, Yiannis Mylonas, Darren Kelsey, Mark Hayes, Paul Norris, Bilge Narin, Gabrielle M. Murry, Catherine A. Luther, Robert Teigrob, Gonca Noyan, Jim Jose, Susan Dente Ross, and Murat Akser. We are very thankful to Yonah Alexander for his encouraging comments and for writing a foreword at such a short notice.

We greatly appreciate the assistance we received from David Neylan and Istanbul Editing in proofreading and copyediting the chapters.

Thanks to Carol Koulikourdi from Cambridge Scholars Publishing for supporting us, and her patience in completion of this book.

And of course, we would like to thank our family members, Michael Dean Hawks, Derin Kyle Hawks, and Gökçen Zorludemir Baruh, with other members of our families for always being there for us.
Critical events are significant events in the life of individuals or collectives that act as discursive points of rupture which reconfigure identity through the reinterpretation of history. At an individual level, critical incidents are those important events in the life of a person that could act as “turning points” influencing a person’s future behavior (Flanagan 1954). Critical incidents also have a phenomenologic potential to shape narratives into meaning-endowed structures (Orbe 1998). On a larger scale, as meaning-producing events, critical incidents “have the potential to change public opinions, policies, and even social values” (Carter, Myung-Hyung, and Taggard 1999, 6).

In many respects, the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center, the July 7 bombings in the U.K., and a relatively smaller bombing incident that took place in a busy intersection in Istanbul on May 26, 2011 are all critical events that at once capture attention, instill fear and cause many to reevaluate what they have taken for granted for a long time. As a critical incident, the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center have particularly served as a springboard for radical and far-reaching changes that, for many, signal a new era in post-Cold War global politics.

Perhaps most telling of this change in the fabric of global politics is the emergence of the “War on Terror” as a powerful rhetorical device. Immediately after the attacks on the World Trade Center, the “War on Terror” frame and its variants, such as “America at War”, were utilized as symbols communicating that the world has changed and the struggle was against a power that targeted the western way of life (Altheide 2007).

The discursive power of the “War on Terror” frame is, at least partly, due to its ability to urge one to pick a side in a war that has neither a fixed
enemy nor a determined battlefield (Lewis and Reese 2009). Without a specified target, the frame emanates an aura of indisputability and perpetuity that makes it particularly suitable to describe the shift in global politics as the result of a “one-sided” conflict (Norris et al. 2003). Accordingly, one-sided conflicts are characterized by a “broad consensus”.

Roger Stahl’s (2008) analysis of the chronopolitics of war in the post 9/11 era is particularly illustrative of how the “War on Terror” becomes the “battleground” for the struggle between authoritarian control and dissent. According to Stahl, in the post 9/11 era, three metaphors of time are utilized to control dissent: 1) the deadline/countdown, 2) infinite/infinitesimal war, and 3) the ticking clock.

The first of these metaphors—the deadline—implies that in post Cold War politics a superpower can, as the U.S. did in both Gulf Wars, control the beginning of war:

The deadline is an authoritarian discourse that preempts its own questionability. The countdown is a rhetoric of submission to the authority of the deadline. The two combine symbiotically to perform the primary ritual of chronopolitical participation, whose main theme is inevitability. (Stahl 2008, 81)

In U.S. President Barrack Obama’s speech about the operation which resulted in Osama Bin Laden’s death, the second metaphor of infinite war becomes apparent in President Obama’s cautioning that “There's no doubt that al Qaeda will continue to pursue attacks against us. We must and we will remain vigilant at home and abroad” (2011). This long war, as the former U.S. President George W. Bush named it in his State of the Union Address in 2006, is characterized by a quality of infinitude which, according to Stahl (2008), serves to extend the executive power and suspend dissent “by fashioning a war that is continually on the verge of ending” (85).

The last metaphor—that of the ticking clock—symbolizes a polity that constantly has to struggle with the possibility that any time and any place may be the target of the next attack.

...time is sovereign and fatal. The ticking clock infuses public life with a nearness (in both time and space) that has come to characterize the sensibility inscribed by the war on terror. (Stahl 2008, 87)

In this metaphor, the only certainty is that the threat (of terrorism) will always be disruptive and unexpected (in terms of time, space, target or the means). As such, because threats materialize instantaneously, conventional
ways of assessing and responding to potential threats are deemed insufficient. As evidenced by the rise of a wide range of technologies for “lateral surveillance” which enable (and invite) individuals to constantly engage in monitoring of others (Andrejevic 2005), the ticking clock requires everybody to be vigilant all the time. In this way, Stahl (2008) argues, the construction of War on Terror as a struggle against the ticking clock is integral to the suspension of the need to adhere to conventional rules (e.g. respecting privacy, not torturing suspects, proving guilt) because “at the temporal zero point, there are no rights, only utility; no deliberation, only authority” (90).

In an earlier article, Susan Dente Ross (2009), one of the contributors to this volume, notes “the promotion of fear is an exercise in social control” (4). The vivid imagery of a plane crashing into the second tower of the World Trade Center certainly plays an important role in instilling fear among masses. Indeed, the conventional wisdom, especially among security experts, is often that of a symbiotic relationship between media and terrorists who “must have publicity in some form if they are to gain attention, inspire fear and respect” (Perl 1997). Stahl’s analysis of the chronopolitics of war, on the other hand, implies that the frame of “War on Terror” repackages the fear without setting any limits as to when we may be relieved:

The phrase itself is meaningless. It defines neither a geographic context nor our presumed enemies … But the little secret here may be that the vagueness of the phrase was deliberately (or instinctively) calculated by its sponsors. Constant reference to a "war on terror" did accomplish one major objective: It stimulated the emergence of a culture of fear. Fear obscures reason, intensifies emotions and makes it easier for demagogic politicians to mobilize the public on behalf of the policies they want to pursue … The sense of a pervasive but otherwise imprecise danger was thus channeled in a politically expedient direction by the mobilizing appeal of being "at war." (Brzezinski 2007)

Unsurprisingly, the western media were quick to pick up on the “War on Terror” frame. As noted by many researchers (e.g. Langer 2002; McChesney 2002), this reaction of the mass media was linked to what Brewer and colleagues (2003) name as “Patriotic Journalism”, which is characterized by a tendency to do away with the professional requirement of detachment (Waisbord 2002). Commenting on media coverage in the post September 11 period, Altheide (2007) argues that the emphasis was on “commonality of the victims rather than the cause or the rationale of the attacks” (300). Accordingly, common identity was communicated to
the audiences through a variety of messages and visuals. At the same time, media content worked to identify two categories of “others”. On the one hand, as Steuter and Wills (2009) argue, was a tendency, prevalent in mass media not only in the U.S., to engage in a representation of Islam and Muslims in a dehumanizing manner. On the other hand were those “others” among “us” whose views about the “War on Terror” did not match the hegemonic discourse.

The contributions to this edited volume aim to investigate such questions regarding the hegemonic power that is exercised by elites (and mass media) through the discourse of “War on Terror.” The chapters in the volume provide case studies from a wide variety of geographies to debate questions regarding the construction of the meaning of “terrorism”, communication of collective identities and otherness, and media frames regarding the “War on Terror”, civil liberties, and government restrictions. In bringing this collection together, it was our intention to provide a venue for discussion of expressions and diverse concerns around the themes of media and terrorism from international and interdisciplinary perspectives. The edited volume is divided into two parts. The first part of the volume focuses on elite discourse about the definition of “terrorism” and discursive strategies involved in construction of “us” vs. “others.” The second part of the volume investigates issues related to media framing of the compromises that are deemed necessary for success in the “War on Terror”.

Part I:
“War on terror”, elite rhetoric, and collective identity

In the first chapter of the Part I, Rémi Brulin (Chapter 2) goes back in history to address timely questions regarding the construction of the meaning of the word “terrorism.” Brulin starts by arguing that “terrorism” did not make it to the diplomatic lexicon until 1972 when, following the killing of Israeli athletes by Palestinian Black September organization, the United Nations started considering adding “terrorism” to the General Assembly agenda. Brulin argues that the General Assembly debates regarding “terrorism” was highly polarized in terms of both what “terrorism” meant and who should be classified as “terrorists”. Then, Brulin goes on to analyze the New York Times coverage of the debates and concludes that the newspaper, known for its professionalism, gravely misrepresented the debates by failing to acknowledge the lack of consensus about the definition of “terrorism.”
In the chapter to follow (Chapter 3), Yiannis Mylonas shifts focus to construction of collective identity in conservative post-September 11 documentaries and reaches conclusions that, in many ways, supports Brulin’s arguments about the elite monolithization of discourse about terrorism. Mylonas’ analysis of several post-September 11 conservative documentaries suggests that the emphasis on “our” (western) identity not only produced a rather simplistic account of terrorism by identifying Islam (and not terrorism) as the route of the problem but also treated both western values and suffering as universal (as opposed to the suffering of “others”, which was treated as external to “us”).

Although in a different context, Darren Kelsey, in his “The Myth the ‘Blitz Spirit’ in British Newspaper Responses to the July 7th Bombings” (Chapter 4), reaches a very similar conclusion about construction of collective memory and assignment of blame. Kelsey observes that in the aftermath of the suicide bombings on London’s transportation system, one common reference point that was utilized by both the media and the government was the Second World War and particularly the “Blitz Spirit”. Kelsey argues that the myth of the Blitz Spirit was utilized to emphasize that London, as was the case before, was the target of outside threats. Accordingly, the myth of the Blitz Spirit suggests that innocent but also defiant and united, Britain is entitled to retaliatory action against this outside threat.

In Chapter 5, Mark Hayes and Paul Norris challenge another conventional wisdom—that the media and terrorism have a symbiotic relationship with each other—about “terrorism.” Hayes and Norris’ case study of media coverage of Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) and Ulster Defence Association (UDA) illustrates that the British media often utilized “seductively simplistic” frames that were “politically acceptable to the government.” At this point, it seems important to note that in line with the observations made by the previous chapters by Yiannis Mylonas and by Darren Kelsey, Hayes and Norris underline the need to recognize that such framing ignores the socioeconomic contexts within which conflicts arise and hence may play an important role in the perpetuation of hatred of “others”.

In Chapter 6, Bilge Narin engages in a framing analysis of Turkish newspapers’ coverage of the London bombings of July 7, 2005 and Al-Qa’ide attacks targeting HSBC and Al-Qaeda attacks in Istanbul in November 2003. Narin observes that the attacks in Istanbul were framed in a way that was slightly more in tune with dominant state ideology. Also, according to Narin, although leftist (Cumhuriyet) and Islamist (Yeni Şafak) differed significantly in terms whom they identified as the victim of the
attacks in Istanbul was—the leftist newspaper claimed that the attack targeted the secular republic whereas Islamist newspaper argued that the attack targeted the stability brought about by the conservative AKP government—they both refrained from accepting the dominant frame that the western civilization was the target of the July 7th attacks in Britain.

In the last chapter of Part I (Chapter 7), Gabrielle Murry investigates the elite rhetoric about the deployment of the German military in a distant land (Afghanistan) as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Murry’s analysis suggests that for a long time, the elite rhetoric about Germany’s participation in the War in Afghanistan emphasized the support role that German military was playing in the development of a new nation. However, Murry notes, recently the media in Germany have been more likely acknowledge that what is transpiring in Afghanistan is war. She observes that the change in terminology was key in renewing public debate about German involvement in Afghanistan.

**Part II: Media frames, compromises, and resistance**

One question that many countries, including the U.S., which took the lead role in the “War on Terror”, had to deal with in the Post-September 11 era concerns the “right” balance between civil liberties and security or preemption of further attacks. The chapters in the second part of the book focus on media framing regarding the compromises that “we” are required to make in the fight against “them”. At the same time, several chapters of this part also identify opportunities for resistance to hegemonic discourse.

In Chapter 8, Catherine A. Luther argues that members of the public in Japan overall appear to have accepted antiterrorism measures without much question and reveals how news media framing of terrorism might promote public acceptance of civil liberty restrictions. Through a survey-based experiment in Japan, Luther’s chapter also takes into account the potential culture specific factors that may also be coming into play.

In Chapter 9, Robert Teigrob argues that after September 11, the hegemonic influence of the United States have been felt more on Canada, a neighboring state, and its own security, political culture, commitment to civil liberties, and sovereignty. He further claims that a threatened United States constitutes a serious threat to Canadian autonomy, core values, and economic fortunes; and in response, Canadian officials often engage in a policymaking triage, willing to sacrifice aspects of autonomy and values in a desperate attempt to protect economy.

The influence of September 11 attacks on media seems significant. While the traditional role of the media has been questioned in the
aftermath of the attacks, there also have been some changes in media’s framing of social issues, movements and politics. In Chapter 10, Gonca Noyan looks at how mass media’s framing of social movements evolved in line with changing social values and political issues following the September 11 attacks. According to Noyan, globalization has been a process that generated its dissident, notably the “anti-globalization movement.” In this chapter, she examines how September 11 affected the media coverage of anti-globalization movement in the U.S. In doing so, she also addresses the question of whether or not the anti-globalization movement has become invisible in the post-September 11 world.

In Chapter 11, Lemi Baruh discusses the influence that the September 11 attacks and the ensuing “war on terrorism” had on how mainstream newspapers cover issues related to privacy rights of individuals and surveillance. To address this question, Baruh analyzes whether there has been a change in the extent to which mainstream newspapers publish stories that have privacy and/or surveillance of individuals as their main focus. His analysis also indicates that newspapers with a conservative slant are less likely to identify government entities as undertaking surveillance (a frame that would potentially be more likely to trigger concerns about civil liberties) and are more likely to portray surveillance as a social phenomenon that is part of the general social fabric.

The events of September 11 gave birth to various forms of non-state actors and entities. With the rise of such non-state actors, political authority can no longer be assumed to rest exclusively with the state and its publicly accountable apparatuses. Rather, it is increasingly dispersed along several axes of organized power. In Chapter 12, Jim Jose, questions the extent to which a state can be said to exercise sovereign political authority, and hence respond to terrorist issues, when its capacity to enforce that authority is outsourced in varying degrees to non-state actors. According to Jose, the emergence of non-state centers of military power, sanctioned and indeed legitimized by the state as part of various privatization arrangements and public-private partnerships, raises serious questions about the nature of the contemporary state’s sovereign political authority, and by extension the state’s capacity to respond to terrorism.

Media’s framing of terrorism can have important consequences in the public psyche. The images and messages being conveyed by the media about “terrorism” have a power to incite fear among members of the public. Through an analysis of discourse on “terrorism” in *The New York Times* during the six months surrounding the U.S. presidential elections in 2004 and 2008, Susan Dente Ross (Chapter 13) scrutinizes the boundaries of media discourse to uncover potential sites of counter-hegemonic resistance.
Cyberspace has become an attractive venue for terrorists, as well as another platform for resistance movements. In Chapter 14, the final chapter of the book, Banu Baybars-Hawks and Murat Akser argue that the distinction between cyberterrorism and hacking is somewhat blurry because, most of the time, the media label hacking activities as cyberterrorist acts. By pointing out the main differences between cyberterrorism and hacking, Baybars-Hawks and Akser evaluate the attacks by Turkish hackers on websites criticizing Islam and Turkey, and invites the readers to reconsider their activities not acts of cyber terror but disruptive discursive hacking activities.

Works Cited


PART I

“War on Terror”, Elite Rhetoric, and Collective Identity
CHAPTER TWO

DEFINING “TERRORISM”: THE 1972 GENERAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES ON “INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM” AND THEIR COVERAGE BY THE NEW YORK TIMES

RÉMI BRULIN

Introduction

“Terrorism” has become an extremely common concept in the vocabulary of international politics. But it was not always this way. In fact, the concept of “terrorism” only entered the language of diplomacy in the early 1970s. Moreover, the entry of “terrorism” into the lexicon occurred with no agreed definition of the term’s meaning and the range of actions and actors to which it should apply – a problem that persists today.

On September 8, 1972, following the murder of Israeli athletes by members of the pro-Palestinian Black September organization, UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim proposed for the first time to add the issue of “terrorism” to the agenda of the General Assembly. Resolution 3034, the General Assembly’s first resolution on “international terrorism,” was adopted three months later.

Recently, scholars have examined the United Nations’ institutional dealings with the issue of “terrorism” (Van Krieken 2002) but few have reached beyond an analysis of the results or lack thereof of the General Assembly’s debates to present an historical account of member states’ arguments as they attempted to define “terrorism,” and tried to agree on the most effective ways to prevent it.

First, this study offers a contextualized account of the 1972 debates on “terrorism,” showing how various countries brought their own pasts and struggles into the debates and attempted to impose their own interpretation of what the concept of “terrorism” actually meant. As this struggle over which acts and actors would or would not be condemned as “terrorists”
was taking place at the United Nations, it is only as a result of a process of mediation that the terms of this struggle could leave the walls of the organization and shape the way in which the general public, political leaders and scholars thought and talked about the issue of “terrorism.”

This process of mediation is the object of the second part of this study, which offers an analysis of the coverage of the debates by the *New York Times*, a paper chosen for its seriousness and professionalism, its unrivaled influence and reputation as a newspaper of record, especially on topics related to major institutions such as the United Nations, and finally because of the extensive nature of its coverage of the “terrorism” debates. However, as we will document by comparing the content of these articles to the official UN records, the *New York Times* systematically misrepresented the positions put forward not only by the unaligned and Soviet bloc states, but also by the United States itself. This distorted account would fuel public, political and scholarly narratives about the General Assembly debates on “international terrorism” for years to come.

**The United Nations takes on an ambiguous term: “Terrorism” as a political concept in the pre-1972 period**

Since the attacks of September 11, 2001 in New York City and Washington, D. C., the word “terrorism” has become a common, powerful epithet. It is interesting to note that, in most cases, users fail to remember that the post 9/11 discourse on “terrorism” did not come out of thin air; rather, it was the reprise of a language born during the Reagan years (Brulin 2011; Chomsky 1987). In 1972 however, the concept of “terrorism” had no agreed upon meaning at the international level, and its presence in the American political discourse was negligible.

**The precedent of Resolution 2625**

During the post-World War II period the term “terrorism” became a central element of the political discourse of many Western states such as France, the United Kingdom, Israel and South Africa as they faced various nationalist and anti-colonialist movements overseas. At the same time, following a decision by the Algerian FLN to take its case to the United Nations, a series of important General Assembly debates led to the recognition of the right of peoples to self-determination and to the adoption by consensus in 1970 of Resolution 2625, which codifies the major principles of international law governing relations among nations (Howard, Andreopoulos, and Shulman 1994).
A study of the discussions over the various drafts that ultimately led to Resolution 2625 reveals a sharp divide between the Western states and the unaligned and Soviet bloc states on the two issues that were at the heart of the “terrorism” debates: the issue of the legitimacy of the use of force by peoples and “national liberation movements,” and the question of the legitimacy of the use of force by the colonial states fighting against these peoples and movements.

During the drafting period, non-Western states argued that “colonial domination and oppression, no matter when it originated, was a clear case of aggression” and that, because the principle of self-determination was a fundamental one, peoples’ “exercise of self-defense in the struggle for their independence was a lawful act under current international law” (A/AC.124/L.38/ADD.1). As the representative of Cameroon suggested, it would be “inconsistent to accord the right of self-determination while refusing the means of exercising that right” (A/AC.125/SR.109).

When the unaligned and Soviet bloc states joined the consensus on Resolution 2625 it was with the understanding that this resolution did, in fact, imply a right for peoples to use force as they struggled to achieve self-determination and a condemnation of the use of force by colonial powers as they attempted to prevent the right of self-determination from being fulfilled.

These interpretations of the principles enumerated in Resolution 2625 were totally rejected by the Western states, which agreed that self-determination was a recognized right but explained that,

This was quite a different matter from stating that force used in the exercise of self-determination was used in accordance with the purposes of the United Nations. The right of self-defense applied not to peoples but to States. (A/AC.124/L.38/ADD.1)

On the contrary, Western governments insisted “recognition of a right such as the so-called right of self-defense against colonial domination would […] mean permitting or encouraging terrorism, riots or other acts in breach of public peace” (A/AC.125/L.53/Add.1).

“Terrorism” is virtually absent from the American political lexicon

The only Western power not to have colonies and therefore not to be faced with decolonization movements, the United States, was also the only Western power that did not have, before 1972, a discourse on “terrorism.” Analysis of the speeches of Presidents Franklyn D. Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon shows that during the four
decades prior to the debates, the term “terrorism” was virtually absent from the political lexicon of the American presidency, and was used to refer to a very broad range of both state and non-state actors and acts.

A search of the digital archives of the Public Papers of the Presidents (American Presidency Project) finds the terms “terrorism” or “terrorist” in only 6 speeches by President Roosevelt, 4 by Truman, 4 by Eisenhower, 1 by Kennedy, 44 by Johnson and 25 by Nixon, 11 of which were given before the Munich incident. In the overwhelming majority of these speeches, the terms “terrorism” or “terrorist” appears only once, sometimes twice.

Further proof that the term “terrorism” was, in 1972, a rarity in American political discourse, is the fact that until March 6, 1972 no American president had used the term “terrorism” or “terrorist” to refer to hijackings or bombings of commercial aircraft, using instead terms like “air pirates,” “sky pirates” or “hijackers.” As noted by political scientist Timothy Naftali in 1972, “Administration documents still referred to members of the PFLP as “guerrillas” or the “fedayeens”” and “the terms international terrorist and international terrorism did not yet appear in high-level documents or in the national consciousness” (52).

Following Munich, the US Congress adopted a resolution (S.358, H.1106) condemning these acts as “inimical to the interests and aspirations of the civilized world” and calling them “acts of murder and barbarism.” Nixon, in a personal call to Prime Minister Meir and an official message to the Government of Israel, described the Munich events as “murderous” and “senseless and tragic” acts perpetrated by “international outlaws.” Neither Congress nor the president used the term “terrorism” or “terrorist.” In fact, Nixon never once used the term “terrorism” or “terrorist” to refer to the Munich attacks in a public speech, using them for the one and only time in a May 3, 1973 report to Congress.

“Terrorism” is used by American presidents to refer to acts committed by individuals, groups and states

In every speech in which he pronounced the term “terrorism,” Roosevelt used it to refer to the Nazis, either to refer to the regime in a general way or to condemn specific practices such as the campaign of the U-Boats against merchant ships (June 20, 1944), the execution of hostages in Europe (October 25, 1941) or the massive air bombing campaigns by Goering’s Luftwaffe (September 17, 1943). Truman denounced the acts of “terrorism” committed by Zionist groups in Mandate Palestine (July 23 and October 28, 1946) and lamented the threat to the Greek Government
posed “by the terrorist activities of several thousand armed men, led by communists” (March 12, 1947), while Eisenhower and Kennedy referred in very general terms to the “terrorism” of the Soviet Union and various other communist states.

Johnson made more than twice as many speeches containing the word “terrorism” or “terrorist” than his four successors combined. In most of the speeches (36 out of 44), he used the term to refer to the war in Vietnam, the major conflict where the United States found itself faced with an anti-colonial uprising. In these speeches, Johnson condemned the “terrorism” of the Vietcong and their allies, North Vietnam and China, stating that “Terrorism – deliberately planned and coldly carried out – continues to be the chief instrument of the Vietcong aggression in South Vietnam,” and adding “If this “war of liberation” triumphs, who will be “liberated” next?” (February 16, 1966).

Nixon used the term “terrorism” or “terrorist” in 11 speeches before Munich, every single time to refer not to the methods of the Vietcong, but rather to denounce violent acts perpetrated on American campuses by activists opposed to the Vietnam War.

Thus, in the four decades preceding the “terrorism” debates, American presidents had used the term “terrorism” to refer to very different actors (states and their armed forces, revolutionary groups, individuals) and very different political situations (political protests inside the United States, full-scale wars, revolutionary wars). During the same period, other Western powers had developed their own “terrorism” discourses in the context of their struggle against often violent decolonization movements, while “national liberation movements” and their allies insisted, at the General Assembly, that international law recognized the right of self-determination and national liberation, and also the right to use force towards the achievement of such goals. In 1972, these discourses, histories and struggles would provide, in addition to the immediate post-Munich context, the broad backdrop against which the “terrorism” debates would play out.

The 1972 debates and Resolution 3034

Positions of the unaligned and Soviet bloc at the 1972 debates

Initially, several unaligned states opposed Waldheim’s proposal and focused on the difficulties and dangers involved in acting against “terrorism” while the term had no agreed-upon definition. Since Western states had voiced, over the previous decade, their opposition to all uses of
Defining “Terrorism”

force by “national liberation movements,” most unaligned states considered the idea of opening debates on “terrorism” after Munich as an attempt to further delegitimize such movements.

The Iraqi delegate declared that “The first task […] was to try to define it and to delimit its scope” (A/C.6/SR.1361), while the representative of Yemen worried that in a context where there was “no clear-cut definition and understanding of terrorism” Waldheim’s initiative could “unintentionally expose the liberation movements in the world to trial by a world court” (A/PV/2037).

Although they all supported the right of “national liberation movements” to use force, there was no consensus among these states as to whether the legitimacy of the ends meant that any and all methods to achieve these ends could be legitimately used.

The Iranian representative, for example, stated that acts committed “in the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination did not fall into the category of acts of international terrorism” because of “the legitimacy of the struggle of peoples for national identity” (A/C.6/SR.1358). Furthermore, the Zaire representative suggested that the actions of “the freedom fighter” were “praiseworthy provided that certain conditions were respected.” For example, “the acts of violence should not arbitrarily involve innocent persons or third persons not parties to the conflict” (A/C.6/SR.1368). The Soviet Foreign Minister defended a similar position, explaining that “It is certainly impossible to condone the acts of terrorism committed by certain elements among the participants in the Palestinian movement” (A/PV.2040).

The “terrorism” of South Africa, Israel and the United States

The unaligned and Soviet bloc states agreed, however, that if the international community intended to fight “terrorism” effectively it should first and foremost focus on the causes of the violence used by groups, that is to say the “terrorism” conducted by states, and more specifically, of Portugal, South Africa, Israel and the United States, who, according to the Yemeni representative, were “the true terrorists of this world” (A/PV.2037).

The Cuban representative, for example, explained that “If the concept of international terrorism included revolutionary violence, it also included the more hateful and criminal acts of reprisal against towns and villages,” and added that “The methods of combat by national liberation movements could not be declared illegal while the policy of terror unleashed against certain peoples was declared legitimate” (A/C.6/SR.1358).
The delegate from Guinea condemned the “Portuguese terrorists,” and after denouncing colonialism and Apartheid, affirmed that peoples in Africa and Asia could not be denied “the right to combat that form of terrorism, which was the scourge of mankind” (A/BUR/SR.202).

As countless non-Western states would also argue, the Syrian representative insisted that it was “inadmissible that Israel should today denounce the means which Irgun, Hagana and the Stern Gang had employed in the past,” and added that “the imperialist, colonialist and Zionist forces were unceasing in the use of their war machine, which conferred, as it were, an official status on the terrorism they were practicing” (A/C.6/SR.1363).

Israel was thus guilty of “terrorism” for two reasons: because Zionist groups committed “terrorist” acts as they struggled to bring forth the birth of the state of Israel, and because Israel, once a state, continued (like other “colonialist” and “imperialist” states) to resort to “terrorism.” As stated in an Egyptian letter to the Secretary General, Israel was “a brazen example of ‘States established by terrorism’” while Israel’s actions were “a clear example of “terrorism by States’” (A/8875, S/10827).

Positions of the Western states at the 1972 debates

A consensus on the need for action against acts such as Munich or Lod

The decision to include the “terrorism” item in the agenda of the upcoming session was met with praise from the Western states as they agreed that the international community had a duty to focus on acts such as the murder of the Israeli athletes in Munich, the murder of tourists in the lobby of Lod airport and the hijacking of commercial airplanes.

As Mr. Rogers, the American Secretary of State, explained on September 25, 1972:

The issue is whether the vulnerable lines of international communications – the airways and the mails, diplomatic discourse and international meetings – can continue, without disruption, to bring nations and peoples together. All who have a stake in this have a stake in decisive action to suppress these demented acts of terrorism (A/PV.2038).

However, the fact that all Western states agreed that a few specific acts should indeed be condemned did not mean that they shared a common analysis of the threat posed by “terrorism” in general, nor that they agreed on the most effective way for the General Assembly to act against “terrorism.”