I Introduction

> *The aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based community... That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors...and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do."*[1]

> *Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.*[2]

On August 3, 1961, Leon Bearden and his sixteen-year-old son hijacked a Continental Airlines Boeing 707 (*New York Times* 1961a). During the nine-hour standoff, Bearden, a former convict, demanded that the pilot fly to Cuba, later reporting that he had hoped to sell the plane to Fidel Castro (*New York Times* 1961d). The plot, which *The New York Times* would subsequently describe as a "wild adventure" (*New York Times* 1961b), was foiled when the pilot told Bearden he would need to stop in El Paso to refuel, where Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and border agents shot out the tires of the plane and one of its engines (*New York Times* 1961c). The Beardens were tried and convicted of federal charges of kidnapping and of transporting a stolen aircraft across a state line – charges for which Bearden the elder was sentenced to life in prison, while his son was sentenced to a correctional facility until the age of twenty-one (*New York Times* 1961d). The convictions were later reversed, however, leaving the Beardens liable only for a charge of "obstruction of international commerce" (*New York Times* 1963). Congress subsequently acted to make hijacking a crime subject to life imprisonment if "deadly or dangerous" weapons

[1] Ron Suskind (2004).
[2] Karl Marx (1994 [1852]).

were used, and security measures at airports and on airplanes were increased. The overall response was moderated, though, due to anticipated resistance from passengers, and to a desire "to avoid over-dramatizing hijacking" (*New York Times* 1961b). As Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) director Najeeb A. Halaby argued at the time, "There are in every country many discontented, maladjusted people who may get the wrong idea" (*New York Times* 1961b).

The limited extent and relatively subdued nature of the response to the Bearden hijackings, "the most dramatic" of a series of such events according to *The New York Times* (1964), pale when compared to more recent incidents. Airline hijackings were not uncommon in the late 1950s and early 1960s,[3] many committed by Americans hoping to defect to Cuba, or, conversely, Cubans trying to make their way to the United States (see, for example, *New York Times* (1965a, 1965b)). According to FAA statistics, there were seventy-nine hijackings worldwide between 1930 and 1967 (Guelke 1995: 49), with *Penthouse* magazine reporting eighty-five US planes hijacked to Cuba between 1961 and 1973.[4] Yet these were not considered to be acts of terrorism. As one account of this period put it, "These attacks were not generally or consistently called terrorism; nor were those who committed them generally or consistently called terrorists"; rather, "they were bandits, rebels, guerrillas, or, later, urban guerrillas, revolutionaries, or insurgents" (Tucker 1997: 2). As late as 1968 the United States generally treated hijacking, or "air piracy," as it was sometimes called, as a routine domestic criminal matter (Naftali 2005: 21).

[3] According to a 1973 report from the President's Science Advisory Committee's (PSAC's) subpanel on hijacking, the "earliest generally recognized hijacking of an aircraft occurred in 1930 in Peru," but "this event, however, was generally unheralded in the world's press at the time of its occurrence." National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Nixon papers, Nixon presidential materials project (NPMP), White House special files (WHSF), staff member and office files, Richard C. Tufaro, box 2, folder "Terrorism 3," "Report of the PSAC's subpanel on hijacking," March 1973.

[4] Photocopy of article from *Penthouse* magazine, April 1973, "Unhappy landings," Martin Schram and John Wallach, NARA, Nixon papers.

By the middle of the 1970s, however, this relatively compla-
cent approach had been displaced by a new and urgent problem:
"terrorism."[5] By the end of the decade bombings, hijackings, kidnap-
pings, and hostage-takings were melded together, conceptualized not
simply as tactics but as identifying activities, and joined to a new and
highly threatening sort of actor: the "terrorist." As the Beardens'
story illustrates, neither hostage-taking nor hijacking were new,
but the hijackings of the 1950s and 1960s had not caused the sort of
panicked response that "terrorism" would call forth. Yet only a few
years later, hijackings would come to be seen as *the* archetypal
terrorist event. This book tells the story of how the phenomenon of
political violence was transformed into "terrorism," and the effects
this would have for the creation of expert knowledge, public under-
standing, and policy in the United States.[6]

Since 9/11 Americans have been told that terrorists are patho-
logical evildoers, beyond our comprehension, and that our response,
in the form of the "war on terror," will be (in the words of George W.
Bush) "a very long struggle against evil." Yet, before the 1970s, the
acts we now understand as "terrorism" were generally considered the
work of rational, sometimes even honorable, actors. The ways in
which we create knowledge about and respond to terrorism are nei-
ther post-9/11 inventions nor ahistorical constants. Rather, terrorism
is a problem with a history, and this history matters for the ways we
think about it, the questions we ask, and the possible remedies we
apply, as well as the questions that we don't ask – those silences that
may even go unobserved.

[5] As Joseba Zulaika and William Douglass put it, "The year 1972 marked a major
transition in the framing of the media's treatment of political violence. Events
that previously were covered under the rubrics of assassination, bombing, torture,
repression, massacre, etc., were now classified as 'terrorism'" (Zulaika and
Douglass 1996).

[6] Although I examine the production of expertise through international networks, the
reader should keep in mind that my goal was to trace how the meanings of terrorism
took shape in the particular US context, and that my conclusions are not necessarily
applicable elsewhere.

"Terrorism" has become the dominant framework for under-standing illegitimate political violence. But despite its centrality in contemporary political discourse, terrorism is not a stable or fixed category. Rather, it is through constant conflicts over what is or is not "terrorism" that we determine which sorts of violence are, and are not, illegitimate. This book traces the creation of "terrorism" as a problem, and the corresponding emergence of a new set of "terrorism experts" who aimed to shape this seemingly uncontrollable problem into an object of rational knowledge. By "rational," I am referring to what Max Weber called formal, or instrumental, rationality: the estab-lishment of routines of action that increase predictability, and that connect actions to desired goals. The problem of "rationality" in the discourse on terrorism is tied up with the dual meaning of "reason": to think through, and to provide accounts for. The refusal to consider terrorist attacks, and terrorists themselves, as rational is the refusal to consider that those we label "terrorist" might have reasons, or rational explanations, for their actions (whether we judge these to be worthy or not). Rather than simply judge terrorists' reasons as unworthy, the terrorism discourse places such actions outside the realm of moral consideration entirely.[7] In other words, the terrorism discourse refuses to grant terrorism and terrorists the consideration of whether or not such actions may be justifiable – for, if they are justifiable, they are no longer "terrorism."

As illustrated by the familiar cliché that "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter," terrorism is a highly contested con-cept. And this "problem of definition" is not just something that afflicts popular or political discourse. Terrorism experts themselves have been unable to settle upon a definition. As Brian Jenkins, head of terrorism research at the think tank RAND, told me in an interview,

[7] As Judith Butler has written of one prominent analyst: "For [Michael] Walzer, 'terrorist violence' falls outside the parameters of both justified and unjustified violence [and] so-called 'terrorist' violence, as he conceives it, falls outside of the purview of this debate... The form of violence his scheme puts outside of reflection and debate is patently unreasonable and non-debatable" (Butler 2010: 153–4).

"Definitional debates are the great Bermuda Triangle of terrorism research. I've seen entire conferences go off into definitional debates, never to be heard from again." A 1988 survey of the literature found over 100 different definitions in use among terrorism researchers (Schmid and Jongman 1988). Similarly, an observer at a mid-1980s Department of Defense symposium reported that there were "almost as many definitions as there were speakers" (Slater and Stohl 1988: 3), and a 2001 article described a "perverse situation where a great number of scholars are studying a phenomenon, the essence of which they have [by now] simply agreed to disagree upon" (Brannan, Esler, and Strindberg 2001: 11).

Rather than trying to determine the one true meaning of "terrorism," this book investigates how the concept of "terrorism" is used empirically in the world. In other words, it analyzes how the concept of terrorism is socially constructed. It is often assumed that demonstrating that some phenomenon is socially constructed is akin to an unveiling, pulling back the mask to show the true face underneath, and thus causing it to lose its power over us. But to show that something is constructed is not to negate its reality. As W. I. Thomas wrote in 1929, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas and Thomas 1929: 572). And, as Bruno Latour has written, buildings are also constructed – and to analyze their structure is not to make them fall down but, rather, the opposite: to investigate how they were put together, and ask what the elements are that make for a strong and lasting construction, as opposed to a weak and flimsy one (Latour 2005). In the social world, this means asking how problems, concepts, and institutions came to be, and what makes them powerful. And it is this question that drives this study: how an object of knowledge such as "terrorism" is able to hold together and remain meaningful despite its contradictions and instability. I show not just that terrorism is socially constructed, but *how* the problem came to take shape as it did (as suggested by Tilly 2004 and Zelizer 2006: 531).

I analyze the emergence of "terrorism" as the outcome of a confluence of new events, new experts, and new practices of knowledge and governance. In so doing, I draw upon William Sewell's (1996: 844)

characterization of "events" as not just happenings but processes through which incidents transform structures of meaning. Likewise, I use Michel Foucault's (2003) notion of "eventalization," in which incidents are most likely to take on historical significance as "events" when they disrupt and destabilize prior modes of understanding the world. "Eventalization" is, in turn, linked to Foucault's concept of problematization, described as an historical process resulting in the diagnosis of a new problem subject to certain forms of knowledge. This is not simply the relabeling of a prior phenomenon but a concrete historical development that makes a problem "subject to thought," and requiring action (Foucault 1987, 1991).

Foucault's focus on the actions required by experts has been fruitfully explored by Latour, a sociologist of science, who describes the role of "actor-networks" that include both expert-actors and the objects that are being made knowable (Latour 1987, 1993 [1991]). Latour speaks of the ways that experts "enroll" problems into particular knowledge projects. This metaphor highlights the ways in which experts actively work to bring a problem under their purview. Previous ways of describing this process often used the metaphor of frames that experts could lay over a pre-existing and passive problem. But the problem with the framing metaphor is that it can't account for why one frame succeeds while others fail. The answer to this question, according to Latour, is that the problem itself must be attributed explanatory power and is not simply a function of the interests, resources, and power of the human actors involved. In other words, the thing to be known is not merely an inert object but an active participant in this process, which may accept some ways of knowledge about it and reject others. Expert knowledge works only when two moving targets – the definition of the problem and the solution – can be aligned and held in place long enough to make sense to others. Enrollment is a process in which the "problem" itself and the techniques of knowledge must fit together in order to produce a new object (Callon 1986; Latour 1987).

The book proceeds by analyzing how the problem of "terrorism" first emerged, and how it subsequently took shape via conflicts over the production of knowledge about it. "Terrorism" first took shape in the 1970s, when it emerged out of, and differentiated from, the discourse on insurgency. In that decade both the concept of "terrorism" and a community of terrorism experts coalesced. But neither the problem of "terrorism" nor the field of terrorism expertise has been fully "disciplined." This manifests itself in the persistent "problem of definition," an ongoing series of conflicts over what terrorism is, and is not. In the 1980s a new set of actors promoted the idea that terrorism was organized by the Soviet Union, rendering legal and criminal approaches irrelevant, and bringing about a new framing of counterterrorism as war. And in the 1990s a new framework emerged that solidified the terrorism discourse around the notion that terrorists were becoming ever more dangerous and irrational, raising the specter of terrorist "weapons of mass destruction" (WMDs). This new framework, I argue, set the stage for the pre-emptive war on terror that would emerge in 2001.

The study of terrorism has been cursed by an ongoing inability to settle upon a stable meaning, and this problem of definition has come to hinge around three core axes: politicization, rationality, and morality.[8] Throughout the entire period I examine, experts and policymakers have been unable to "rationalize" management of the terrorism problem. And terrorism experts' "failure" to develop into a profession or a discipline has manifested itself in the continual presence of "self-proclaimed" experts in arenas ranging from congressional hearings and the nightly news to the scholarly realm of conferences and publications.

[8] Struggles over the shifting terrain of the political and the apolitical, and the rational and the irrational, and the relation of morality to epistemology are not a phenomenon unique to the problem of terrorism and terrorism expertise. Claims to politicization and neutrality are a common feature of expertise and public discourse. One need think only of recent public debates on such topics as global warming, genetically modified crops, sex education, and reproductive rights to realize the widespread role of claims and counterclaims to neutrality, bias, and the politicization of knowledge in public controversies (Mooney 2005).

An ongoing conflict has centered on the question of whether terrorism experts are politically biased. Rather than seeking to answer this question, this book asks what these debates over politicization can themselves tell us about the field of terrorism studies and the production of expertise. I argue that this discourse of politicization does not merely reflect the fact that terrorism is a controversial subject, but is also part of an ongoing process in which struggles over the nature of "politicized" and "apolitical" knowledge themselves structure the production of terrorism experts and expertise. In arguing over whether particular analyses of terrorism are biased (or not), analysts not only aim to establish their own positions as experts but also construct "terrorism" as one of the "domains of objects about which true or false statements can be made" (Foucault 1987: 97). When terrorism experts level charges of politicized knowledge against each other, they are attempting to manage both the field of expertise and the proper definition of terrorism itself.

These struggles over politicization, morality, and rationality are similar to Bourdieusian classification struggles, in which claims to establish certain types of knowledge as "political" and "apolitical" are part of an ongoing battle for credibility among different actors in and about the field of terrorism expertise (Bourdieu 1988 [1984], 1996 [1992]). This is particularly true insofar as this opposition of "politicization" and "neutrality" is not just an attempt to *describe* the field of terrorism expertise but also constitutes part of an active process through which claims to authority, and credible positions from which to speak, are established. In other words, it is partly through these conflicts over politicization that spaces and positions of knowledge production are produced.

Discourse about the inherent immorality of terrorism has centrally shaped the possibilities for the creation of both knowledge about terrorism and terrorism experts themselves. I show that, as it took shape, the concept of terrorism became inherently associated with a moral judgment about the acts that we place in that category: terrorism *is* unacceptable violence. And, while experts have repeatedly attempted to "purify" the concept of this moral character, aiming

to create a morally neutral concept that can be used to analyze violence scientifically in a neutral manner, these projects have been continually forestalled. This vacillating process, through which the concept of terrorism is alternately "purified" of, and then reinvested with, political and moral content, has been central to the construction of the concept and of expertise about it.

Although the terms "terror" and "terrorism" were in use before the 1970s, earlier uses of these terms were just as, if not more, likely to refer to *institutional* or *state* violence as to the sort of oppositional activity we associate it with today. Writers on political violence during the 1960s classified "terror/terrorism" as largely an attribute of states and political systems, and only secondarily of revolutionary groups (Walter 1964). The state itself was seen to engage in "enforcement terror," which was differentiated from insurgent violence (Thornton 1964). The new framework of "terrorism" that emerged over the course of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, however, would recast such incidents as the acts of pathological, irrational actors, precluding its application to the actions of states or legitimate institutions. "Terrorism" emerged from this transformation as an inherently problematic concept – undefinable, infused with moral absolutism, and deeply politicized – leading to persistent difficulties for those who would create rational knowledge about it.

PREVIOUS WORK ON TERRORISM AND TERRORISM EXPERTISE

Despite the centrality of terrorism in contemporary political discourse, there have been few empirical studies of terrorism experts. A number of studies have analyzed popular and expert discourses on terrorism, but these works have generally failed to link discursive analysis to an empirical analysis of the production of expertise.[9]

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[9] See Burnett and Whyte (2005), Lustick (2006), Mueller (2006), and Ross (2004) for some moves in this direction, however, while Wagner-Pacifici (1986,1995) has written extensively on the functioning of terrorism discourse in particular contexts.

A few recent authors have presented more nuanced views of terrorism expertise that analyze the role of experts and their specific interests as differentiated from the state. John Mueller (2006) focuses on the interests of experts and politicians to account for the persistence of a "terrorism industry," and Ian Lustick (2006) suggests that the "war on terror" may have become a self-perpetuating phenomenon, generating incentives for its own continuation. And more recently a "critical terrorism studies" movement has emerged to critique existing research on terrorism and its political effects. Richard Jackson, founding editor of the new journal *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, asserts that terrorism discourse "is at the same time a highly complex and intertwined set of narratives and rhetorical strategies that aims to reinforce the authority of the state and reify its disciplinary practices" (Jackson 2005: 178).

It would be easy, but misleading, to see the rise of terrorism expertise as simply a response to an increase in political violence. This simplistic empirical approach neglects the reflexive relationship between experts and their objects of knowledge. Others have suggested that we view terrorism expertise as a product of political propaganda by governments seeking to demonize their enemies and draw attention away from their own use of violence. But this "critical" approach (see, for example, Chomsky 2001; Herman and O'Sullivan 1989), which argues that terrorism experts constitute an "industry," funded and organized by the state and other elite interests, neglects the agency and interests of the experts themselves, and the ways in which these interests may either harmonize or clash with those of the state, the media, and the "terrorists" themselves. Terrorism experts have been more independent of the state and more divided among themselves than these theories can explain. Furthermore, these approaches cannot account for shifts in the ways that terrorism has been constituted as an object of knowledge, nor for why particular sorts of experts have been highly influential, while others have lost credibility and other specialists with seemingly relevant knowledge have stayed absent from the fray. Perhaps most crucially, to the extent