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Constructing Enemies: ‘Islamic Terrorism’ in Political and Academic Discourse

ONE OF THE IMPORTANT CONSEQUENCES OF THE 11 SEPTEMBER 2001 attacks was a rapid transformation in the security priorities of many Western states and international organizations. In a relatively short space of time, terrorism emerged as arguably the single most important security issue; its elevation up the list of priorities quickly engendered an impressive array of new anti-terrorism laws, agencies, doctrines, strategies, programmes, initiatives and measures. The terrorism threat is now a major focus of policy-making attention and commands enormous intellectual and material investment from the security establishment, the emergency services, industry and commerce, the academy and the media. At the same time, the terrorism discourse – the terms, assumptions, labels, categories and narratives used to describe and explain terrorism – has emerged as one of the most important political discourses of the modern era, alongside climate change, human rights, global poverty and arms proliferation. As a term of elite and popular discourse, terrorism has come to possess clearly observable ideographic qualities.² That is, like ‘freedom’, ‘democracy’ and ‘justice’, ‘terrorism’ now functions as a primary term for the central narratives of the culture, employed in political debate and daily conversation, but largely unquestioned in its meaning and usage.

A ubiquitous feature of contemporary terrorism discourse, observable in a great many political, academic and cultural texts, is the

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² Carol Winkler, *In the Name of Terrorism: Presidents on Political Violence in the Post-World War II Era*, Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 2006, pp. 11–16.

deeply problematic notion of 'Islamic terrorism', a term that comes laden with its own set of unacknowledged assumptions and embedded political-cultural narratives. The political significance of this particular discursive formation can be discerned in the not insignificant material and intellectual investment committed by public agencies to the project of combating 'radicalization'. The purpose of this article is to engage in a discursive critique of the 'Islamic terrorism' discourse. Specifically, it aims to describe and dissect its central terms, assumptions, labels, narratives and genealogical roots, and to reflect on the political and normative consequences of the language and knowledge production of 'Islamic terrorism'. It concludes that the discourse of 'Islamic terrorism' is profoundly unhelpful, not least because it is highly politicized, intellectually contestable, damaging to community relations and largely counter-productive in the struggle to control subaltern violence in the long run.

THE ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE

The analytical approach employed in this study falls broadly under the mantle of discourse analysis.³ A form of critical theorizing, discourse analysis aims primarily to illustrate and describe the relationship between textual and social processes. In particular, it is concerned with the politics of representation – the manifest political consequences of adopting one mode of representation over another. Although discourse theorizing is employed within a range of different epistemological paradigms – poststructuralist, postmodernist, feminist and social constructivist – it is predicated on a shared set of theoretical commitments. Broadly speaking, these include:⁴ an

³ For an insightful discussion of discourse analytic approaches in international relations, see: Jennifer Milliken, 'The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods', *European Journal of International Relations*, 5: 2 (1999), pp. 225–54. See also: Mark Laffey and Jutta Weldes, 'Beyond Belief: Ideas and Symbolic Technologies in the Study of International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations*, 3: 2 (1997), pp. 193–237; Trevor Purvis and Alan Hunt, 'Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology . . .', *British Journal of Sociology*, 44: 3 (1993), pp. 473–99; and Albert Yee, 'The Causal Effects of Ideas on Politics', *International Organization*, 50: 1 (1996), pp. 69–108.

⁴ These shared commitments are explored in detail in Milliken, 'The Study of Discourse'.

understanding of language as constitutive or productive of meaning; an understanding of discourse as structures of signification that construct social realities, particularly in terms of defining subjects and establishing their relational positions within a system of signification;⁵ an understanding of discourse as being productive of subjects authorized to speak and act, legitimate forms of knowledge and political practices and importantly, common sense within particular social groups and historical settings; an understanding of discourse as necessarily exclusionary and silencing of other modes of representation; and an understanding of discourse as historically and culturally contingent, intertextual, open-ended, requiring continuous articulation and re-articulation and therefore, open to destabilization and counter-hegemonic struggle.

On this epistemological foundation and adopting an interpretive logic rather than a causal logic, the discourse analytic technique employed in this article proceeded in two stages. The first stage entailed a close examination of texts representative of the 'Islamic terrorism' discourse, particularly those by actors presumed to be authoritative or authorized speakers of the dominant discourse. As such, the primary units of analysis or 'data' for this research were more than 300 written and spoken English-language 'Western' texts authored primarily between 2001 and late 2006, including: (1) official speeches and documents of senior policy makers; (2) books, articles and reports by major think-tanks, public intellectuals and journalists; and (3) academic books and scholarly articles in the core terrorism studies and international relations journals. Each text was examined for the labels, assumptions, narratives, predicates, metaphors, inferences and arguments they deployed and the kinds of existing cultural-political narratives and pre-existing texts they drew upon. Employing a 'grounded theory' approach, the analysis was assumed to be completed or validated when it was found that adding new texts generated no new categories or insights beyond those developed through the examination of earlier texts.

⁵ For an excellent study on subject positioning and its political consequences, see Roxanne Doty, 'Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines', *International Studies Quarterly*, 37 (1993), pp. 297–320.

The second stage of the research involved subjecting the findings of the textual analysis to both a first- and second-order critique. A first-order or immanent critique uses a discourse's internal contradictions, mistakes and misconceptions to criticize it on its own terms and expose the events and perspectives that the discourse fails to acknowledge or address. The point of this form of internal critique is not necessarily to establish the 'correct' or 'real truth' of the subject beyond doubt, but rather to destabilize dominant interpretations and demonstrate the inherently contested and political nature of the discourse.

A second-order critique entails reflecting on the broader political and ethical consequences – the ideological effects – of the representations enabled by the discourse. Specifically, it involves an exploration of the ways in which the discourse functions as a 'symbolic technology',⁶ wielded by particular elites and institutions, to: structure the primary subject positions, accepted knowledge, commonsense and legitimate policy responses to the actors and events being described; exclude and de-legitimize alternative knowledge and practice; naturalize a particular political and social order; and construct and maintain a hegemonic regime of truth. A range of specific discourse analytic techniques are useful in second-order critique: genealogical analysis, predicate analysis, narrative analysis and deconstructive analysis.⁷ Importantly, the exposure and destabilization of dominant forms of knowledge opens up critical space for the articulation of alternative and potentially emancipatory forms of knowledge and practice.

'ISLAMIC TERRORISM' IN POLITICAL AND ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

Despite its apparent sudden ubiquity in the public arena, the notion of 'Islamic terrorism' actually has a long history and is already deeply embedded in the broader cultural, institutional and discursive structures of Western society. In this section, I provide an overview of the main genealogical roots, discursive foundations and core narratives of the 'Islamic terrorism' discourse.

⁶ See Laffey and Weldes, 'Beyond Belief'.

⁷ For explanation of these techniques, see: Milliken, 'The Study of Discourse'; and Doty, 'Foreign Policy as Social Construction', p. 306.

The Genealogy of the 'Islamic Terrorism' Discourse

Discourses produce meaning in part through drawing upon the linguistic resources and specific discursive opportunity structures – or the extant cultural raw materials – of a particular social context: 'texts always refer back to other texts which themselves refer still to other texts', in other words.⁸ A genealogical approach to discourse therefore can help us understand how current forms of knowledge have been naturalized through time and discursive practice. This is not the place to outline a detailed genealogy of the contemporary 'Islamic terrorism' discourse, but simply to suggest that three discernible discursive traditions would seem important for understanding its present form.

First and foremost, the current discourse of 'Islamic terrorism' is rooted in the assumptions, theories and knowledge of terrorism studies – a discrete field of academic research that has grown tremendously and gained genuine authority since the 11 September terrorist attacks. The notion of 'Islamic terrorism' appears to have emerged from studies of 'religious terrorism', a subject founded largely on David Rapoport's seminal article from 1984.⁹ Since then, a number of core texts and scholars have established reputations as leading sources of expert knowledge in 'Islamic terrorism'.¹⁰ As later sections of this article demonstrate, a great many of the central labels and narratives of the 'Islamic terrorism' discourse are drawn from this body of work. Importantly, through well-established networks of influence linking 'terrorism experts' with the policy-making estab-

⁸ Doty, 'Foreign Policy as Social Construction', p. 302. See also: Jutta Weldes, 'Constructing National Interests', *European Journal of International Relations*, 2: 3 (1996), p. 284.

⁹ Rapoport's article is probably the most cited academic text in the 'religious terrorism' sub-field. See David Rapoport, 'Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions', *American Political Science Review*, 78: 3 (1984), pp. 658–77.

¹⁰ Following David Rapoport's article, and containing all the central narratives of 'Islamic terrorism' discussed below, the most commonly cited and authoritative 'religious terrorism' texts include, among others: Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1998; Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999; Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 2000; Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*, New York, HarperCollins, 2003; and Magnus Ranstorp, 'Terrorism in the Name of Religion', *Journal of International Affairs*, 50: 1 (1996), pp. 41–62.

lishment many of these narratives have become politically influential.¹¹

Secondly, the discourse derives a great many of its core assumptions, labels and narratives from the long tradition and archive of orientalist scholarship on the Middle East and Arab culture and religion.¹² This literature expanded rapidly in response to the tumultuous events in the Middle East in the 1970s and 1980s – such as the 1972 Munich massacre, the 1973 oil shocks, the 1979 Iranian revolution and embassy hostage crisis, the Rushdie affair and the terrorist kidnappings and hijackings of the 1980s. It has been greatly stimulated once again by the 9/11 attacks and subsequent war on terrorism. Importantly, Samuel Huntington's highly influential 1993 essay 'The Clash of Civilizations?', the title of which is derived from a much-cited article by Bernard Lewis,¹³ reproduced a number of orientalist claims for an international affairs audience and it is therefore an important antecedent of the current 'Islamic terrorism' discourse.¹⁴ As with terrorism studies scholars, a great many identifiable orientalist Middle East scholars, including Bernard Lewis, Noah

¹¹ For incisive accounts of the networks of influence linking terrorism scholars to government agencies, see: Jonny Burnett and Dave Whyte, 'Embedded Expertise and the New Terrorism', *Journal for Crime, Conflict and the Media*, 1: 4 (2005), pp. 1–18; Alexander George, 'The Discipline of Terrorology', in Alexander George (ed.), *Western State Terrorism*, Cambridge, Polity, 1991; and Edward Herman and Gerry O'Sullivan, *The 'Terrorism' Industry*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1990.

¹² Orientalism is a system of knowledge based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between the orient and the occident in which the orient is constructed largely as a negative inversion of Western culture, and which employs a series of biological and cultural generalizations and racial and religious prejudices, including depictions of 'Arab' cultures as irrational, violent, backward, anti-Western, savage, dishonest and the like. For detailed analysis of past and recent orientalist scholarship, see among others: Edward Said, *Orientalism*, London, Penguin, 1978, 2003; Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, London, Vintage, 1981, revised edition 1997; Fred Halliday, *Two Hours that Shook the World – September 11, 2001: Causes & Consequences*, London, Saqi Books, 2002, pp. 88–131; and Yahya Sadowsky, 'The New Orientalism and the Democracy Debate', in Joel Beinin and Joe Stork (eds), *Political Islam*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1996.

¹³ Bernard Lewis, 'The Roots of Muslim Rage', *Atlantic Monthly*, 266: 3 (1990), pp. 47–60.

¹⁴ Samuel Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs*, 72: 3 (1993), pp. 22–49. This article was widely distributed among US diplomatic officials and was highly influential in foreign policy discussions.

Feldman and the late Raphael Patai, have made frequent appearances as advisers and expert witnesses for official bodies, thereby transmitting many of the central assumptions and narratives of orientalist scholarship into the policy process.¹⁵

Thirdly, the discourse draws on a long tradition of cultural stereotypes and deeply hostile media representations and depictions of Islam and Muslims.¹⁶ Typically, in portraying Muslims, the mainstream media has tended to employ frameworks centred on violence, threat, extremism, fanaticism and terrorism, although there is also a visual orientalist tradition in which they are portrayed as exotic and mysterious.¹⁷ Moreover, these kinds of cultural representations have proved extremely resilient, perhaps because, as Said claims, they reflect deeper social-cultural fears, anxieties and stereotypes of the oriental 'other' that go back to the imperial age.¹⁸ For others, they are the necessary cultural corollary of contemporary forms of imperialism.¹⁹

In addition to these three primary historical discursive traditions, the post-9/11 'Islamic terrorism' discourse frequently draws upon and is embedded within a wider set of political-cultural narratives surrounding the war on terrorism, including, among others: the 'good war' narrative surrounding the struggle against fascism during

¹⁵ See Said, *Covering Islam*, p. 150; and As'ad AbuKhali, 'Book Review: "The Islam Industry" and Scholarship', *Middle East Journal*, 58: 1 (2004), pp. 130–8.

¹⁶ There is a large and sophisticated literature examining media representations of Muslims. See, among others: Elizabeth Poole and John Richardson, *Muslims and the News Media*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2006; Kai Hafez (ed.), *Islam and the West in the Mass Media: Fragmented Images in a Globalizing World*, Cresskill, NJ, Hampton Press, 2000; John Richardson, *(Mis)Representing Islam: The Racism and Rhetoric of British Broadsheet Newspapers*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 2004; Jack Sheehan, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, Northampton, MA, Interlink Publishing Group, 2004; and Reeve Simon, *The Middle East in Crime Fiction: Mysteries, Spy Novels, and Thrillers from 1916 to the 1980s*, New York, Lilian Barber Press, 1989.

¹⁷ See Elizabeth Hurd, 'Appropriating Islam: The Islamic Other in the Consolidation of Western Modernity', *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, 12: 1 (2003), pp. 25–41. Hurd demonstrates that orientalist images of the 'Muslim Other' were widely diffused across American culture in the early twentieth century, establishing important cultural templates for later constructions of Muslim tyranny, rogue states and 'Islamic terrorists'.

¹⁸ See Said, *Orientalism*.

¹⁹ See K. El Fadl (ed.), *Shattered Illusions: Analyzing the War on Terrorism*, Bristol, Amal Press, 2002.

the Second World War; mythologies of the Cold War, including the notion of 'the long war', the deeply embedded civilization-versus-barbarism narrative, the cult of innocence, the language and assumptions of the enemy within, the labels and narratives of 'rogue states', and the discourse surrounding the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.²⁰

The Discursive Foundations of the 'Islamic Terrorism' Discourse

The discourse is first and foremost founded on the deployment of a series of core labels, terms and discursive formations, including, among others: 'the Islamic world', 'the West', 'the Islamic revival', 'political Islam', 'Islamism', 'extremism', 'radicalism', 'fundamentalism', 'religious terrorism', 'jihadists', 'Wahhabis', 'Salafis', 'militants', 'moderates', 'global jihadist movement', 'al-Qaeda', and of course, 'Islamic terrorism'. Crucially, in their textual usage these terms are often vaguely defined (if at all), yet culturally loaded and highly flexible in the way they are deployed.

In addition, these labels and terms are organized into a series of dramatic oppositional binaries, such as the West versus the Islamic world, extremists versus moderates, violent versus peaceful, democratic versus totalitarian, religious versus secular, medieval versus modern and savage versus civilized. Such powerful categories function to construct 'Islamic terrorists' and 'extremists' as particular kinds of subjects within the overall discourse and enforce highly constricting subject positions upon them vis-à-vis other subjects, such as 'decent people', 'democratic states' or 'moderate Muslims', for example. Importantly, they also render unreasonable more nuanced narratives about the often-contradictory identities and characteristics of the narratives' central actors. The application of labels such as 'terrorist', 'fundamentalist' and 'extremist' to groups like Hamas and Hizbollah for example, functions to obscure their simultaneous existence as political party, social welfare provider, protection force, local

²⁰ For a discussion of these broader cultural-political narratives and the ways in which they are linked to the war on terrorism, see among others: Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counterterrorism*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2005; and Stuart Croft, *Culture, Crisis and America's War on Terror*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

association, relief agency, charity, education provider, bank, guerrilla force and the like – as well as position them as the enemy of Western societies.

The discourse also includes a series of careful qualifications that are designed to mitigate the use of labels, narratives and assumptions that in other political or cultural contexts would be considered pejorative. Thus, it is not uncommon for 'Islamic terrorism' texts to begin with statements such as: 'Most Muslims prefer a *peaceful* and inclusive version of their faith';²¹ 'Islamic terrorists' are 'inspired by a *distorted* vision of Islam and sanctify their campaign of violence through a selective reading of Quranic phrases';²² and 'We do not act against Islam. The true followers of Islam are our brothers and sisters in this struggle.'²³ Of course, in extreme expressions of the discourse, such qualifications are replaced by overt hostility towards Islam or aspects of it. However, in the majority of 'Islamic terrorism' texts, these kinds of statements are ubiquitous, but notably fail to avoid subsequent expressions of prejudicial material.

The Primary Narratives of 'Islamic Terrorism'

Discourses are never completely uniform, coherent or consistent; they have porous borders and there are often exceptions, inconsistencies and contradictions by different speakers and texts. Many of the 'Islamic terrorism' experts quoted in this section, upon a close reading of their individual texts often express much more nuanced arguments containing both supportive and oppositional statements towards the overall discourse than are presented here.²⁴ The important point is not that each text uniformly expresses all the main narratives in the same way, or even that they necessarily agree with all

²¹ The 9/11 Commission, *Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2004, p. 54, emphasis added.

²² Ray Takeyh and Nikolas Gvosdev, 'Radical Islam: The Death of an Ideology?', *Middle East Policy*, 11: 4 (2004), p. 86, emphasis added.

²³ Tony Blair, 'Address at the Labour Party Conference', 2 October 2001, at <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/tblair10-02-01.htm>, accessed 28 April, 2006.

²⁴ The noted terrorism scholar, Marc Sageman, is emblematic of this point. As the following sections clearly demonstrate, Sageman articulates many of the dominant narratives while simultaneously furnishing much of the empirical evidence used to question accepted 'knowledge' of terrorism.

of them. It is rather, that taken together as a broader discourse that has political and cultural currency, the narratives function to construct and maintain a specific understanding of, and approach to, 'Islamic terrorism'. Given the sheer size of the 'Islamic terrorism' discourse, the following discussion is merely illustrative of the primary assumptions, labels, narratives and discursive constructions of the overall discourse. In some instances, more extreme expressions of the central narratives are used to reveal the character of the discourse.

First, central to the discourse is an underlying assumption that violence – and by implication, terrorism – is inherent to Islam, because unlike Christianity, Islam makes no distinction between Church and State, has never discarded the notion of religious war,²⁵ purports to regulate both the public and private lives of Muslims and has much to say about the political life of the community. This narrative is frequently expressed opaquely in observations about Islam's prominent status in the field of religious violence. Walter Laqueur, a respected terrorism expert, suggests that while there is 'no *Muslim* or *Arab* monopoly in the field of religious fanaticism . . . the frequency of *Muslim- and Arab-inspired terrorism* is still striking', and while 'a discussion of religion-inspired terrorism cannot possibly confine itself to radical *Islam* . . . it has to take into account the *Muslim countries*' pre-eminent position in this field'.²⁶ Similarly, Barak Mendelsohn notes that 'religious extremists who wish to impose religious order exist in all religions, but evidently, *religious terrorism looms larger in Muslim societies*'.²⁷

However, there are also a great many overt expressions of this narrative. Apart from Samuel Huntington's crude assertion that 'Islam has bloody borders',²⁸ it is not uncommon to find discussions of 'the inherent, even organic connection that has always existed

²⁵ Barak Mendelsohn argues that while the doctrine and practice of 'holy war' has been discarded by Christianity historically, in Islam '*Jihad* as war against the "infidels" was never clearly rejected on a religious basis'; Barak Mendelsohn, 'Sovereignty Under Attack: The International Society Meets the Al Qaeda Network', *Review of International Studies*, 31 (2005), p. 55.

²⁶ Laqueur, *The New Terrorism*, p. 129, emphasis added.

²⁷ Mendelsohn, 'Sovereignty Under Attack', p. 57, emphasis added.

²⁸ Huntington, 'A Clash of Civilizations?', p. 35. Magnus Ranstorp similarly speaks about 'the traditionally violent Middle East, where religion and terrorism share a long history.' Ranstorp, 'Terrorism in the Name of Religion', p. 43.

between *Political Islam* and violence' due to the fact that 'Islam does not separate the realms of religion and politics.'²⁹ A prominent counter-terrorism think-tank publication argues that 'in *the Islamic world* one cannot differentiate between the political *violence of Islamic groups* and their popular support derived from religion . . . the present terrorism on the part of the Arab and Muslim world is *Islamic in nature*'.³⁰

Directly related to this, it is most frequently assumed that terrorism is directly linked to, emerges from, or is inspired by, extremist and fundamentalist forms of Islam. In particular, many texts appear to take it as axiomatic that 'Islamist', 'Wahhabist' and 'Salafist' groups are usually linked to or directly involved in terrorism. Magnus Ranstorp for example, refers to 'the Islamist movements and their respective armed terrorist wings' without any qualification at all, implying that all 'Islamist' groups naturally have a 'terrorist wing'.³¹ Reuven Paz of the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) writes of the 'Islamist terrorist culture' and 'violent Islamist ideologies, doctrines and activities'³² – implying that violence is culturally embedded within Islamism. Similarly, Marc Sageman, a noted terrorism expert, refers to 'the global Salafi jihad' and 'Salafi terrorist groups' led by al-Qaeda, arguing that 'Salafi ideology determines its mission, sets its goals, and guides its tactics'.³³ Moreover, according to Sageman, 'Al Qaeda is not only a terrorist political organization; it is also a *revivalist religious social movement*'.³⁴ The terrorism–extremism association contained in these discursive formations works to con-

²⁹ Habib Malik, 'Political Islam and the Roots of Violence', in Elliott Abrams (ed.), *The Influence of Faith: Religious Groups and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield, 2001, author's emphasis.

³⁰ Reuven Paz, 'Is There an "Islamic Terrorism"?' International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) Publication, Herzilya, Israel, 7 September 1998, available at <http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articledet.cfm?articleid=46>, accessed 12 October, 2001, emphasis added.

³¹ Ranstorp, 'Terrorism in the Name of Religion', p. 58.

³² Reuven Paz, 'Radical Islamist Terrorism: Points for Pondering', International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) Publication, Herzilya, Israel, 20 June 2001, at <http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articledet.cfm?articleid=367>, accessed 12 October, 2001.

³³ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004, p. 1.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126, emphasis added.

struct the widely accepted 'knowledge' that certain forms of Islam are by nature violent and terroristic.

However, there are other more implicit ways of associating Islam with violence and terrorism. Obviously, the use of the term 'Islamic terrorism', for example, discursively links the religion of Islam with terrorism, thereby forming an unconscious and seamless association between the two. Additionally, a great many 'Islamic terrorism' texts contain detailed discussions of Islamic doctrines of jihad, shari'a, *shahada*, *Dar al-Islam*, *Dar al-Harb*, *jahiliyyah*, *ummah*, *takfir* and the like, as well as analyses of Islamic scholars and writers such as Sayyid Qutb and Ibn Wahhab, all within the context of discussing the origins of 'Islamic terrorism'.³⁵ One such study begins with the assertion that 'Al Qaeda and the radical fundamentalists that constitute the new "global jihadi movement" are *not theological outliers*',³⁶ thereby implying that they are part of the Islamic mainstream. Intentional or not, these studies function to reinforce the perception that contemporary 'Islamic terrorism' somehow emerges from, or is indeed rooted in, Islamic doctrine and practice. In turn, this creates the impression that Islam itself is a source of threat, and in the words of the Foreign Policy Centre, that 'the "*jihadists*" can be found in almost any place that Muslim communities can be found'.³⁷

Another core narrative of the discourse is that 'Islamic terrorism' is motivated largely by religious or 'sacred' causes rather than political or ideological concerns. Typically, it asserts that 'Islamic terrorists' aim primarily to destroy Israel and the West, overthrow apostate regimes in Muslim lands, return the Muslim world to a true and pure form of Islam and re-establish an Islamic Caliphate. Shaul Mishal and Maoz Rosenthal for example, argue that Islamic extremists' 'more

³⁵ See for example, Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror*, New York, Random House, 2002; Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism*, New York, W.W. Norton, 2003; Natana DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004; and Raphael Israeli, 'A Manual of Islamic Fundamentalist Terrorism', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 14: 4 (2002), pp. 23–40. Extraordinarily, Israeli employs the term 'Islamikaze' to denote the 'new brand of Muslim terrorists' (p. 23) who employ suicidal, kamikaze attacks.

³⁶ Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'A Genealogy of Radical Islam', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 28 (2005), p. 75, emphasis added.

³⁷ Greg Austin, *The Next Attack: Know Your Enemy and Know Yourself*, London, Foreign Policy Centre, 2005, p. i.

far-reaching goal is the replacement of the existing non-Islamic social and political order in the Arab nations with an Islamic state ruled by the Islamic law'.³⁸ David Cook goes even further, suggesting that radical Muslims aim at 'uniting all Muslims into one state, and dominating the world'.³⁹

Associated with this discursive formulation of religiously motivated aims is the frequent portrayal of 'Islamic terrorism' as anti-modern, anti-secular and anti-democratic. Ranstorp suggests that, 'the threat of *secularization* from foreign sources' is the 'catalyst for springing religious terrorists into action'; these groups are motivated by a 'xenophobia against everything alien or *secular*' and a 'vehement rejection of *western culture*'.⁴⁰ Similarly, Benjamin Barber argues that 'These Jihadic warriors detest *modernity* – the *secular, scientific, rational* and commercial civilization created by the Enlightenment as it is defined . . . in its virtues (freedom, *democracy*, tolerance and diversity)'.⁴¹ An extremely crass expression of this narrative, published in a prominent terrorism studies journal, states: 'the Islamic world's *rejection of democracy and modernity* as well as their ongoing Islamic resurgence and propensity to violence' was because 'the concept of nation-state and democracy is, to most contemporary Muslim nations, as alien to them as pork rinds'.⁴²

Moreover, 'Islamic terrorists' are said to be motivated by a deep 'hatred' of America and the West, which is in turn caused by rage and a sense of impotence brought about by the failure of the Muslim world to achieve economic development and modernization, successive military defeats by Israel and an inability to resist intrusive processes of globalization and secularization. Takeyh and Gvosdev suggest that 'Radical Islamism is *an ideology of wrath* directed against

³⁸ Shaul Mishal and Maoz Rosenthal, 'Al Qaeda as a Dune Organization: Towards a Typology of Islamic Terrorist Organizations', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 28 (2005), p. 277.

³⁹ David Cook, 'The Recovery of Radical Islam in the Wake of the Defeat of the Taliban', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 15: 1 (2003), p. 52.

⁴⁰ Ranstorp, 'Terrorism in the Name of Religion', p. 49, emphasis added.

⁴¹ Benjamin Barber, 'Democracy and Terror in the Era of Jihad vs. McWorld', in Ken Booth and Tim Dunne (eds), *Worlds in Collision: Terror and the Future of Global Order*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 247, emphasis added.

⁴² Ayla Schbley, 'Religious Terrorism, the Media, and International Islamization Terrorism: Justifying the Unjustifiable', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 27 (2004), p. 208.

an existing order',⁴³ while Bernard Lewis argues that 'Islamic fundamentalism has given an aim and a form to the otherwise aimless and formless *resentment and anger* of the Muslim masses at the forces that have devalued their traditional values and loyalties'.⁴⁴ Consequently, it is assumed that 'Part of the mission of jihad is thus to restore Muslims' pride in the face of a humiliating New World Order.'⁴⁵

Perhaps the most important narrative of 'Islamic terrorism', however, is that it poses a massive threat to the security of the West. In most texts, it is seen as self-evident that 'Islamic terrorism' remains 'one of the most significant threats to the Western world in general and U.S. national security in particular'.⁴⁶ Sageman, employing several of the primary 'Islamic terrorism' narratives, describes the threat thus:

A new type of terrorism *threatens the world*, driven by networks of fanatics determined to inflict maximum civilian and economic damages on distant targets in pursuit of their extremist goals. Armed with modern technology, they are *capable of devastating destruction worldwide*. They target the West, but their operations mercilessly slaughter thousands of people . . .⁴⁷

Officials in particular, are apt to suggest that 'Islamic terrorism' is such a potent force that it threatens to destroy Western democracy, civilization and our entire way of life. Moreover, 'Islamic terrorists' are said to have the support of several dangerous 'rogue' regimes and hundreds of millions of Muslim sympathizers across both the Muslim and Western worlds. For example, after identifying the enemy as 'militant Islam', Daniel Pipes suggests that the 'Islamist element constitutes some 10 to 15 per cent of the total Muslim world population of roughly one billion – that is, some 100 to 150 million persons worldwide', which means that 'the United States has over 100 million

⁴³ Takeyh and Gvosdev, 'Radical Islam', p. 93, emphasis added.

⁴⁴ Lewis, 'The Roots of Muslim Rage', emphasis added. Francis Fukuyama similarly suggests that 'the hatred is born out of a resentment of western success and Muslim failure'. He also maintains that 'there does seem to be something about Islam, or at least the fundamentalist versions of Islam that have been dominant in recent years, that makes Muslim societies particularly resistant to modernity'; Francis Fukuyama, 'The West Has Won', *Guardian*, 11 October 2001.

⁴⁵ Stern, *Terror in the Name of God*, p. 264.

⁴⁶ Mishal and Rosenthal, 'Al Qaeda as a Dune Organization', p. 276. Barak Mendelsohn goes even further, suggesting that 'the challenge that Al Qaeda represents is putting *the survival of the system* under risk'. Mendelsohn, 'Sovereignty under Attack', p. 45, emphasis added.

⁴⁷ Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, p. vii, emphasis added.

Islamist enemies'. In addition, he opines that although 'reliable statistics on opinion in the Muslim world do not exist, my sense is that one half of the world's Muslims – or some 500 million persons – sympathize more with Osama bin Laden and the Taliban than with the United States'.⁴⁸

The narrative of the threat posed by 'Islamic terrorism' is also closely tied to a pervasive mythology surrounding the 'al-Qaeda' network and the so-called 'Afghan jihad'. Typically, it is asserted that there are thousands of militant 'jihadists', many of whom trained in the Afghan campaign, who are linked together in a global 'jihadist network' of terror.⁴⁹ Stern states that 'by September 11, 2001, between 70,000 and 110,000 radical Muslims had graduated from Al Qaeda training camps'.⁵⁰ Others have suggested that there may be between 35,000 and 50,000 'al-Qaeda operatives' in the world today, many of them in 'independent "sleeper" cells committed to waging holy war against the West'⁵¹ and who are supported by over six million more radicals worldwide.⁵² The picture created by these kinds of discursive constructions return us to the notion that Islam and 'the Muslim world' constitute a direct and existential threat to the West.

The threat narrative borrows heavily from the field of terrorism studies, particularly the notion that the world is facing a 'new terrorism'.⁵³ The 'new terrorism' thesis argues that, driven by hatred, fanaticism and extremism rather than by political ideology, today's

⁴⁸ Daniel Pipes, 'Who is the Enemy?', *Commentary*, 113: 1 (January 2002), pp. 23–4, 26, available at: <http://www.danielpipes.org/article/103>, accessed 27 June 2006.

⁴⁹ The narrative of al-Qaeda's role in funding, arming, guiding and coordinating 'local jihads' into a 'global jihad' against the West is described in detail in Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, pp. 25–59.

⁵⁰ Stern, *Terror in the Name of God*, p. 260.

⁵¹ Gus Martin, *Understanding Terrorism: Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues*, London, Sage, 2003, pp. 194, 198.

⁵² Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2002, pp. 8, 95. It should be noted that a great many different figures are quoted by 'Islamic terrorism' authors, but all of them refer to at least 4,000 or more well-trained 'militants', 'al-Qaeda members', 'jihadists', etc.

⁵³ A few of the numerous 'new terrorism' texts include: Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*; Laqueur, *The New Terrorism*; Ian Lesser et al., *Countering the New Terrorism*, Santa Monica, CA, Rand Corporation Publications, 1999; Charles Kegley, Jr. (ed.), *The New Global Terrorism: Characteristics, Causes, Controls*, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 2003; and Russell Howard and Reid Slayer (eds), *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment*, Guildford, McGraw-Hill, 2003.

religiously inspired terrorists are determined to cause mass casualties among civilians, are driven to sacrifice themselves in murderous suicide attacks and would be willing to employ weapons of mass destruction. It is therefore a more murderous form of terrorism than the world has seen before. Ranstorp states that religious extremists are 'relatively *unconstrained* in the lethality and the *indiscriminate* nature of violence used', because they lack 'any moral constraints in the use of violence'.⁵⁴ Similarly, Stern argues that 'Religious terrorist groups are *more violent* than their secular counterparts and are probably more *likely to use weapons of mass destruction*'.⁵⁵

Crucially, the above narratives imply that because 'Islamic terrorism' is fanatical, religiously motivated, murderous and irrational, there is no possibility of negotiation, compromise or appeasement; instead, eradication, deterrence and forceful counter-terrorism are the only reasonable responses. In a typical expression of this narrative, Byman states: 'Because of the scope of its grievances, its broader agenda of rectifying humiliation, and a poisoned worldview that glorifies jihad as a solution, *appeasing* al-Qaeda is difficult in theory and *impossible in practice*'.⁵⁶ Similarly, Barber argues that 'their purposes can be *neither rationalized nor negotiated*' and 'the *terrorists offer no terms* and can be given none in exchange'. The logic of this language implies that bringing terrorists 'to justice can *only* take the form of extirpation – root, trunk and branch'.⁵⁷ The typical political attitude is expressed by Tony Blair, who argues that 'you only have to read the demands that come out from Al Qaeda to realise that *there is no compromise with these people possible*, you either get defeated by them or defeat them'.⁵⁸

Another element of the 'new terrorism' narrative is the notion that, unlike the hierarchically organized traditional terrorist groups, the new 'Islamic terrorists' operate in decentralized, flexible network structures. RAND Corporation analysts argue that: 'Terrorism seems to be evolving in the direction of violent *netwar*. Islamic

⁵⁴ Ranstorp, 'Terrorism in the Name of Religion', p. 54, emphasis added.

⁵⁵ Stern, *Terror in the Name of God*, p. xxii, emphasis added. See also, Mendelsohn, 'Sovereignty Under Attack', p. 65; and Bruce Hoffman, 'Terrorism Trends and Prospects', in Lesser et al., *Countering the New Terrorism*, p. 17.

⁵⁶ Daniel Byman, 'Al-Qaeda as an Adversary: Do We Understand Our Enemy?', *World Politics*, 56 (2003), p. 147, emphasis added.

⁵⁷ Barber, 'Democracy and Terror', p. 246, emphasis added.

⁵⁸ Tony Blair, 'PM's Press Conference', 5 August 2005, at <http://www.number10.gov.uk/output/Page8041.asp>, accessed 28 April 2006.

fundamentalist organizations like Hamas and the bin Laden *network* consist of groups in *loosely interconnected, semi-independent cells* that have no single commanding hierarchy.⁵⁹ Chatham House similarly describes al-Qaeda as 'a *network of networks* and affiliates with a presence in at least 60 countries'.⁶⁰ The 'jihadi networks', moreover, are facilitated by the internet and various other modern technologies that extremists use to propagate their message, indoctrinate individuals, find new recruits, coordinate activities, share operational information, raise funds and elicit support. This has been dubbed '*techno-terrorism*, or the use by terrorists of satellite communications, email, and the World Wide Web'.⁶¹ It is often seen as ironic that such groups use modern technology in pursuit of a return to a medieval way of life. As Barber acerbically notes, 'Bin Laden without modern media would have been an unknown desert rat. Terrorism without its reliance on credit cards, global financial systems, modern technology and the internet would have been reduced to throwing stones at local sheiks.'⁶² Ultimately, however, the purpose of this language seems to be to reinforce how widespread and dangerous these groups are, how difficult they are to counteract and how extermination is a necessary and reasonable response.

A related narrative common in the texts is that 'Islamic terrorists' exploit Islamic charities and non-governmental organizations by diverting funds to support terrorist activities. Byman, for example, argues that terrorists are linked to:

... an even broader network that includes *charities* supporting relief in Chechnya, *Islamic education efforts* in Southeast Asia, and *fund-raising* in Europe. The network of *nongovernmental organizations* is particularly important. NGOs are a means of *raising money*, but they also are valuable for giving activists jobs, *channelling money*, and acquiring necessary documents.⁶³

Similarly, Paul Pillar identifies 'certain nongovernmental organizations that facilitate, wittingly or unwittingly, the activities of

⁵⁹ John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt and Michele Zanini, 'Networks, Netwar, and Information-Age Terrorism', in Lesser et al., *Countering the New Terrorism*, p. 56, emphasis added.

⁶⁰ Frank Gregory and Paul Wilkinson, 'Riding Pillion for Tackling Terrorism is a High-Risk Policy', *Security, Terrorism and the UK*, Chatham House ISP/NSC Briefing Paper 05/01, July 2005, p. 2.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁶² Barber, 'Democracy and Terror', p. 249.

⁶³ Byman, 'Al-Qaeda as an Adversary', p. 151, emphasis added.

terrorists',⁶⁴ while the Foreign Policy Centre suggests that many Islamic charities are 'the unwitting dupes of terrorist organisations'.⁶⁵ As before, this kind of language functions to identify a vast array of Islamic groups and innocuous everyday activities as potential sources of threat.

Another narrative is that 'Islamic terrorism' must be opposed at the level of ideas, and that 'moderate' Muslims must take the lead in fighting extremism in their communities. Zeyno Baran, for example, argues that a central counter-terrorism task is 'to find ways of helping moderates win the theological and ideological civil war currently taking place within the Muslim world'.⁶⁶ Similarly, in a *Newstatesman* interview, Patricia Hewitt argued that 'People in positions of responsibility and leadership need to stand up against the propaganda and against the perverted form of extremist Islam that a dangerous minority in the Muslim community wants to impose'.⁶⁷ This narrative implies that not only is there is an identifiable line between 'moderates' and 'extremists', but the problem of terrorism is largely internal to the 'Islamic world' and it is the responsibility of the 'Islamic world' to fix it.

Other narratives frequently seen in the 'Islamic terrorism' literature include, among others, the ideas that: 'Islamic terrorism' and 'extremism' by Muslims living in Western societies is largely due to lack of integration, alienation, unemployment, the failure of multiculturalism or the radicalizing influence of foreign Jihadists;⁶⁸ Muslim communities in Western countries are an actual or potential 'fifth column' or 'enemy within';⁶⁹ 'Islamic terrorists' are most often

⁶⁴ Paul Pillar, 'Terrorism Goes Global: Extremist Groups Extend their Reach Worldwide', *Brookings Review*, 19: 4 (2001), p. 36.

⁶⁵ Austin, 'The Next Attack', p. 28.

⁶⁶ Zeyno Baran, 'Fighting the War of Ideas', *Foreign Affairs*, 84: 6 (2005), p. 84, emphasis added. See also, Husain Haqqani, 'Islam's Weakened Moderates', *Foreign Policy*, 137 (2003), pp. 61–3.

⁶⁷ NS interview, Patricia Hewitt, *Newstatesman*, 25 July 2005, p. 26.

⁶⁸ This narrative is prominent in the British government's 'Draft Report on Young Muslims and Extremism', UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office/Home Office, April 2004, available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2004/muslimext-uk.htm>, accessed 27 June 2006.

⁶⁹ See Javier Jordan and Luisa Box, 'Al-Qaeda and Western Islam', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 16: 1 (2004), pp. 1–17. Their assessment is that 'by working among ordinary European and North American Muslims, Al-Qaeda has gained strategic depth at the very heart of Western Communities' (p. 4). See also Robert Leiken, 'Europe's Angry Muslims', *Foreign Affairs*, 84: 4 (2005), pp. 120–7.

vulnerable, weak-minded or uneducated young men who are indoctrinated, groomed, brainwashed or radicalized into terrorism, often through extremist madrasas, mosques or internet sites;⁷⁰ and 'Islamic' suicide bombers are primarily young men driven by sexual frustration and impotence.⁷¹

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON 'ISLAMIC TERRORISM'

The 'Islamic terrorism' discourse is susceptible to both first- and second-order critiques. A first-order critique reveals that the discourse is predicated on a number of highly problematic and contestable labels, assumptions and narratives, while a second-order critique exposes the ways in which the discourse functions politically to naturalize and legitimize particular forms of knowledge and political practices.

First-Order Critique

Employing the same social scientific modes of analysis, terminology and empirical categories used by the 'Islamic terrorism' texts, it can be argued that many of the key terms, labels, assumptions and narratives of the 'Islamic terrorism' discourse are highly contestable, and the discourse as a whole consists of a number of over-simplifications, misconceptions and mistaken inferences.

At the most fundamental level, it can be argued that it is profoundly misleading to use terms like 'the Muslim world', 'Islam',

⁷⁰ This narrative is expressed in Husain Haqqani, 'Islam's Medieval Outposts', *Foreign Policy*, 133 (2002), pp. 58–64.

⁷¹ In one of the most cited texts on religious terrorism, Mark Juergensmeyer states that 'the young bachelor self-martyrs in the Hamas movement . . . expect that the blasts that kill them will propel them to a bed in heaven where the most delicious acts of sexual consummation will be theirs for the taking', Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, p. 201. In fact, a surprising number of 'Islamic terrorism' texts, in discussing the Islamic tradition of martyrdom, mention the 'seventy black-eyed virgins' in paradise, with its implicit promise of sexual fulfilment, as being a primary motive for suicide bombings. See Wiktorowicz, 'A Genealogy of Radical Islam', p. 93.

'Islamism', 'Islamic terrorists', 'jihadists' or any of the other core labels as guiding analytical categories. There is simply too much variation within 'Islam' and Islamic movements for meaningful or illuminating generalizations, not least because 'Islam' consists of over a billion people from more than 50 countries, languages and cultures, five major doctrinal groupings and hundreds of smaller sects, theological traditions and cultural-religious variants.⁷² Even terms like 'extremism', 'fundamentalism', 'Islamism' or 'moderates' require careful qualification and contextualization.⁷³ There are great variations in Islamic fundamentalist and Islamist movements, not least between Sunni and Shia, violent and non-violent, political and quietist, utopian and accommodationist, nationalist and internationalist and those that fall between and cross over such crude divisions. Every Islamist group is a product of a unique history and context, and comparing Islamists in Saudi Arabia with Uzbek, Somali, Bangladeshi or Malaysian Islamists, for example, usually serves to obscure rather than illuminate.⁷⁴

In practice, the dividing line between 'extremists' and 'moderates' is not only context specific, but also highly porous. Terms like 'extremist' and 'fundamentalist' also obscure the fact that Islamist groups engage in an array of political, social and cultural activities, few of which could be described as radical. Moreover, when it is used to describe a single category of people, the label 'Islamic terrorists' in itself is highly misleading because it lumps together an extremely diverse set of groups, cells, movements and individuals, and conceals the importance of local contingencies in their form and development.⁷⁵ At the very least, it obscures the way in which

⁷² See John Esposito, 'Political Islam: Beyond the Green Menace', *Current History*, 93: 579 (1994), pp. 19–24.

⁷³ This point is powerfully made in Guilain Denoëux, 'The Forgotten Swamp: Navigating Political Islam', *Middle East Policy*, 9: 2 (2002), pp. 56–81. Denoëux argues that the term 'fundamentalism' is particularly misleading when applied to Islam because the word has connotations derived from its origins in early twentieth-century American Protestantism. See also Zaheer Kazmi, 'Discipline and Power: Interpreting Global Islam: A Review Essay', *Review of International Studies*, 30 (2004), pp. 245–54; and M. E. Yapp, 'Islam and Islamism', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 40: 2 (2004), pp. 161–82.

⁷⁴ See Ismail, *Rethinking Islamist Politics: Culture, the State and Islamism*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2006.

⁷⁵ Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*, London, Penguin, 2003, p. 24.

different groups split, merge and move away or towards violent actions; a great many Islamist groups have rejected violent struggle as a strategic necessity due to theological or pragmatic reassessment, while others have adopted violence when non-violent struggle failed.⁷⁶

In contradistinction to most 'Islamic terrorism' texts, there is a large and sophisticated body of research that confirms that Islamic doctrine and practice, including varieties of 'Islamism' and 'Islamic fundamentalism', is not typically or necessarily violent, anti-democratic or incompatible with secularism and modernity.⁷⁷ This research suggests that not only are Islamic values compatible with democracy,⁷⁸ but, as opinion polls have consistently shown over many years, the great majority of individuals in Muslim countries prefer democracy over other kinds of political systems.⁷⁹ Nor is it the case that 'Islamists' are opposed to democracy; in many countries they constitute the only viable vehicle for democratic participation and opposition in relatively closed political systems.⁸⁰ As Mumtaz Ahmad has noted: 'The Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Turkish, Malaysian, Egyptian, Jordanian, Algerian, Tunisian and Moroccan Islamists have already accepted the Islamic legitimacy of popular elections, the electoral process, the multiplicity of political parties and even the authority of the popularly elected parliament to legislate not only on socio-

⁷⁶ See Ismail, *Rethinking Islamist Politics*.

⁷⁷ It is as true for Islam as it is for Christianity that 'the fundamentalist emphasis on personal purity often takes an individual rather than a collective and political expression' – that greater religious devotion more often leads to political withdrawal than to militancy. Joseph Schwartz, 'Misreading Islamist Terrorism: The "War against Terrorism" and Just-War Theory', *Metaphilosophy*, 35: 3 (2004), p. 278.

⁷⁸ See John Esposito and John Voll, *Democracy and Islam*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996; Niaz Kabuli, *Democracy According to Islam*, Pittsburgh, PA, Dorrance Publications, 1994; and Anthony Shahid, *Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats, and the New Politics of Islam*, Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 2001.

⁷⁹ World Values Survey data from 1995–2001 support this finding, discussed in Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, 'Public Opinion Among Muslims and the West', in Pippa Norris, Montague Kern and Marion Just (eds), *Framing Terrorism: The News Media, the Government, and the Public*, London, Routledge, 2003. In other words, the problem would seem to be not that Islam is antithetical to democracy but that repressive regimes, often with the support of Western powers, have suppressed democratic movements.

⁸⁰ Esposito, 'Political Islam', p. 23.

economic matters but also on Islamic doctrinal issues.’⁸¹ We should also note that Islamist movements like Hamas, Hizbollah and the Muslim Brotherhood (referred to simply as ‘Islamic terrorists’ in most texts), as well as Islamist parties in several Central Asian states,⁸² have not only participated in national elections, but have well-established internal democratic processes. In fact, Islamist groups have adopted a multitude of strategies and approaches to their interaction with the state and other social actors and are engaged in a variety of locally defined projects, most of which are focused on winning power. From this perspective, Islamism is perhaps better understood as a dynamic set of processes rather than a fixed or essential identity.

Arguably the most important challenge to the discourse pertains to the notion of ‘religious terrorism’ as an analytical category and to the narratives of the religious foundations of ‘Islamic terrorism’ in particular. In the first instance, as Fred Halliday notes, ‘it is nonsense to seek the causes, as distinct from legitimation, of violence in the texts or traditions of any religion’, because all religions have texts or traditions that allow a violent (or a pacifist) reading.⁸³ It is not that the rhetorical justifications of violence are unimportant or that terrorist groups never appeal to religious ideas, simply that they are secondary to the strategic decision to employ violence in pursuit of political goals. Similarly, it is a logical fallacy to assume that some shared characteristic among terrorists – including a common religion – is necessarily linked to their terrorist actions: the fact that the majority of terrorists are men, for example, does not mean that being male predisposes one to terrorism.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Mumtaz Ahmad, ‘Islam and Democracy: The Emerging Consensus’, *Milli Gazette*, 2 October 2002, quoted in Takeyh and Gosdev, ‘Radical Islam’, p. 94. Ahmad also notes that several Islamist parties have revised their opposition to women holding political office. Similarly, Schwartz notes that when Islamist parties have gained mainstream political influence, their political stance has often evolved in strikingly moderate and pragmatic directions. Schwartz, ‘Misreading Islamist Terrorism’, p. 280.

⁸² See Anna Zelkina, ‘Islam and Security in the New States of Central Asia: How Genuine is the Islamic Threat?’, *Religion, State & Society*, 27: 3–4 (1999), pp. 355–72; and Shirin Akiner, ‘The Politicisation of Islam in Postsoviet Central Asia’, *Religion, State & Society*, 31: 2 (2003), pp. 97–122.

⁸³ Halliday, *Two Hours that Shook the World*, pp. 46, 78. See also, Burke, *Al-Qaeda*, p. 32.

⁸⁴ Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, p. 144.

In addition, and contrary to widely held beliefs, every major empirical study on the subject has thrown doubt on the purported link between religion and terrorism. The Chicago Project on Suicide Terrorism, for example, which compiled a database on every case of suicide terrorism from 1980 to 2003, some 315 attacks in all, concluded that 'there is little connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, or any one of the world's religions'.⁸⁵ Some of the key findings of the study that support this assessment include: only about half of the suicide attacks from this period can be associated by group or individual characteristics with Islamic fundamentalism; the leading practitioners of suicide terrorism are the secular, Marxist–Leninist Tamil Tigers, who committed 76 attacks; of the 384 individual attackers on which data could be found, only 166 or 43 per cent were religious; there were 41 attacks attributed to Hizbollah during this period, of which eight were carried out by Muslims, 27 by communists and three by Christians (the other three attackers could not be identified); and 95 per cent of suicide attacks can be shown to be part of a broader political and military campaign that has a secular and strategic goal, namely, to end what is perceived as foreign occupation.⁸⁶

Similarly, Sageman's widely quoted study compiled detailed biographical data on 172 participants of 'Islamic terrorist' groups. Some of the relevant findings of his study include, among others: only 17 per cent of the terrorists had an Islamic religious education; only 8 per cent of terrorists showed any religious devotion as youths; only 13 per cent of terrorists indicated that they were inspired to join solely on the basis of religious beliefs; increased religious devotion appeared to be an effect of joining the terrorist group, not the cause of it; there is no empirical evidence that the terrorists were motivated largely by hate or pathological prejudice; 'Islamic terrorist' groups do not engage in active recruitment, as there are more volunteers than they can accommodate; the data, along with five decades of research, failed to provide any support for the notion of religious brainwashing; and there is no evidence

⁸⁵ Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, New York, Random House, 2005, p. 4.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 17, 139, 205, 210. Pape's findings are supported by recent ethnographic research. See Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2005.

of any individual joining a terrorist group solely on the basis of exposure to internet-based material.⁸⁷

Interestingly, the data compiled in these two projects also demonstrate that the notion that 'Islamic terrorism' results from poverty, disaffection and alienation is unsupported. In fact, both of these studies show that the overwhelming majority of 'terrorists' are middle or upper class, of above-average educational standing, professionally employed, often married or in relationships, are well integrated into their communities and generally have good future prospects. Robert Pape concludes that the typical profile of a 'terrorist' resembles 'the kind of politically conscious individuals who might join a grassroots movement' rather than a religious fanatic.⁸⁸

In addition to quantitative research, content and interpretive analysis of so-called jihadist literature suggest that the central aims, goals and concerns are political and nationalist in the traditional sense, and the use of religious language and symbols is instrumental rather than primary. Halliday, for example, argues that Islamist discourse, although often expressed in religious terms, is a form of secular or nationalist protest at external and internal domination and forms of exclusion.⁸⁹ Within such a reading, Islamism is probably more accurately described as a revolutionary ideology than a violent religious cult.⁹⁰ This conclusion is also drawn by several studies of al-Qaeda, the quintessential 'Islamic terrorist' group.⁹¹ These texts

⁸⁷ Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, pp. 93, 97, 110, 115, 121–5, 163. Other studies that question the relationship between Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism include: Stephen Holmes, 'Al Qaeda, September 11, 2001', in Diego Gambetta (ed.), *Making Sense of Suicide Missions*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 131–72; Ariel Merari, 'The Readiness to Kill and Die: Suicidal Terrorism in the Middle East', in Walter Reich (ed.), *Origins of Terrorism*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1990; and Ehud Sprinzak, 'Rational Fanatics', *Foreign Policy*, 120 (2000), pp. 66–73.

⁸⁸ Pape, *Dying to Win*, p. 216. Sageman similarly suggests that 'from all the evidence, many participants joined in search of a larger cause worthy of sacrifice', Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, p. 97.

⁸⁹ Halliday, *Two Hours that Shook the World*, pp. 129–31. See also, Tarak Barkwai, 'On the Pedagogy of "Small Wars"', *International Affairs*, 80: 1 (2004), pp. 19–37.

⁹⁰ See Roxanne Euban, 'Killing (for) Politics: Jihad, Martyrdom, and Political Action', *Political Theory*, 30: 1 (2002), pp. 4–35.

⁹¹ Jason Burke concludes that bin Laden's 'grievances are political but articulated in religious terms and with reference to a religious worldview. The movement is rooted in social, economic and political contingencies.' Burke, *Al-Qaeda*, pp. xxv–xxvi. See also, Peter Bergen, *Holy War Inc: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden*, London,

reveal a fairly nuanced political analysis and a clear set of political goals, including: support for the establishment of a Palestinian state; ending US military occupation of the Arabian peninsular and its ongoing support for Israel; overthrowing corrupt and oppressive Arab regimes; supporting local insurgencies in Kashmir, Chechnya, the Philippines and elsewhere; and the expulsion of Western forces from Iraq and Afghanistan.⁹² In fact, after examining al-Qaeda's mobilization rhetoric, and based on the aforementioned empirical analysis of the group's members and targeting strategies, Pape concluded: 'Al-Qaeda is less a transnational network of like-minded ideologues . . . than a cross-national military *alliance of national liberation movements* working together against what they see as a common imperial threat. For al-Qaeda, religion matters, but mainly in the context of *national resistance to foreign occupation*.'⁹³ In short, in-depth qualitative studies suggest that terrorism is always local; that is, it is driven by identifiable political grievances and issues specific to particular societies and locales.

Other narratives and assumptions of the 'Islamic terrorism' discourse are similarly contestable from within its own analytical modes and categories. For example, a number of recent studies have seriously questioned the notion of 'new terrorism', demonstrating empirically that the continuities between 'new' and 'old' terrorism are much greater than any purported differences. In particular, they show how the assertion that the 'new terrorism' is primarily motivated by religion is largely unsupported by the evidence.⁹⁴ Related to this, the assertion that 'Islamic terrorists' are irrational fanatics who slaughter innocent civilians mindlessly is a wholly mistaken conclu-

Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2001, p. 242; and Mohammed Ayoob, 'The Future of Political Islam: The Importance of External Variables', *International Affairs*, 81: 5 (2005), p. 955.

⁹² See Osama bin Laden, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*, ed. by Bruce Lawrence, trans. by James Howarth, London, Verso, 2005.

⁹³ Pape, *Dying to Win*, p. 104, emphasis added. A similar picture of Hamas can be read into 'Interviews from Gaza: What Hamas Wants', *Middle East Policy*, 9: 4 (2002), pp. 102–15; and Henry Munson, 'Islam, Nationalism and Resentment of Foreign Domination', *Middle East Policy*, 10: 2 (2003), pp. 40–53.

⁹⁴ See Thomas Copeland, 'Is the New Terrorism Really New? An Analysis of the New Paradigm for Terrorism', *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 21: 2 (2001), pp. 91–105; Isabelle Duyvesteyn, 'How New is the New Terrorism?', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 27: 5 (2004), pp. 439–54; and Alexander Spencer, 'Questioning the Concept of "New Terrorism"', *Peace, Conflict & Development*, 8 (2006), pp. 1–33, available at: <http://www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk>.

sion. In fact, the carefully formulated and finely calibrated tactics and strategies of many contemporary terrorist groups demonstrate a powerful strategic rationality that conforms to the logic and precepts of asymmetric warfare.⁹⁵ In addition, most 'Islamic terrorist' groups expend real care in articulating fairly nuanced theological and political justifications for their choice of tactics, respond to criticism of certain kinds of attacks and often readjust their methods following doctrinal and strategic review.⁹⁶

A growing number of studies also suggest that the threat posed by 'Islamic terrorism' or terrorism in general is vastly over-exaggerated;⁹⁷ in particular, the likelihood of terrorists deploying weapons of mass destruction is minuscule.⁹⁸ Additionally, the mythology surrounding al-Qaeda and the so-called 'Afghan jihad' has also been thrown into serious doubt. Journalists like Jason Burke and Peter Bergen, for example, have debunked the notion that al-Qaeda exists as a coherent, hierarchical organization or that Osama bin Laden and his group played anything more than a peripheral role in the Afghan war.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Mark Sedgwick argues that al-Qaeda is more easily explained in terms of classic theories of terrorism as developed by nineteenth-century Italian anarchists than in religious terms. Mark Sedgwick, 'Al-Qaeda and the Nature of Religious Terrorism', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 16: 4 (2004), pp. 795–814.

⁹⁶ See Quintan Wiktorowicz and John Kaltner, 'Killing in the Name of Islam: Al-Qaeda's Justification for September 11', *Middle East Policy*, 10: 2 (2003), pp. 76–92.

⁹⁷ Annually, terrorism results in up to 7,000 fatalities globally, which is less than half the number of people murdered every year by handguns in the USA alone. As a threat to individual or national security, terrorism ranks far below state repression, small arms proliferation, organized crime, illegal narcotics, poverty, disease and global warming. There is a growing literature that challenges the terrorist threat narrative. See, among others: Richard Jackson, 'Playing the Politics of Fear: Writing the Terrorist Threat in the War on Terrorism', in George Kassimeris (ed.), *Playing Politics With Terrorism*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2007; John Mueller, *Overblown: How Politicians and the Terrorism Industry Inflate National Security Threats and Why We Believe Them*, New York, Free Press, 2006; and Ehud Sprinzak, 'The Great Superterrorism Scare', *Foreign Policy*, 112 (1998), pp. 110–24.

⁹⁸ See Brian Jenkins, 'Will Terrorists go Nuclear? A Reappraisal', in Harvey Kushner (ed.), *The Future of Terrorism: Violence in the New Millennium*, London, Sage, 1998.

⁹⁹ See Burke, *Al-Qaeda*; Bergen, *Holy War Inc.*; and Thomas Hegghammer, 'Global Jihadism after the Iraq War', *Middle East Journal*, 60: 1 (2006), pp. 11–22. Marc Sageman, a former US Foreign Service officer based in Islamabad from 1987 to 1989, has stated: 'I was running those guys in Afghanistan. The foreigners did no fighting

Second-Order Critique

In contrast to first-order critique, second-order critique involves the adoption of a critical standpoint outside the discourse. In this case, based on an understanding of discourse as socially productive or constitutive, and fully cognizant of the knowledge–power nexus, a second-order critique attempts to expose the political functions and ideological consequences of the particular forms of representation enunciated by the discourse.

One of the most important functions of the discourse of ‘Islamic terrorism’ is to construct and maintain national identity, primarily through the articulation of a contrasting, negative ‘other’ who defines the Western ‘self’ through negation. Given the extent to which the discourse has penetrated the politics and culture of Western societies, it can hardly be doubted that ‘Islamic terrorism’ now functions as a negative ideograph.¹⁰⁰ Directly related to this, as David Campbell has convincingly demonstrated, the elaboration of an external threat such as that posed by ‘Islamic terrorism’ is crucial to maintaining internal/external, self/other boundaries and the ‘writing’ of national identity.¹⁰¹ In fact, some have argued that Western identity is dependent on the appropriation of a backward, illiberal, violent Islamic ‘other’ against which the West can organize a collective liberal, civilized ‘self’ and consolidate its cultural and political norms.¹⁰²

Beyond this broader systemic function, however, discourses affect certain kinds of social action ‘not by directly or inevitably determining them but rather by rendering these actions plausible or implausible, acceptable or unacceptable, conceivable or inconceivable, respectable or disrespectable, etc’.¹⁰³ That is, discourses establish the initial ideational conditions of possibility for action,

whatsoever. They claim credit because the Afghans did not write the history . . . The fact is that they were only involved in one small skirmish.’ See ‘The Forum: Alternative Views of the Terrorist Threat’, *International Studies Review*, 7 (2005), p. 677.

¹⁰⁰ See Winkler, *In the Name of Terrorism* and Croft, *Culture, Crisis and America’s War on Terror*.

¹⁰¹ David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, revised edn, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998.

¹⁰² Hurd, ‘Appropriating Islam’, pp. 26–7. See also Euban, ‘Killing (for) Politics’, p. 8.

¹⁰³ Yee, ‘The Causal Effects of Ideas on Politics’, p. 97.

while simultaneously constructing the wider meaning structures or common sense that make those actions intelligible and legitimate. In this case, for example, it can be argued that by denying the rational-political demands of insurgent groups, demonizing them as fanatics and essentializing them as violent, irrational, savage and fanatical, the 'Islamic terrorism' discourse normalizes and legitimizes a restricted set of coercive and punitive counter-terrorism strategies, whilst simultaneously making non-violent alternatives such as dialogue, compromise and reform appear inconceivable and nonsensical.

This understanding of discourse further draws our attention to the ways in which discourse can be deployed as a political technology in the hegemonic projects of various agents, such as state elites. In this case, it is possible to describe a number of means by which the 'Islamic terrorism' discourse functions to reify and expand the hegemonic power of particular states. For example, by locating the source of contemporary terrorism in religious extremism, the discourse works to deny and obscure its political origins and the possibility that it is a response to specific Western policies. That is, by assigning non-rational, cosmic aims to violent groups, the discourse depoliticizes, decontextualizes and dehistoricizes the grievances and political struggles of groups and societies, thereby de-linking the motives of the terrorists from the policies of Western states or their allies. Such socially constructed 'knowledge' of 'Islamic terrorism' thus facilitates or enables the uninterrupted exercise of US and British power in the international sphere by obviating the need for policy reappraisal. At the same time, it functions directly as a powerful discursive tool designed to de-invest insurgent groups of any political authority or wider social-cultural legitimacy they may have, in large part by appealing to the secular prejudice of Western societies.¹⁰⁴

More prosaically, it can be seen that many of the policies made possible by the discourse also function directly to extend and consolidate state power, and provide direct material and discursive benefits to elements of the national security sector. For example, intrusive surveillance, expanded police powers, control orders, the

¹⁰⁴ Jeroen Gunning points out that the 'secular prejudice' – the attitude whereby any expression of religiosity is treated a priori as irrational and dangerous – has underpinned a great part of the social scientific research on social movements, and in particular, studies of Islamist movements. See Jeroen Gunning, *Hamas in Politics: Representation, Religion, Violence*, London, Hurst, forthcoming, 2007.

regulation of public speech, investigations of charities and the like, can and have been used to limit political dissent, strengthen state security institutions and bring previously unregulated social arenas like charities and religious activities under greater state control.

Linked to this, the analysis of public discourse by politicians clearly demonstrates that elites in the USA and Britain frequently deploy the discourse of 'Islamic terrorism' to legitimize or 'sell' a range of international and domestic political projects, including: regime change in states like Afghanistan and Iraq; the expansion of a military presence to new regions such as Central Asia; the control of strategic resources like oil; increased military and political support for allies in strategic regions like the Horn of Africa and Central America; increased resources and power for the military establishment; the construction of domestic and international surveillance systems; the control of international institutions and processes; and more broadly, the preservation and extension of a Western-dominated liberal international order. The frequency of narratives of 'Islamic terrorism' in contemporary political speeches suggests that, following earlier patterns,¹⁰⁵ the discourse is being used in a deliberative fashion as a political technology.

Beyond exposing the ideological functions of the discourse, another purpose of second-order critique is to examine the ethical normative consequences of the discourse. In this case, it is suggested that the 'Islamic terrorism' discourse is proving harmful to community relations, public morality and the search for effective, proportionate and legitimate responses to terrorist acts. First, given the way the Western self has been constructed in opposition to the Islamic other, and given the negative subject positioning and predication within the discourse, the evidence of rising tensions between and within local, national and global communities does not seem at all surprising. A recent survey of global opinion found that many Westerners see Muslims as fanatical, violent and intolerant, while many Muslims have an aggrieved view of the West.¹⁰⁶ There is also

¹⁰⁵ See Winkler, *In the Name of Terrorism*.

¹⁰⁶ These findings came from a Pew Research Center poll, reported in 'Survey Highlights Islam-West Rift', available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/5110364.stm, accessed 27 June 2006. Other polls show that between 48 and 66 per cent of British Muslims feel that relations between Muslims and non-Muslims had deteriorated since 11 September 2001. See 'Draft Report on Young Muslims and Extremism'.

evidence of increasing levels of Islamophobia across the European Union¹⁰⁷ and increases in faith-hate crime in Britain and elsewhere.¹⁰⁸ It seems reasonable to assume that this situation is at least in part due to the ubiquitous public discourse that identifies Islam and Muslims as a source of terrorism, extremism and threat.

Related to this, it is possible to detect an erosion of public morality in polling data that shows that significant proportions of the public in many Western countries, but most notably in the United States, now agree that torturing terrorist suspects is justified in some circumstances.¹⁰⁹ It can also be seen in the absence of public concern or outrage at the public evidence of torture and abuse, the muted response to human rights abuses committed by the security forces during counter-terrorism operations and the ongoing and very serious public debate by academics, officials and journalists about the necessity and ethics of torture and other human rights abuses against terrorist suspects. This erosion of public morality is, I would suggest, directly linked to the social and political construction of a pervasive discourse of threatening, murderous, fanatical 'Islamic terrorists' who must be eradicated in the name of national security.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia released a major report on 18 December 2006 entitled, 'Muslims in the European Union: Discrimination and Islamophobia', which details the nature and extent of the phenomenon in the EU. The report is available at <http://eumc.europa.eu/eumc/index.php>.

¹⁰⁸ Scotland Yard, for example, published figures showing a 600 per cent increase in faith-hate crimes in the period immediately following the London bombings. See Alan Cowell, 'Faith-Hate on Rise in UK', *International Herald Tribune*, 4 August 2005.

¹⁰⁹ See the poll data in: David Luban, 'Liberalism, Torture, and the Ticking Bomb', in Karen Greenberg (ed.), *The Torture Debate in America*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 35; Alisa Solomon, 'The Case Against Torture: A New U.S. Threat to Human Rights', *Village Voice*, 28 November–4 December 2001, available at <http://www.villagevoice.com/news/0148,fsolomon,30292,1.html>, accessed 26 March 2006; David Morris and Gary Langer, 'Terror Suspect Treatment: Most Americans Oppose Torture Techniques', *ABC News*, available at http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/Polls/torture_poll_040527.html, accessed 24 March 2006; and Will Lester, 'Poll Finds Support for the Use of Torture in War on Terror', *Washington Times*, available at <http://washingtontimes.com/functions/print.php?StoryID=20051206-114042-3526r>, accessed 24 March 2006.

¹¹⁰ This point is made in Richard Jackson, 'Language, Policy and the Construction of a Torture Culture in the War on Terrorism', *Review of International Studies* (forthcoming, October 2007).

At a more practical level, it can also be argued that the 'Islamic terrorism' discourse is proving to be counter-productive in its effects on the broader counter-terrorism campaign of the war on terrorism. For example, it seems obvious that the discourse assists certain militant groups in promoting their message that there is a fundamental conflict between Islam and the West; in this sense, the language works to co-constitute the very threat it purports to counter. In addition, narratives of fanatical, murderous, suicidal 'Islamic terrorists' functions to amplify rather than allay the social fear generated by terrorist actions because it reinforces the perception that the attackers are inhuman killing machines who cannot be deterred or reasoned with. In terms of foreign policy, the construction of a global Islamic threat can contribute to support for governments who actively suppress popular Islamic movements or cancel elections, thus creating a self-fulfilling prophecy in which imprisoned, tortured and harassed activists decide that the use of violence is their only recourse.¹¹¹

More broadly, there seems little doubt that Western counter-terrorism policies, based in large part on the productive categories of the 'Islamic terrorism' discourse, are at least partly responsible for intensifying cycles of violence and instability. That is, the Iraq invasion, the destruction of Falluja, the Abu Ghraib abuses, the Guantanamo prison camp, the practice of extraordinary rendition and public support for Israel's war against Lebanon – among others – are helping to construct further political grievances that could provide the justification for further acts of terrorism.

In part, these patently self-defeating policies persist because the discourse restricts and constructs the legitimate 'knowledge' that is allowed to inform policy debate whilst simultaneously establishing the parameters of legitimate action. Thus, within the confines of policy and public discussion about how to deal with religiously inspired, murderous 'Islamic extremists' for example, the possibility of diplomacy or policy reform appears both implausible and illegitimate, while actual or suggested policies of racial profiling, surveillance of mosques and schools, a shoot-to-kill policy, control orders, restrictions on Islamic preachers, shutting down extremist websites and bookshops, banning radical groups, Islamic youth outreach programmes, asking academics to spy on their students

¹¹¹ Esposito, 'Political Islam', p. 23.

and prosecuting the glorification of terrorism, appear as reasonable and legitimate. The main problem is that the central assumptions and narratives – the accepted ‘knowledge’ – underpinning these policies is, as I have demonstrated, both highly debatable and dismissive of alternative accounts. Based on a restricted and highly politicized understanding of the nature of contemporary political violence therefore, it seems safe to predict that many current policies are likely to be ineffective and a waste of resources.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this article is not to assert that the terrorist threat does not exist or that terrorism and religion are not linked in some fashion. Rather, its central aim is to draw attention to the contestable and politicized character of the dominant narratives, the ways in which ‘Islamic terrorism’ is interpreted and socially constructed as an existential threat and the means by which the broader discourse functions to promote a number of discrete political projects and reify a particular kind of political and social order. Exposing the ideological effects and political technologies of the discourse has the potential to open up critical space for the articulation of alternative and potentially emancipatory forms of knowledge and practice. Moreover, given the enormous material and social destruction of the war on terrorism thus far, the possibility of articulating non-violent or constructive responses to acts of terrorism takes on immense normative significance.

Fortunately, discourses are never completely hegemonic; there is always room for counter-hegemonic struggle and subversive forms of knowledge. In this case, not only is the discourse inherently unstable and vulnerable to different forms of critique, but the continual setbacks in Iraq and Afghanistan, ongoing revelations of torture and rendition and increasing resistance to government attempts to restrict civil liberties suggest that the present juncture provides an opportune moment to engage in deliberate and sustained critique. Recent moves by officials of the European Union for example, to review its lexicon of terms regarding ‘Islamic’ or ‘jihadi’ terrorism are indicative of a growing dissatisfaction with the discourse within parts

of the political establishment.¹¹² In particular, given their public role, scholars in the field have a responsibility to challenge the articulation of the central labels and narratives of the dominant discourse and to explore alternative forms of language and knowledge. As an initial starting point, reclaiming the labels and narratives of 'political violence', 'revolutionaries', 'militants', 'nationalism', 'anti-imperialism', 'self-determination', 'insurgency', 'ideology' and the like to describe the current conflict, could provide a more flexible and ethically responsible alternative to the oppressive confines of the discourse of 'Islamic terrorism'.

¹¹² The EU recently announced that as a result of long consultations with academic experts, it plans to review expressions such as 'Islamic terrorism', 'Islamist terrorism', 'fundamentalism' and 'jihadi' and expel them from the next edition of its dictionary – largely for the reasons expressed in this article. See 'EU Removes "Islamic Terrorism" from its Dictionary', *Zaman Online*, 12 April, 2006, available at <http://www.zaman.com/?bl=international&alt=&hn=31952>, accessed 22 May 2006. Similarly, an internal Foreign Office–Home Office draft report on countering Islamic extremism in Britain recognized that 'a change of language' was required. The report noted, for example, that 'the term "Islamic fundamentalism" is unhelpful and should be avoided, because some perfectly moderate Muslims are likely to perceive it as a negative comment on their own approach to their faith.' See 'Draft Report on Young Muslims and Extremism'.