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Framing the threat of catastrophic terrorism: Genealogy, discourse and President Clinton's counterterrorism approach

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Abstract   A frequent argument in the literature on the US-led war on terror is that the war and its public discourse originated with the George W. Bush administration. This article seeks to explore the political discourse of terrorism and counterterrorism practices during the Clinton administration in order to challenge this perspective. By examining US administration discourses of terrorism, this article demonstrates deep continuities in counterterrorism approaches from Ronald Reagan to Bill Clinton, through to George W. Bush. The research suggests that, based on Reagan's initial 'war on terrorism' discourse, Clinton articulated the notion of 'catastrophic terrorism' or 'new terrorism', which became a formative conception for the United States and its allies in the post-Cold War era. Clinton's counterterrorism discourse then provided an important rhetorical foundation for President Bush to respond to the 2001 terrorist attacks. In other words, far from being a radical break, Bush's 'war on terror' represents a continuation of established counter-terrorist understanding and practice.
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Introduction

The central core of terrorism and counterterrorism discourse is the interpretation of threat, danger and uncertainty. Political elites also emphasize, and frequently claim, that terrorist violence is sudden, dramatic and threatening, thus requiring urgent action. However, some would question whether the threat posed by terrorism really is as dangerous as officials assert. It is argued that the danger and threat stressed by politicians is not actually an objective condition; instead, it is defined, articulated

and socially constructed by authorized actors (Campbell, 1998, pp. 1–2). Specifically, danger and threat are not things that exist independently; rather, they become 'reality' by the way in which people analyze them and consider them to be urgent and imminent. In other words, our perception of threats, crises and risks is introduced through a series of interpretations, and as a result, is largely a product of social construction. In Foucault's (1980, 2002) terms, the interpretation of terrorist threat constitutes the knowledge of terrorism and sustains a counter-terrorism 'regime of truth'[1] that defines what can be meaningfully said and discussed about the subject. With regard to the political function of threat and danger, some scholars (Freedman, 2004; Robin, 2004; Jackson, 2008a) have argued that the political interpretation of threat, danger and war serves a number of political purposes, in particular, 'selling' specific foreign or domestic policies to public audiences. In efforts to prepare public opinion for extraordinary exertions and potential sacrifice, a political and social 'reality' of threat and danger is necessary.

The concept of threat and danger is established on the basis of the human emotion of fear (Booth and Wheeler, 2008, p. 62). Undoubtedly, emotions inform our attitudes and strategies, and tell us how to react and face the situation we are experiencing. The emotional reaction we experience as fear is caused by a sense of danger. That danger, through discursive interpretation, threatens to harm things we value, such as freedom from pain or freedom from loss of some sort. Importantly, the fear produced by threat and danger not only affects individuals' responses to the surroundings they face; it also guides the subsequent actions and behaviors of actors in the political arena. For example, during the Cold War, US foreign and security policies were based on the scenario of nuclear devastation, and the world order was perceived to be established on the so-called 'balance of terror'. Similarly, in the post-Cold War period, the threat and danger posed by terrorism has become a dominant framework for foreign and security policies. Through a series of discursive processes of interpretation, so-called 'catastrophic terrorism' (Carter and Perry, 1999, pp. 149–150) or 'super-terrorism' (see Sprinzak, 1998) has become a 'reality' that threatens the values of US society.

This article argues that counterterrorism policy was not initially the primary preoccupation of the Clinton administration; yet, through the discursive construction of the notion of 'new terrorism',[2] terrorism came to be viewed as one of the most pressing challenges to US national security. With the occurrence of several major terrorist attacks on the United States and its allies, including the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and the 1995 Tokyo sarin gas attack, terrorism came to be seen as a serious threat to the United States, and counterterrorism was defined as one of the main tasks of US military forces in the post-Cold War period. By articulating the extraordinary threat of catastrophic terrorism, the 'reality' of new terrorism was accepted and shared by the key figures of Clinton's administration and by most US citizens.

This article is divided into four sections. The first section briefly introduces the methodological approach and the texts examined in this research. The second section discusses the historical meaning of the word 'terrorism', and the invention of 'terrorism' in the US political arena. Through the method of genealogy, the article examines how the understanding of 'terrorism' and 'terrorist' has shifted historically and culturally. The third section focuses on Clinton's discursive construction of terrorism. An analysis of the 'intertextuality'[3] of Clinton's 'new terrorism' discourse demonstrates that the Reagan administration actually provided the initial framework for the Clinton administration to construct its new terrorism discourse. Through various discursive practices, so-called catastrophic terrorism involving inherent features of boundlessness, weapons of mass destruction and rogue states became a political 'reality' widely known by US citizens. Finally, some of the broader social effects and political consequences of Clinton's terrorism discourse, such as anti-terrorism initiatives, and a military approach to address the threat of terrorism are discussed in the fourth section. The conclusion discusses the main continuities in US counterterrorism from Reagan to Clinton and Bush, and explores some of the implications of the main findings.

Methodology

In this research, Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA) and his Three-Dimensional Model (Fairclough, 1992, 2001, 2010) are employed as the central framework to examine US terrorism discourse and the counterterrorism initiatives implemented by the Clinton administration. Fairclough's approach to CDA is distinguished by its conception of discourse: that discourse refers to language use as social practice, that discourse is comprehended as the kind of language used in some specific fields, and that discourse is utilized as a 'count noun',[4] referring to a way of speaking and thinking that gives things meaning from a particular perspective (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002, pp. 66–67). For Fairclough, discourse should not be seen as merely constitutive, but also as constituted, and it should be understood as an important form of social practice that shapes the world (ibid.). This conception of discourse as constitutive and constituted refers to Fairclough's other definitions of discourse. Given that discourse is a count noun and a kind of language used in different contexts, a number of specific discourses can be identified, such as neoliberal discourse, Marxist discourse and environmentalist discourse, among others. These discourses are produced and given meaning by socially powerful actors, or 'world-making' elites in Bourdieu's (1987) terms. Through the process of discursive practice, these discourses are created, consumed and reproduced in everyday life and therefore come to constitute the social world.

Aside from providing the definitions of discourse, Fairclough indicates that every instance of language use could be seen as a 'communicative event'[5] that

encompasses three dimensions: a 'text' including spoken and written language, a visual image or a combination of these; a 'discursive practice' that involves the production and consumption of discourse; and a 'social practice' that involves both discursive and non-discursive elements (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 67). Methodologically then, a discourse analysis should concentrate on the linguistic features of the text (text), the process associated with the production and consumption of the text (discursive practice), and the wider social practice to which the communicative event belongs (social practice). By adopting Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, in this research, I first of all concentrate on the text(s) itself. In text analysis, the usage of the terms 'terrorism' and 'terrorist' by administration officials is identified and analyzed. Following the text analysis, a specific analysis of intertextuality of Clinton's 'new terrorism' discourse is undertaken. The research demonstrates that Reagan's 'war on terrorism' discourse provided a rhetorical foundation for Clinton and later, George W. Bush, to construct their discourse on terrorism. Lastly, the broader social effects and political consequences of US terrorism discourse are explored.

In terms of the data analyzed, more than 200 official texts were examined in this study, including all of Clinton's terrorism- and counterterrorism-related speeches, interviews and radio addresses, as compiled and published by the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Administration in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* and the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*. In addition, in order to explore the continuities of US counterterrorism, Reagan's 'war on terrorism' discourse and Bush's 'war on terror' discourse were also carefully examined. Other significant official documents and reports regarding US counterterrorism policies also contributed to the analysis.

Genealogy and the Invention of US Terrorism Discourse

It has been argued that as late as 1965, the word 'terrorism' had not entered into general usage in the US political arena (Collins, 2002, p. 158). Yet, a decade later, the term had acquired a particular set of meanings, the American public was familiar with the meaning of the term and there were political elites who regularly invoked 'terrorism' as a threat to the United States (ibid.). Winkler (2006) demonstrates that since the Kennedy administration, the US government has regularly employed terms such as 'terrorism' and 'terrorist' to label its adversaries abroad, and its internal political dissidents, in particular, the students who adopted confrontational tactics to protest US intervention in South Vietnam. For example, President Kennedy used the phrase 'Communist terror', which combined the political ideologies of communism and terrorism, in his letter to President Diem of South Vietnam (ibid, p. 18). In addition, when reminiscing about the Second World War, Kennedy created another phrase – 'Nazi terrorists' – to describe Nazi Germany (ibid.). By merging terrorism

and communism into a companion phrase, the Kennedy administration rhetorically amalgamated the tactics of terrorism with the ideological objectives of Communists powers, and in doing so, helped to justify US military intervention in South Vietnam.

When Lyndon Johnson assumed the presidency, key figures in the Johnson administration adopted the same rhetorical strategy – the strategy that amalgamates terrorism and communism – to label US enemies in the Vietnam War (Winkler, 2006). Henry Lodge, the US ambassador to Vietnam, called terrorism a 'time tested traditional Viet Cong weapon' (quoted in ibid, p. 18). He added that terrorism was 'the heart of the matter in the war in Viet-Nam' (quoted in ibid.). When President Johnson described US foreign policy in the Vietnam War, he stated: 'It will remain the policy of the United State to furnish assistance and support to South Viet-Nam for as long as it is required to bring Communist aggression and terrorism under control' (quoted in ibid, p. 19). For the Johnson administration, terrorism was not only a tactic adopted by the enemies of the United States on the battlefield and one that could decisively determine the outcome of the war, but it was also a potential threat that might profoundly affect the willingness of Vietnamese civilians to fight the Viet Cong (ibid, p. 18).

The Nixon administration continued his predecessors' rhetorical strategy, although, in contrast to the Johnson administration, it tried to adopt a more conciliatory approach to address the conundrum that the United States faced in South Vietnam (Winkler, 2006, p. 20). For Nixon, 'terrorism' implied both an external and internal threat to the United States; that is, terrorism could refer to the Communist enemies in Vietnam and to students protesting the US-Vietnam foreign policy (ibid, p. 21). Rhetorically, Nixon (1969) used the term 'reign of terror' – a special phrase that invokes a set of historical meanings drawn from the French Revolution, Nazi Germany and from Stalin's Great Terror – to describe the political situation in Vietnam (Townshend, 2011). On the other hand, when answering press inquiries, Nixon (1970) claimed: '[…] when students on university campuses burn buildings, when they engage in violence, when they break up furniture, when they terrorize their fellow students and terrorize the faculty, then I think "bums" is perhaps too kind a word to apply to that kind of person'.

Similar interpretations of terrorism were employed by the Carter administration when the United States attempted to tackle the Iranian Hostage Crisis. Carter used Nixon's definitions of 'terrorism' and 'terrorist', while additionally defining the Crisis as an 'act of terrorism' and portraying the captors – most of whom were students – as 'terrorists'. In an interview with NBC News, Carter asserted that,

> Iran is at this moment involved in a criminal act, a terrorist act. And it's not a matter of negotiating on a diplomatic basis between two nations. This is a matter of condemning Iran for international terrorism and kidnapping. (Carter, 1980)

Carter's interpretation of the Hostage Crisis featured a crime metaphor, and the labeling of the captors as 'criminals', 'kidnappers' and 'terrorists' shifted the dominant political discourse of terrorism. Specifically, and in contrast to other

presidents, Carter adopted a particular rhetorical framework to define and conceptualize acts of terrorism, rather than simply linking the Hostage Crisis with the Vietnam-era notion of terrorism (see Winkler, 2006).

However, notably, with the growing confrontation between the United States and the Soviets, the US terrorism discourse changed significantly, particularly during the Reagan presidency. Throughout the 1980s, the Reagan administration broadly employed a 'war' metaphor to construct its terrorism discourse, particularly focusing on the threat of international terrorism and so-called state-sponsored terrorism (see Winkler, 2006, 2007). In public statements, Reagan stated that terrorism is a 'new kind of warfare' (Reagan, 1984a), and that 'international terrorism is indeed a new form of international warfare' (Reagan, 1985a). He further argued:

> the war which terrorists are waging is not only directed against the United States, it is a war against all of civilized society. This is a war in which innocent civilians are targets. This is a war in which innocent civilians are intentional victims, and our servicemen have become specific targets. (Reagan, 1985b)

Reagan's terrorism discourse illustrates a specific rhetorical strategy that links the broader Cold War narrative to the state sponsorship of terrorism. For example, Reagan argued that the rise of state-sponsored terrorism could be traced back to 'increased Soviet support for terrorism, insurgency, and aggression coupled with the perception of weakening US power and resolve' (Reagan, 1984b, p. 480). For Reagan, 'terrorism is the antithesis of democracy' (Reagan, 1985c) and an act of war that was supported by the Soviet Union as well as some terrorist states. Jackson (2005, 2006) argues that Reagan's terrorism discourse actually provided the primary rhetorical foundation for the George W. Bush administration to respond to the 2001 World Trade Center bombings with a 'war on terrorism'. Both administrations explicitly defined terrorism as 'an act of war', and adopted a military-based approach to counterterrorism.

In short, a genealogical study of US terrorism discourse not only contributes to our understanding of the way terrorism was discursively constructed in the past, but also to our understanding of contemporary US counterterrorism. This challenges a dominant theme in the existing literature, namely, that the current US-led war on terror and its discourse largely originated with the George W. Bush administration. In fact, before September 11, 2001, there had been a long history of labeling US threats and enemies as 'terrorism' and 'terrorists', and the meaning of the terms had changed several times in different social and political contexts. In the 1980s, Reagan employed a specific language to construct his 'war on terrorism' by strategically linking it to the Cold War narrative. In the 1990s, however, there was a fairly significant discursive change in US counterterrorism. Yet, somehow this change is rarely mentioned in the current literature. The discursive change in US counter-terrorism is due, in part, to the shift in the international order, but also because of the way that the US elite came to understand the world – that is, as a world without major threats from the Soviet Union but beset by uncertain new challenges. This further

shaped US foreign and security policies in accordance with the national interests identified.

Writing the Threat of Catastrophic Terrorism: The Transformation of Contemporary Terrorism

During the Clinton era, the United States and its allies suffered a number of significant terrorist attacks. Key incidents included the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the 1995 Aum Shinrikyo Gas Attack in Japan, the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing, the 1996 Khobar Towers Bombing, the 1998 US Embassy Bombings in Africa and the 2000 *USS Cole* Bombing. These incidents were the primary focus of the Clinton administration's terrorism and counterterrorism discourses, and were constantly mentioned in administration rhetoric. In sharp contrast to Reagan's terrorism discourse and its focus on state-sponsored terrorism, encapsulated in Reagan's Cold War expression that terrorism is the antithesis of democracy (see Winkler, 2006), the Clinton administration formulated and constructed its terrorism discourse by stressing the characteristics of a 'catastrophic terrorism', or 'new terrorism', the characteristics of which were based on the terrorists' targets, the methods they adopted and the weapons they utilized. According to the Clinton administration, boundlessness stood out as the most significant feature of the 'new terrorism', where terrorists come from 'within or beyond our borders' (Clinton, 1995f, p. 832), and terrorist acts have 'become an equal opportunity destroyer, with no respect for borders' (Clinton, 1996c, p. 1257). In other words, there was no longer a clear boundary between external and internal terrorism. Terrorist attacks could strike a foreign ally or even on US soil.

In addition, John Deutch, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, echoed Clinton's construction of boundlessness when he wrote: 'terrorism, like the plague in the Middle Ages, frightens both leaders and citizens. It is a disease that is spreading; its cure is unknown' (Deutch, 1997, p. 10). Portraying terrorism as a 'disease' was actually not a new type of rhetorical expression in the US political arena. In order to intensify the terrorist threat, Reagan and his administration had adopted the same theme, depicting terrorism as a 'cancer'. According to the Reagan administration, the 'plague of terrorism' would 'spread like a cancer, eating away at civilized societies and sowing fear and chaos everywhere' (quoted in Leeman, 1991, p. 130). This would occur 'if we permit terrorism to succeed anywhere' (quoted in ibid, pp. 130–131). By employing a medical metaphor, terrorism was thus interpreted as a disease that can strike anyone, anywhere, and because there is no cure for this threat, it is indeed very frightening.

The concept of the 'new terrorism' later became a prominent conception in the Bush administration's 'war on terror' discourse. Bush and his top officials adopted the same rhetorical strategy established by the Clinton administration to construct

their terrorism discourse in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Colin Powell, for example, referred to 'the scourge of terrorism' (quoted in Jackson, 2005, p. 73) while justifying the US-led global war on terror. Donald Rumsfeld also claimed that 'terrorism is a cancer on the human condition and we intend to oppose it' (quoted in ibid, p. 73). This rhetoric graphically described the characteristics of terrorism and suggested that the terrorist threat required aggressive counter-measures. Fairclough (2001, p. 100) argues that 'different metaphors imply different ways of dealing with things'. Terrorism therefore, interpreted as a dangerous disease and an extreme threat to all human beings, had to be eliminated and cut out.

Clinton's discursive construction of terrorism and counterterrorism can be traced to late in the first term of his presidency, specifically after two significant terrorist attacks occurred in Japan and on US territory: the 1995 sarin gas attack in Japan and the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. The 1995 gas attack in Japan played a key role in the construction of Clinton's terrorist narratives, and was mentioned in many presidential speeches, as well as many official documents and reports. For instance, when stressing the threat of weapons of mass destruction, Clinton mentioned that 'no one is immune to their danger … the sarin gas attack in the subway injured thousands of commuters' (Clinton, 1996b, p. 790); and, 'as we have seen this year in Japan, chemical weapons can threaten our security and that of our allies, whether as a instrument of war or of terrorism' (Clinton, 1995b, p. 1725). Although this was an attack on a foreign ally rather than directly against the United States, the US government took various lessons from it.

To many terrorism experts and academics, this incident showed that weapons of mass destruction were now available to a great many terrorists. It was suggested that more and more terrorists would likely utilize chemical and biological weapons to attack mass-civilian targets because these weapons were easy to acquire and possess (see Laqueur, 1996; Deutch, 1997). This incident was also thought to mark a turning point in the history of terrorism, because for the first time a non-state terrorist group had used chemical and biological weapons to attack civilian non-combatants (see RAND, 1999). In addition, it was seen as a defining incident for all discussions of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) terrorism (ibid, p. 40). Before this tragedy, terrorist attacks that involved the use of weapons of mass destruction were merely part of a theoretical scenario discussed by terrorism experts and national security practitioners. However, the 1995 sarin nerve gas attack came to symbolize how the threat of weapons of mass destruction was no longer a theoretical possibility, but had become a reality.

The discursive construction of Clinton's terrorism and counterterrorism discourse was also heavily influenced by the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, particularly in terms of its contribution to Clinton's interpretation of 'home-grown' terrorism. Clinton expanded Reagan's notion of international terrorism to construct a new threat of 'home-grown' terrorism. In contrast to other terrorist attacks in the 1990s, the Oklahoma City bombing stands out as an instance of white extremist terrorism that

originated on US soil. Even more alarming for the administration, the two main suspects, Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, were American nationals. The terrorists were not motivated by discontent with US foreign policy, nor were they under the influence of a religious cult. Instead, they merely disagreed with the authorities' gun control policies and strongly supported the militia movement (see Linenthal, 2001). Following the Oklahoma City bombing, the Clinton administration amended its anti-terrorism legislation, which had initially concentrated on fighting international terrorism, in order to address the threat of 'home-grown' terrorism (see Clinton, 1995c, p. 633; 1996d, pp. 630–632).

The Oklahoma City bombing and the Tokyo sarin gas attack both appeared to display characteristics of modern terrorism: its boundless nature, and the novel means adopted by the terrorists. In his public rhetoric, the president emphasized how, with this transformation of terrorism, no one was immune from the terrorist threat. Importantly, the discursive construction of a borderless threat was also a noted feature of Bush's 'war on terror' discourse and an essential part of US homeland security after the 2001 terrorist attacks. With this 'new terrorism', Clinton asserted:

> we become vulnerable to two kinds of terrorism: first of all, what you might call home-grown terrorism, what you experienced in the Japanese subway, what we experienced at Oklahoma City; secondly, terrorism that is generated or at least involves, interests from beyond your borders, such as what we experienced at the World Trade Centre in New York [...]. (Clinton, 1996a, p. 589)

Clinton's construction of the 'new terrorism' would eventually provide a key rhetorical foundation for the Bush administration's responses to the terrorist attacks of September 11. For example, when discussing the threat of terrorism, Cofer Black, Bush's Spokesman Coordinator for Counterterrorism, claimed that 'the threat of international terrorism knows no boundaries' (quoted in Jackson, 2005, p. 100). Similarly, President Bush himself stressed that the government had to 'give law enforcement the additional tools it needs to track down terror here at home' (quoted in ibid, p. 112). This rhetoric employs nearly identical discursive strategies as the Clinton administration's attempts to portray the threat of terrorism as boundless.

It is also worth noting that 'cyber-terrorism', a new tactic used by modern terrorists, was articulated in Clinton's terrorism discourse, and also by the Bush administration after the tragedy of September 11, 2001. Clinton's cyber-terrorism narrative closely echoed his interpretation of the new terrorism as boundless. Owing to the convenience of modern technology and the opportunities provided by the internet, terrorists found it easier to breach the traditional boundaries of nation states, and attack private and governmental facilities to achieve widespread social disruption. Data from experts also showed that there was a dramatic increase in the number of people worldwide who possessed the skills to carry out cyber attacks, climbing from a few thousand in the early 1980s to 17 million in 1996; it was projected that the

number would reach 19 million by 2001 (*Critical Foundations: Protecting American's Infrastructures*, 1997, p. 9). Clinton responded to this by announcing:

> Hackers break into government and business computers. They can raid banks, run up credit card charges, extort money by threats to unleash computer viruses. If we fail to take strong action, the terrorists, criminals and hostile regimes could invade and paralyze these vital system, disrupting commerce, threatening health, [and] weakening our capacity to function in a crisis […]. (Clinton, 1998, p. 826)

For the Clinton administration, cyber-terrorism was not merely a possible scenario; it was now a fact of everyday life.

Apart from the focus on cyber-terrorism, the Clinton administration also highlighted the presence of external threats from so-called 'rogue states'. Reagan's terrorism discourse had previously stressed that in terms of the sponsorship of terrorism the Soviet Union was not the only participating government. Reagan asserted that:

> Most of the terrorists who are kidnapping and murdering American citizens and attacking American installations are being trained, financed and directly or indirectly controlled by a core group of radical and totalitarian governments – a new, international version of Murder, Incorporated. (quoted in Winkler, 2006, p. 86)

According to Reagan, 'all of these states are united by one simple criminal phenomenon – their fanatical hatred of the United States, our people, our way of life, our international stature' (quoted in ibid.).

Clinton adopted the same language and added such expressions to his terrorism discourse. During the Clinton era, the United States successfully associated the terrorism issue with rogue states and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The Clinton administration claimed that these countries attempted to harbor terrorists, destroy peace in the Middle East, and they had established close relationships with various groups designated as terrorist organizations by the US Department of State. In official language, these countries were thus explicitly labeled as allies of terrorists who hated the United States. The Clinton administration further argued that rogue states, together with terrorists, international criminals and drug traffickers, constituted a 'nexus of new threats' that menaced US national security in the post-Cold War world (Clinton, 1996e, p. 2135; 1996f, pp. 2151–2152). While making comments on the so-called 'rogue threat', President Clinton stated:

> nations like Iran and Iraq and Libya […] aim to destabilize the region. They harbor terrorists within their borders. They establish and support terrorist base camps in other lands; they hunger for nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. (Clinton, 1995g, p. 616)

To tackle the threat posed by rogue states, President Clinton declared that US policy toward these countries was simple: 'they must be contained' (Clinton, 1995g, p. 616).[6]

Beyond this, the Clinton administration claimed that the United States also had an obligation to help these states transform themselves into constructive members of the international community (Lake, 1994, p. 46). Similar to Clinton, after the 2001 World Trade Center bombing, Bush directly associated terrorism with the threat of rogue states and weapons of mass destruction. In his 2002 State of the Union address, Bush mentioned that 'states like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger' (quoted in Jackson, 2005, p. 106). In other words, based on the rhetorical foundations established by Clinton, Bush used the same rhetoric to label and construct US enemies and highlight the threat of catastrophic terrorism.

A close study of Clinton's terrorism discourse reveals that at the beginning of his first term, counterterrorism policy was not a central preoccupation of the US government. However, the Tokyo sarin gas attack and the Oklahoma City bombing prompted the Clinton administration to reassess the priorities of US national security policy and formulate a robust counterterrorism strategy. Following this reassessment, the terrorism issue was then frequently mentioned in presidential rhetoric and stressed by many senior US officials. The Clinton administration also declared on many occasions that terrorism was one of the most dangerous threats to the United States during the post-Cold War period. For example, in his remarks at the United States Air Force Academy, Clinton argued that 'fighting terrorism is a big part of our national security today, and it will be well into the 21st century' (Clinton, 1995d, p. 768). Similarly, Warren Christopher, the Secretary of State, echoed the president's language when he mentioned that 'none of the challenges we now face is more pressing than the fight against terrorism. Terrorism destroys innocent lives. It undermines a society's sense of security' (Christopher, 1996). During the Clinton presidency, such statements were ubiquitous in administration rhetoric.

Overall, during the 8 years of his presidency, Clinton articulated a specific interpretation of terrorism, detailing the features of 'new terrorism' and the scenarios of potential terrorist attacks. Based on the foundation of the 'war on terrorism' constructed by the Reagan administration, Clinton expanded Reagan's interpretation of international terrorism by adding the threat posed by 'home-grown' terrorists. Clinton also stressed the danger of catastrophic terrorism that involved rogue states, weapons of mass destruction and cyber-terrorism. In so doing, Clinton's discourse provided a rhetorical context and foundation for the Bush administration to respond to the tragedy of September 11, 2001. It maintained a continuity of US counterterrorism policies from Reagan to Clinton and Bush.

The Social Practices of US Terrorism Discourse: Political Consequences and Social Effects

As previously discussed, a central theme of Clinton's terrorism discourse was writing the new terrorist threat, and then 'selling' the subsequent counter-terrorist policies to the public. During Clinton's tenure, the administration undertook counterterrorism initiatives, including, among others, anti-terrorism legislation, international cooperation in the fight against terrorism, the enhancement of aviation safety and security, and shifts in military strategy.

It is argued that the most significant anti-terrorism achievement of the Clinton administration was the promotion of the Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (AEDPA). Following the two tragedies that occurred in 1995, namely, the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and the gas attack in Japan, the Clinton administration was stunned by the increased threat of so-called catastrophic terrorism featuring characteristics of home-grown terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In response to these attacks, law enforcement agencies were commanded to enhance and sharpen their counterterrorism capabilities.

Responding to requests from law enforcement officers, in May 1995 the Clinton administration sent the Anti-terrorism Amendment Act of 1995 to Congress. This legislation called for an increase in the powers of law enforcement agencies to combat domestic terrorism (Clinton, 1995c, p. 633). In order to persuade the Congress and American citizens to accept the new anti-terrorism legislation, Clinton powerfully demonstrated the urgency and necessity of the law. He reminded American citizens of the tragedy they had experienced, and reiterated the severe danger modern terrorism posed. The main theme of Clinton's counterterrorism discourse was simple and clear: America was now vulnerable to the threat of terrorism, and terrorism was severely challenging US national security and its way of life. Clinton stated that terrorism and terrorists 'threaten our common peace, our freedom, our way of life' (Clinton, 1995a, p. 575; 1995e, p. 573). For these reasons, new anti-terrorism legislation was considered to be indispensable. In the president's words:

> we mustn't let our country fight the war against terrorism ill-armed or ill-prepared. I want us to be armed with 1000 more FBI agents. I want the ability to monitor high-tech communications among far-flung terrorists. I want to be able to have our people learn their plans before they strike. (Clinton, 1995h, p. 721)

Along with AEDPA 1996, during his presidency, Clinton signed several Executive Orders (EOs) regarding anti-terrorism efforts, including EO 12938: Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, EO 12947 and EO 13099: Prohibiting Transactions with Terrorists Who Threaten to Disrupt the Middle East Peace Process, and EO 13129: Blocking Property and Prohibiting Transactions with the Taliban. Through the discursive construction of terrorism as a major, boundless threat challenging both

the American way of life and the traditional values Americans believe in, Clinton's 'new' terrorism discourse eventually became a 'reality' explicitly articulated in numerous official documents and was accepted as a common 'grid of intelligibility' (see Milliken, 1999) shared by counterterrorism practitioners, as well as the American public. According to the polling data provided by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, the percentage of Americans who believed international terrorism was a critical threat to the United States increased from 69 per cent in 1994 to 84 per cent in 1998 (*US General Population Topline Report*, 2002, p. 92). In addition, in 1998, 76 per cent of US citizens worried about the threat of chemical and biological weapons (ibid, p. 93). The polling date illustrated that through the process of discursive practice, in which discourse is constructed, circulated and understood, the new terrorism 'reality' had been constituted and accepted by many in Clinton's era.

As well as the new anti-terrorism legislation, shifts in US national security strategy and military doctrine were also discursive achievements of Clinton's presidency. In February 1995, the Clinton administration released its *National Security Strategy* (*NSS*). In the *NSS*, terrorism was clearly articulated as a significant threat to the United States in a 'new' security environment, and combating terrorism was identified as one of the key tasks of US military forces in the post-Cold War era. As explicitly articulated in the *NSS*:

> as long as terrorist groups continue to target American citizens and interests, the United States will need to have specialized units available to defeat such groups. From time to time, we might also find it necessary to strike terrorists at their bases abroad or to attack assets valued by the governments that support them. (*NSS*, 1995, p. 10)

To fight the terrorist threat, the US counterterrorism policy was

> to make no concessions to terrorists, continue to pressure state sponsors of terrorism, fully exploit all available legal mechanisms to punish international terrorists and help other governments improve their capabilities to combat terrorism. (*NSS*, 1995, p. 10)

The *NSS* was understood as a guideline that helped to frame Clinton's foreign and security policies; it also laid out elements of the worldview and political ideals of the Clinton presidency.

In June 1995, Clinton further signed the *Presidential Directive Decision 39* (*PDD 39*) that reiterated the US government's 'no concession' policy toward terrorism and terrorists (Clarke, 2004, p. 92). In this document, the Clinton administration claimed that the United States would act decisively and adopt both defensive and offensive actions to 'reduce the capabilities and support available to terrorists' and to 'reduce vulnerabilities at home and abroad' (*PDD 39*). In addition, the significance of enhancing the counterterrorism capabilities of the United States to 'detect', 'prevent', 'defeat' and 'manage' the consequences of chemical, biological, and nuclear

materials and weapons utilized by terrorists, was stressed. The articulation of *PDD 39* shows that before the 2001 terrorist attacks, the preemptive use of force – one of the essential elements of the subsequent Bush Doctrine – had already been adopted by US policy-making elites in order to combat terrorism and prevent the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction by terrorists.

As well as the articulation of *NSS* and *PDD 39*, William Perry, Clinton's Secretary of Defense, introduced and described a new concept of US military strategy – Preventive Defence – during the second term of Clinton's presidency. The new military strategy was based on three essential priorities: to prevent threats from emerging, to deter threats that do emerge and to defeat threats using military force, if prevention and deterrence fail (Perry, 1996, p. 65). The shift of US military strategy illustrated that Clinton's presidential rhetoric about the new terrorism had eventually become a kind of policy-based 'common sense' broadly shared by the key figures of the Clinton administration, and it functioned to sustain the existing counterterrorism 'regime of truth'. The imminent threat of terrorism, through its interpretation by powerful elites, had become a central political 'reality' of American society.

In addition to some of the concrete discursive achievements mentioned, it is also worth noting the broader social effects of Clinton's terrorism and counterterrorism discourse. The most influential effect of social practice of the terrorism discourse is the construction of the subject. The construction of the subject not only shaped knowledge of terrorism but also affected subsequent practices of anti-terrorism. For example, when terrorism was depicted as a 'disease', a 'plague' or a 'cancer', this kind of interpretation suggested a particular approach to the problem; that is, it should be 'eliminated', as that is the only way to wipe out the disease. During the Clinton presidency, the United States launched several military operations aimed at 'eliminating' the terrorist threat, such as its responses to Iraq's attempt to assassinate the former President George H.W. Bush in 1993, and to the 1998 African embassy bombings. According to public opinion polls, 61 per cent of Americans supported the president's decision to bomb Iraq, and more than 70 per cent of US citizens supported US raids on terrorist installations in Sudan and Afghanistan (Hendrickson, 2002, pp. 112, 144). In addition, approximately 77 per cent of American opinion leaders supported the US government's decision to launch air strikes against terrorist training camps and other facilities (*US Leaders Topline Report*, 2002, p. 51). The result of the public opinion polls demonstrates the degree to which the administration's terrorism discourse resonated with the public, thus enabling officials to carry out the desired military operations.

Another social effect of the terrorism discourse is that the construction of the subject created a specific cultural understanding of terrorism. For example, the nature of terrorism was constructed as mere brutality and violence, terrorists were inherently 'evil', and were 'psychos', 'fanatics' and members of 'religious cults'. The interpretation of terrorists as 'fanatics' and 'killers' functioned to depoliticize their purposes by attributing their violence to religious, other-worldly or psychopathic causes. However, the causal link between religion and violence has been challenged

and questioned by many academics (see Jackson, 2007; Gunning and Jackson, 2011). Research suggests that there is insufficient evidence that religion is the central cause of political violence. Similarly, Pape and Feldman (2010) strongly argued that foreign military occupation, and the United States's pro-Israeli foreign policies, are the major concerns of so-called Islamist terrorists, rather than Islamic fundamentalism.

The conclusion of recent research suggests that the counterterrorism 'regime of truth' is constructed and sustained through the production and reproduction of discourse. When the terrorism discourse is consumed and accepted as 'truth' and as 'taken-for-granted' knowledge, other approaches and discourses are silenced and marginalized, such as state terrorism (Chomsky, 2002; Stohl, 2006), nonviolent response to terrorism (Hastings, 2004; Goerzig, 2010; Toros, 2012), and the political causes of terrorism (Eland, 1998; Pape and Feldman, 2010). In terms of WMD terrorism, for example, scholars have recently argued that there is no need to exaggerate this threat because the possibility of an attack is very low and it is very difficult for terrorists to possess and deliver chemical or biological agents (Carpintero-Santamaria and Mueller, 2012, pp. 85–87). Despite the existence of thousands of terrorist groups throughout history and tens of thousands of terrorist attacks over the past 40 years, there have been very few attacks using WMD (Jackson, 2011a, p. 138). In past decades, the most serious incidents are the 1995 Tokyo sarin gas attack and the anthrax letters sent in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks (Bolanos *et al*, 2012, p. 40). As Brian Jenkins, a long-standing RAND specialist has argued, 'deliberate attempts to kill as many people as possible in one violent action are rare' (Jenkins, 1995, p. 44), and 'terrorists want many witnesses, not many dead' (ibid.).

With regard to the threat of state-sponsored terrorism, the Gilmore Commission, a Clinton-appointed advisory panel formed to assess response capabilities to WMD-related terrorist incidents in the United States, concluded in its final report that rogue states would hesitate to entrust such weapons to terrorists because their actions are unpredictable and there is a possibility that terrorists might also utilize these weapons against their state-sponsors (see RAND, 2003). In addition to this, the subsequent consequences that rogue states would face (for instance, their international obligations) are likely to prevent these states from utilizing WMDs. In other words, the apocalyptic scenarios described in presidential rhetoric, and by key figures of their administrations, are of questionable validity and utility.

Conclusion

Clinton's terrorism and counterterrorism discourse reveals real continuity in US counterterrorism policy, which may indicate a limited capacity for change between administrations. According to the research presented here, there is evidence of an established tradition whereby Washington elites utilize a similar rhetorical strategy to

construct their interpretation of terrorism, and this tradition has continued through the administrations of Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. They all adopted similar themes and narratives in their discursive constructions of terrorism and counterterrorism, particularly in terms of the interpretation of the terrorist threat, and the requirement of counterterrorism measures. Officials repeatedly claimed that terrorism threatened the American way of life, challenged the core values of the nation and intended to disrupt American society. These actions could not be tolerated, they further claimed, and the United States had to act decisively to protect the values Americans firmly believed in. Leading the world in this fight against terrorism was not only the international obligation of the United States but also its historical burden. Language used by officials created a powerful framework for the authorities to normalize and justify their political decisions, and served to maintain the counterterrorism 'regime of truth' that has been further expanded and institutionalized in Bush's war on terror and Obama's counterterrorism approaches (see McCrisken, 2011; Jackson, 2011b). Through its articulation and re-articulation, the threat of terrorism has come to form part of a common 'grid of intelligibility' (see Milliken, 1999) that is broadly shared by policymakers and the public. Most important of all, the dominant discourse has functioned to exclude other alternative measures, suppress dissent, silence other opinions, such as the 'war for oil' discourse (Croft, 2006), state terrorism (Stohl, 2006; Jackson, 2008b), and nonviolent responses to terrorism (Hasting, 2004; Goerzig, 2010; Toros, 2012). Simultaneously, it determined alternative future courses of counterterrorism action – for example, drone strikes, civil surveillance and target-killing programs.

However, it is also important to note that although the different presidencies exhibited many similarities, slight variations still existed between them. For Reagan, international terrorism and state-sponsored terrorism were the great concerns of his administration. In his 1985 speech delivered before the American Bar Association, Reagan claimed that the Soviet Union was no longer the sole source of terrorism; instead, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Cuba and Nicaragua were emerging as the primary enemies of the United States (Winkler, 2006, p. 84). Reagan's interpretation of terrorism stressed that terrorism was the antithesis of democracy. He also suggested that acts of terrorism may be evidence of the strength of democracy in the Cold War world. As the United States was the exemplar of an effective democracy, it became the natural target of terrorists (ibid, pp. 84–85).

Like his predecessor, Clinton adopted Reagan's expression of state-sponsored terrorism, and depicted terrorists as 'enemies of peace'. Based on Reagan's first 'war on terrorism', Clinton expanded Reagan's interpretation of international terrorism and broadly related terrorism to issues of rogue states, weapons of mass destruction and a threat to peace in the Middle East. For Clinton, these issues were inter-related and could not be discussed separately. Clinton claimed that rogue states harbored terrorists, maintained close relationships with various terrorist organizations, sought to possess weapons of mass destruction and hated peace and

democracy. In addition, he emphasized the threat of 'home-grown' terrorism and the possibility of catastrophic terrorism aimed at the mass killing of civilians. The Clinton administration also focused its counterterrorism initiatives on non-state terrorism, such as that practiced by bin Laden and his Al Qaeda accomplices, along with Hamas, Hezbollah and the Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ). The definition and interpretation of terrorism and terrorists directly affected the framing of the Clinton administration's counterterrorism policy, as well as its counterterrorism practices. During the Clinton presidency, the promotion of anti-terrorism legislation, international cooperation with US allies and the enhancement of aviation security were seen as the three pillars of US counterterrorism strategy, and were explicitly articulated in the president's counterterrorism discourse.

Furthermore, it can be argued that the Clinton administration constructed the main rhetorical foundation for the Bush administration to construct its response to terrorism. After the tragedy of September 11, 2001, Bush employed the same rhetorical strategy to formulate his public terrorism discourse, such as when he labeled enemies of the United States as the 'Axis of Evil', and stressed the danger of terrorism as an unlimited, potentially catastrophic threat. The Bush administration also related terrorism to issues of rogue states and weapons of mass destruction, and these narratives became institutionalized in subsequent US counterterrorism practices. The construction of catastrophic terrorism resonated with the American public and became a form of commonsense during Clinton's and Bush's presidencies. In 2002, according to the polling data provided by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, more than 85 per cent of Americans worried about the possibility of unfriendly countries becoming nuclear powers, while 86 per cent of US citizens thought that the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons would threaten US national security (*US General Population Topline Report*, 2002, pp. 92–93).

Similar to his predecessors, Bush also adopted a military approach to respond to terrorist attacks, and clearly defined terrorism as an 'act of war'. Bush's interpretation of terrorism and his war rhetoric in turn directly led to US overseas military operations, namely, Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001 and Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. In the name of counterterrorism, the Bush administration was able to defend its policy of war on terror, both domestic and international, using the rhetorical framework established by Clinton.

The Global War on Terror launched by Bush, it could therefore be said, was the next logical step along the course of rhetoric and practice established by Clinton, as the use of force to respond to terrorist attacks was already widely held as an 'extraordinary step' during the Clinton administration. Richard Clarke (2004), Clinton's chief counterterrorism advisor on the National Security Council, argued that since the mid-1990s, the United States has been dedicated to monitoring, tracing and assassinating bin Laden and the key members of Al Qaeda (see also Chollet and Goldgeier, 2008, p. 263). In 1998, the Clinton administration also bombed Al Qaeda's

terrorist facilities in Sudan and Afghanistan. George Tenet, former director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, had explicitly indicated in a memo that 'Americans are at war' (Dumbrell, 2009, p. 138). In addition, in order to address the problem of Saddam Hussein and weapons of mass destruction, Clinton, in his second term, considered the possibility of regime change in Iraq (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007; Freedman, 2009). In 1998, with promotion from neoconservatives, the US Congress passed the Iraq Liberation Act aimed at toppling Saddam's regime (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007, p. 244; Freedman, 2009, p. 297).[7] Public opinion showed at the end of 1998 that both US citizens and the US Congress all expected a regime change in Iraq, and that if military force had to be used, it should be utilized to overthrow Saddam Hussein rather than merely support UN authorized missions (Freedman, 2009, p. 297). In 1993, 1996, 1998 and 2000, the United States also launched various military operations targeted at Iraq and its facilities alleged to hold weapons of mass destruction (Hendrickson, 2002; Albright, 2003; Indyk, 2009). Taken in sum, the analysis of the discourse and practice of the Clinton administration demonstrates a strong line of continuity in US counterterrorism policies between the Clinton and Bush presidencies, and illustrates that the discursive origins of the war on terror in fact lie in the earlier period.

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Notes

1 According to Foucault (2002, p. 131), each society has its 'regime of truth'. Foucault (ibid.) elaborates by stating that the concept of 'regime of truth' can be understood as the types of discourse that are perceived and function as true; the specific mechanisms or some instances that enable individuals to distinguish true and false interpretations; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; and the status of those who have the authority to affect public opinion and decide what is true.

2 Duyvesteyn (2004, p. 443) argued that the so-called 'new terrorism' is characterized by four features. First, the perpetrators of terrorism act transnationally, and operate in loosely organized networks. Second, religion is the key motivator for terrorists and terrorist organizations. Terrorists act for religious causes, and are therefore seen as religious fanatics. Third, terrorists seek weapons of mass destruction in order to kill as many people as possible. Fourth, terrorists do not differentiate between military combatants and civilians.

3 According to Norman Fairclough (1992), the purpose of 'intertextuality' is to shed light on the function of the existing text(s), especially focusing on how the writer utilizes the existing text(s) to construct the new text(s).

4 In contrast to other scholars, such as Laclau and Mouffe, who identify all social practices as discourse. Fairclough indicates and confines the term 'discourse' to semiotic systems such as language and images, and therefore, there are various discourses. In addition to this, each type of discourse represents a specific way of thinking and a particular way of understanding (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002, pp. 66–67).

5 The term 'communicative event' is defined by Fairclough as an instance of language use, such as, for example, a newspaper article, a film, a video, an interview or a given political speech (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 70).

6 After the 2001 World Trade Center bombings, US foreign policy toward rogue states shifted from Clinton's containment approach to George W. Bush's regime change plans. The Bush administration suggested that regimes in the so-called 'rogue states' needed to be removed before they could pose a major threat.

7 Recent research (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007, pp. 243–244; Freedman, 2009) has argued that since the 1990s, neoconservatives, led by Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld, Robert Kagan, John Bolton, Elliott Abrams, Richard Perle and Bernard Lewis, had prompted a regime change plan in Iraq, and urged the Clinton administration to overthrow Saddam Hussein regime. Many of the neoconservative pundits later served as key figures of President George W. Bush's national security team and played important roles in the framing of US foreign and security policies.

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