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DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2015.1005935

Critical Studies on Terrorism, 2015
Vol. 8, No. 1, 90–109, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2015.1005935

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

ARTICLE

Conjuring up the next attack: the future-orientedness of terror and the counterterrorist imagination

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(*Received 6 October 2014; accepted 15 December 2014*)

Although terrorism is widely understood to be the politically motivated creation of fear by means of violence in a target group, the nature of that fear is seldom explained or even considered. The present article attempts to close that gap by proposing a definition of terror as the apprehension of (more) violence to come. Because every terrorist act is perceived to be part of a potential series, terror is oriented towards the future and involves the imaginary anticipation of prospective events. On the basis of this definition, I will examine the problematical role of counterterrorist discourse. As the statements of public officials and security experts in the run-up to, and during, the "War on Terror" demonstrate, the peculiar dynamic of terror is, seemingly paradoxically, reinforced by counterterrorist rhetoric. With its insistence on the escalatory nature of terrorist violence and its repeated prediction of even worse attacks, counterterrorism contributes to the evocation of terror in the sense proposed here.

Keywords: terror; trauma; War on Terror; public discourse; counterterrorism

Introduction

> HH: Do you think we will get through this decade without a massive attack on the homeland?
> DC: I doubt it. I doubt it. I think there will be another attack. And next time, I think it's likely to be far deadlier than the last one. You can just imagine what would happen …
> HH: Yeah.
> DC: … if somebody could smuggle a nuclear device, put it in a shipping container, and drive it down the Beltway outside of Washington, D.C. (Hewitt 2014)

On 24 June 2014, Dick Cheney was interviewed by political commentator Hugh Hewitt on the latter's popular radio talk show, which is broadcast by more than 75 stations across the USA. The occasion of the interview was the recent foundation of the Alliance for a Strong America, a non-profit organization headed by Cheney together with his daughter, the attorney Liz Cheney, with the goal of working towards "reversing President Obama's policies" (Alliance for a Strong America 2014a). After several years out of the spotlight, the former vice president launched the group on 17 June 2014 via a promotional video released on YouTube. The two-minute clip shows a grim-looking Cheney standing next to his equally stern-faced daughter in front of a blue-screen image of snow-capped mountains and a sloping meadow lined by trees. Sporting a cowboy hat and a sleeveless faux suede jacket, Cheney reads the text of the group's press release from a card or teleprompter, declaring that Barack Obama's policies "have put America on a path of decline" while "[t]hreats to America's security are on rise" (The Alliance for a Strong America

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2014b). As of the time of writing (five months later), the video has received less than 90,000 views, which indicates that the Alliance could do with some publicity. Hugh Hewitt, a vociferous opponent of the Obama administration himself, was more than willing to provide a platform for that purpose, and Dick Cheney knew how to seize the opportunity. On the day after the broadcast of the interview, Cheney's speculation about a possible attack on Washington DC was cited hundreds of times in various news media and blogs, as Hewitt and Cheney no doubt knew it would be.

In his study, *Creating Fear*, a survey of the "discourse of fear" in American newspapers of the 1980s and 1990s, media scholar David Altheide wryly observes that fear "makes for good entertainment" and that, consequently, "the entertainment media have aimed a fear machine … at audiences who have come to expect entertainment" (2002, 59). Against this background, it is hardly surprising that Cheney's "nuclear device … in a shipping container" scenario made the headlines, especially given that it reads like the synopsis of a Hollywood film. At first sight, Cheney's spectacular statement seems to be little more than a rather transparent attempt at the "politics of fear", or "[s]care tactics [that] can sometimes work to undermine opponents and to gain the acquiescence of the electorate" (Furedi 2005, 123). In order to promote his political agenda – the restoration of Republican rule in the USA – Cheney does not want to rely on arguments alone. Instead, he invokes the fear of another 9/11 or, rather, an attack "far deadlier than the last one" (as he ominously phrases it) because it will involve a nuclear device.

But there is more to be gleaned from Cheney's statement than just another instance of the practice popularly known as fear mongering. The statement also confirms the observation of political theorist and philosopher Brian Massumi that "[w]e live in times when what has not happened qualifies as front-page news" and "when what is yet to occur not only climbs to the top of the news but periodically takes blaring precedence over what has actually happened" (2010, 52). Once again, a member of the former Bush administration raises the spectre of the "weapon of mass destruction" (WMD), a concept that predates 9/11, but that came to real prominence in the run-up to, and during, the so-called War on Terror.

As international relations scholar Michelle Bentley points out in her recent book on the topic, "the WMD threat did not have to be proven to actually exist in order to comprise a conceptual resource; the concept could be used to construct a hypothetical threat that policymakers could then draw upon in order to influence political discourse" (2014, 106). Accordingly, Cheney does not (explicitly) frame his scenario as being grounded in fact. Instead of inferring it either from the patterns of *previous* terrorist operations or from intelligence information on *current* terrorist activities, he articulates a subjective assessment ("I think …") of a *forthcoming* threat. The use of a conditional clause and the explicit reference to the imagination ("You can just imagine what would happen if …") further accentuate the hypothetical nature of his scenario. For the listener of the radio interview, there is no way of telling under which conditions the scenario could become a reality. Is it a simple question of whether terrorists will manage to "smuggle a nuclear device" into the USA, meaning that they already have access to such a weapon or even possession of one, and that they are both intent upon and capable of deploying it in the fashion described by Cheney? Or is Cheney merely imagining a sequence of improbable events?

To explain the blurring between the real and the hypothetical in counterterrorist discourse, we require a better understanding of the temporal dynamic of fear and its close relationship to the imagination – two factors that are seldom considered,[1] although they are of great strategic importance not only to terrorists, but also to counterterrorism

and its self-legitimising discourse. Triggered by a perceived source of danger that is believed to pose an imminent threat to our physical well-being and safety (such as a terrorist network), fear involves imagining the possible outcome of an encounter with that source of danger (such as becoming the victim of a terrorist attack). While the perception of the threat is based upon prior experience (past events) and concerns us here and now (instilling a present sense of dread), fear is nonetheless oriented towards the future. It is the apprehension of an event that has not as yet occurred. Terrorism systematically exploits this anticipatory nature of fear. For what characterises terrorism, moreover, is less the single act of violence than it is the fact that this act is perceived to be the beginning, or part, of a potential series, and that further acts are expected to occur. To achieve its defining effect – collective fear of more violence to come – terrorism relies on the belief that the next attack is impending, and that it could happen anywhere, anytime. In this sense, the terror caused by terrorism is a halfway house between the real (actual attacks and their tangible aftermath) and the imaginary (possible future assaults).

An appreciation of the relationship between terror and the imagination can shed new light on the role of counterterrorist discourse, whose preferred mode is that of the "What if?" After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the focus of government officials and security experts from both sides of the Atlantic immediately shifted to the future. Now that they had successfully attacked New York City and Washington, DC, what would the terrorists do next? And how could they possibly surpass the mass murder of 9/11?

In the following, I will argue that the ensuing threat scenarios are themselves productive of terror and that they make the difference between fact and fiction increasingly difficult to discern; in an unholy alliance with terrorism, counterterrorism exploits the fear of another (indeterminate) attack for its own goals and purposes. To develop this argument, I shall proceed in three steps. I will begin by proposing a definition of terror as the "fear of a next time" (Assmann 2011, 355). In contradistinction to approaches that equate terror with trauma, I will emphasise the former's orientation towards prospective and, as yet, imaginary events, which clearly differentiates terror from trauma. With such a definition, it will be possible to show how counterterrorist discourse relates to terror: it is focused on the possible (future) outcomes of political violence rather than the actual (past and present) factors enabling such violence in the first place, and it thereby encourages a fatalistic attitude. In my final section, I will illustrate this attitude with the help of a literary text, Ian McEwan's post-9/11 and pre-7/7 novel, *Saturday*.

Terror, the fear of a next time

In the mid-1970s, when international terrorism could still be described as "a new mode of conflict", Brian Jenkins of the RAND Corporation observed that "[f]ear is the intended effect, not the by-product of terrorism" and that this latter aspect distinguishes terrorism from "other common forms of violent crime that may terrify but are not terrorism" (1975, 14). To this day, most scholars concur that a key characteristic of terrorist acts lies in the fact that these acts do not fulfil their aim in their immediate material consequences (death and destruction). Rather, the *physical* act affecting a limited group of immediate victims serves the greater aim of producing *psychological* reactions among a larger audience, namely fear. This collective fear is usually explained as constituting, for its part, the means to an even greater *political* aim: to exercise pressure on power holders, who must respond to the disruptive and destabilising effects of the violence.[2] It is part of the strategic logic of terrorism that this response will advance the cause of the perpetrators in one way or another. Consequently, it is necessary to differentiate between a first-order

target, against which the terrorist act is directly aimed, and a second-order target, to which the act is addressed as a symbolic message with the aim of intimidation. In turn, a distinction must be drawn between the above two targets and a third aim or objective: the long-term political change that is sought.

Scholarly writing about terrorism does not tire of emphasising (in a somewhat tautologous fashion) that "[w]hat makes an act terrorism is that someone is terrified by it" (Juergensmeyer 2003, 41). But what exactly do we mean when we say that terrorism leaves a large number of people "terrified"? While the media publicity and public attention generated by terrorism can be empirically measured, the nature and the amount of fear that this entails are far more difficult to grasp. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that this fundamental aspect of terrorism is often underexposed and sometimes even overlooked in the literature (see also Webel 2004, 10; Bowden 2008, 13). One exception is the work of Dutch terrorism expert Alex P. Schmid. In the early 1980s, Schmid undertook the ambitious attempt to collate a comprehensive description of terrorism from 109 previous definitions. The resulting *Research Guide* equated "terror" with "a state of chronic fear" (Schmid 1983, 111), but did not elaborate on how that state manifests itself. This provoked disagreement from the American psychiatrist Frank Ochberg, who dismissed Schmid's usage of "terror" as being unscientific.

A pioneer of trauma science and post-traumatic therapy, Ochberg explained that terror must be understood as "an extreme form of anxiety, often accompanied by aggression, denial, constricted affect, and followed by frightening imagery and intrusive, repetitive recollection" (cited in Schmid and Jongman 1988, 19). Because such an extreme response is obviously not what terrorism scholars have in mind when they speak of a state of fear in the general population, Ochberg recommended dropping the criterion of terror altogether and focusing the definition of terrorism on other criteria instead, such as the specific methods employed by terrorists. In the second edition of his study, co-authored with Albert Jongman in 1988, Alex Schmid replied to this proposition under the chapter heading "Terrorism without Terror?" (1988, 19–21). This rhetorical question is formulated in a consciously suggestive manner. The answer can, of course, only be "no", since "terrorism without terror" would be a contradiction in terms. Schmid and Jongman proposed the following compromise: even if sub-state terrorism does not succeed in creating "chronic fear" across broad sections of the population over an extended period of time, it nevertheless pursues the intent of achieving precisely that. And this fact alone, they say, justifies the application of the category of "terror" (Schmid and Jongman 1988, 19). From such a perspective, a terrorist is someone who seeks to engender fear beyond the bounds of the immediate context of their violent acts, and precisely this effort makes them a terrorist, regardless of whether they achieve their desired effect – indeed, even regardless of whether the threatened act is actually carried out.

In 2009, political scientist Ami-Jacques Rapin raised the objection that a social phenomenon can hardly be characterised on the basis of the intentions of the actors alone, independently of their actual effects (Rapin 2009, 167, 172). But how are the effects of terrorism to be measured, beyond the quantifiable human and material damage caused? Can there be any kind of meaningful response to the question as to how much terror terrorism creates? In the course of his arguments, Rapin considers the possibility that research into post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSDs), which has taken great strides in recent years, might be able to place the terror concept on a sounder scientific footing. As he demonstrates, various empirical studies suggest that terrorist acts do indeed create stress and that this psychological effect extends beyond the group of immediate victims,

even if it only concerns a small part of the total population. Rapin concedes, however, that "stress" cannot be simply considered equivalent to "terror" (2009, 173).

After having discussed the pros and cons of several approaches to terrorism-induced PTSD, he concludes that terrorism studies require a more rigorous terminological basis and that it is not certain at present whether "terror" and "terrorism" are at all "adequate … for describing the phenomena observed" (Rapin 2009, 177). Psychiatrist Frank Ochberg apparently came to a similar conclusion. Although his earlier-cited description of terror does not mention PTSD, it corresponds exactly to the commonly accepted definition of that category:

> [M]ost descriptions generally agree that there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (Caruth 1995, 4)

There is no question that such a response may occur among traumatised survivors, relatives of victims, and immediate witnesses of terrorist acts. Yet, Ochberg is certainly right to doubt whether this definition is also suited to describe the psychological condition of an entire society. The reason, I think, is that the word "trauma" only describes *one* dimension of the psychological impact of terrorist violence and that we should distinguish between, rather than equate, "terror" and "trauma". Both are, of course, closely related, but they nevertheless constitute separate responses to terrorist violence. Given its nature as emotional "injury" – this is the literal meaning of the Greek word *trauma* – trauma is more properly ascribed to the realm of the immediate harm caused by terrorist acts, alongside physical injury.

Seen in this way, the first-order aim of terrorism directed against human targets is to inflict bodily as well as psychological wounds. Its second-order aim, by contrast, is meant to reach far beyond the immediate victims of, and witnesses to, such acts: the terror is supposed to be felt by whole groups and even populations. As cultural theorist Aleida Assmann points out: "Closer study of the two reveals significant differences in their temporal frames of reference that are of central importance for the analysis of each phenomenon individually" (2011, 355). Trauma manifests itself in the intrusion of the past into the present, producing what the political scientist Jenny Edkins characterises as "trauma time" (2003, 29–42). Drawing on the theoretical work of literary scholar Cathy Caruth (1995), Edkins explains that: "trauma and traumatic memory alter the linearity of historical, narrativised time, time which has beginnings and ends … Events from the period of the trauma are experienced in a sense simultaneously with those of a survivor's current existence" (2003, 40). For the traumatised individual, the present is interrupted by arbitrary, flashback-type memories of the traumatic event that bring about a belated experience.

Terror, on the other hand, works in the opposite temporal direction. To some extent, it involves intrusions of the (imagined) future into the present, in other words, "flashforwards". Put simply, trauma is the unintentional (re)experiencing of past violence, whereas terror is the fearful anticipation of future violence – based on, and initiated by, the occurrence of violence in the past. In analogy to Edkin's concept of "trauma time", we could speak of "terror time".

This distinction can be further elucidated with the help of an observation made by philosopher Jacques Derrida in an interview of October 2001, according to which the

"traumatism" caused by the 9/11 attacks had a specific temporal structure (2003, 96). Contrary to the common understanding of trauma, the "repetition compulsion" following the actual event did not, in this case, "reproduce what ha[d] already happened or been produced":

> The ordeal of the event has as its tragic correlate not what is presently happening or what has happened in the past but the precursory signs of what threatens to happen. It is the future that determines the unappropriability of the event, not the present or the past. Or at least, if it is the present or the past, it is only insofar as it bears on its body the terrible sign of what might or perhaps will take place, which will be *worse than anything that has ever taken place.* (Derrida 2003, 96–97, emphasis in original)

To clarify this point, Derrida engages in a little thought experiment:

> Imagine that the Americans and, through them, the entire world, had been told: what has just happened, the spectacular destruction of two towers, the theatrical but invisible deaths of thousands of people in just a few second, is an awful thing, a terrible crime, a pain without measure, but it's all over, it won't happen again, there will never again be anything as awful as or more awful than that. I assume that mourning would have been possible in a relatively short period of time. … But this is not at all what happened. There is traumatism with no possible work of mourning when the evil comes … from the repetition to come – though worse. Traumatism is produced by the *future*, by the *to come*, by the threat of the worst *to come*, rather than by an aggression that is "over and done with". (Derrida 2003, 97, emphases in original)

For Derrida, then, the traumatic potential of the 11 September 2001 attacks lies less in the wound inflicted by the bombings themselves than in the fact that this wound is not allowed to heal. Because the source of the trauma is projected forward – in the form of scenarios of *even worse* attacks with chemical, bacteriological, or nuclear weapons (see Derrida 2003, 97) – the trauma cannot be worked through: "For the wound remains open by our terror before the *future* and not only the past" (Derrida 2003, 96, emphasis in original).

This is a very eloquent description of the combined psychological effects of terrorist violence and counterterrorist discourse. I would argue, however, that what Derrida describes is not trauma at all, but a closely related phenomenon, namely terror. Everything that Derrida says with respect to a "trauma … whose temporality proceeds … from an im-presentable [*sic*] to come *(à venir)*" (Derrida 2003, 97) may be applied to terror, as Derrida's own use of the word "terror" indicates; it is not a coincidence that the earlier-cited passage speaks of "*terror* before the future".

The fact that fear is future-oriented was already pointed out by the classical philosophers. In *Protagoras*, Plato has Socrates express his understanding of dread (*deos*) and fear (*phobos*) as "a certain expectation of something bad" (2004, 62 [358d]). Two of Socrates's interlocutors give their assent to this definition, whereas one (Prodicus) disagrees, explaining that this definition only fits *phobos*, not *deos* (Plato 2004, 62 [358d]). Unfortunately, no further elucidation of the two terms is given in the dialogue, but David Konstan has recently taken the side of Socrates, asserting that "there is no cognitive difference between *phobos* and *deos* in ordinary Greek usage" (2006, 154). Plato's disciple Aristotle later offered a more elaborate explanation of the anticipatory nature of fear. This is how George Kennedy renders the relevant passage from *On Rhetoric*:

> 1. Let *fear* [*phobos*] be [defined as] a sort of pain or agitation derived from the imagination of a future destructive or painful evil; for all evils are not feared; for example, [a person does not fear] that he will become unjust or slow-witted but [only] what has the potential for great pains or destruction, and these [only] if they do not appear far off but near, so that they are about to happen…
>
> 2. If this is what fear is, such things are necessarily causes of fear as seem to have great potential for destruction or for causing harms that lead to great pains. Therefore, even the signs of such things are causes of fear; for that which causes fear seems near a hand. (This is danger: an approach of something that causes fear.) 3. Such [signs] are enmity and anger from those with the power to do something; for it is clear that they wish to, and thus they are near doing it. (Aristotle 2007, 128–129 [2.5, 1382a], square brackets in original)

Many later philosophical discussions of fear could be cited here, but the two most relevant elements are already present in Aristotle's definition: the apprehension of pain and destruction inflicted by a superior and determined power; and the notion that the danger of such pain and destruction is imminent (rather than distant). As Aristotle implies, fear is not necessarily prompted by the actual physical presence of the source of the danger in the here and now; rather, it is "derived from the imagination of a future destructive or painful evil". Sometimes, Aristotle writes, fear is incited by signs or tokens (*sêmeia*) that indicate the proximity of danger. This includes the possibility of misinterpretation: what matters is that pain and destruction seem near, that we *believe* them to be impending, not that they really are.

In emphasising the role of the imagination, Aristotle does not mean to say that fear is by definition unfounded (and therefore psychosis). His point is quite different: even if there is an objective threat, the anticipation of the moment in which the source of that threat causes actual harm still has an imaginary character. According to Aristotle, fear refers to a potentiality – the possibility, not the reality of pain and death. The object of fear is anticipated evil. This is especially relevant for the specific type of fear examined here: the collective apprehension of (more) political violence to come.

The counterterrorist imagination

What Jacques Derrida fails to mention in his discussion of the "trauma" of 9/11 is that the source of what he describes as "our terror before the future" is not so much terrorism itself than it is the public discourse on terrorism. When he observes that "for the future and for always, the threat … might be worse than any other … The threat of a *chemical* attack, no doubt, or *bacteriological* attack …, but especially the threat of a *nuclear* attack" (2003, 97, emphases in original), Derrida seems to take these last three threats for granted. The same applies to the following passage from philosopher and cultural critic Slavoj Žižek in another much-cited early publication on 9/11:

> The true long-term threat is further acts of mass terror in comparison with which the memory of the WTC collapse will pale – acts that are less spectacular, but much more horrifying. What about bacteriological warfare, what about the use of lethal gas, what about the prospect of DNA terrorism (developing poisons which will affect only people who share a specific genome)? (2002, 36)

It is worth remembering that neither of these concrete scenarios appeared in any declaration or communiqué issued by al-Qaeda; the notion that the 11 September 2001 attacks would be followed by even worse attacks involving weapons of mass destruction does not stem from terrorist propaganda. Rather, these scenarios were

publicised by the Bush administration in its attempt to justify an unprecedented counterterrorist campaign which demanded severe sacrifices from the public, both at home (the USA Patriot Act and its incursions into civil rights) and abroad (the various battlefields of the War on Terror). Because such far-reaching measures require a large degree of consensus or at least acquiescence, the Bush administration established "a kind of public narrative" with the aim of "normalising" its various actions (Jackson 2005, 1). In his meticulous analysis of speeches by US officials from the day of the 11 September attacks to the first year of the Iraq War, political scientist Richard Jackson (2005) has demonstrated how successfully this self-legitimising narrative (or discourse) was implemented. The narrative was so successful, in fact, that even otherwise critical commentators such as Derrida and Žižek repeated parts of it without apparently noticing it.

The threat of WMD is an essential element of the discourse of the War on Terror. As the US government set out to fight terrorism by means of security and military measures, it released statements that were better suited to increase than to diminish public concern about further violence. Although President Bush spoke of a "War on Terror", this did not mean that his administration intended to tackle the problem of terror itself. On the contrary, the fear of a further attack became an integral part of counterterrorist policies. At the end of January 2002, US Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld addressed a military audience at the National Defense University in Washington DC. His speech was devoted to the need for transformation in the US Military in light of the current War on Terror. As he argued, America was now facing an entirely different threat to its security than during the Cold War, one that was not "nearly as predictable":

> Who would have imagined only a few months ago that terrorists would take commercial airliners, turn them into missiles and use them to strike the Pentagon and the World Trade Towers, killing thousands? But it happened.
>
> And let there be no doubt, in the years ahead, it is likely that we will be surprised again by new adversaries who may also strike in unexpected ways.
>
> And as they gain access to weapons of increasing power – and let there be no doubt but that they are – these attacks will grow vastly more deadly than those we suffered several months ago.
>
> Our challenge in this new century is a difficult one. It's really to prepare to defend our nation against the unknown, the uncertain and what we have to understand will be the unexpected. (Rumsfeld 2002)

For that reason, Rumsfeld went on to assert that the Armed Forces could no longer rely on policies developed in the context of earlier conflicts. The purpose of his speech was to justify the so-called defence strategy of preemptive attack – the tactic, that is, of "striking militarily an adversary who poses an imminent threat before the adversary can strike first" (Wittkopf, Jones, and Kegley 2007, 12). Immediately following the cited passage, Rumsfeld cautioned: "[W]e have to put aside the comfortable ways of thinking and planning, take risks and try new things so that we can prepare our forces to deter and defeat adversaries that have not yet emerged to challenges" (2002). One would assume that this strategy of neutralising a potential threat even before that threat has materialised requires exact knowledge of the latent menace.

What is immediately striking about Rumsfeld's speech, however, is that it paints the picture of a war "against the unknown". Rumsfeld emphasises that there is no way of telling who ("new adversaries") will strike the US when ("we will be surprised again")

and how ("in unexpected ways"). The only thing that Americans can be sure of, according to the Secretary of State, is that the new enemy will strike again and that the next attack is bound to be much worse than even the worst terrorist incident in history. There can be "no doubt" about that, even if all the rest is "uncertain". In this way, "a felt certainty about the world" is used to compensate for the absence of actual observable facts, which goes to show that "[g]ut feeling was proudly and publicly embraced by Bush as his peak decision making process in the lead-up to the war in Iraq and beyond" (Massumi 2010, 55).

Yet, it would be too easy to dismiss this logic as an idiosyncrasy of the Bush administration, or of the neo-conservative think tanks that provided its speechwriters with key words and concepts. For very similar arguments can also be found on the other of the Atlantic. Ten months after Rumsfeld's lecture, the UK Home Office gave its own demonstration of "what if" reasoning in the name of counterterrorism. In November 2002, it issued the following statement, signed by Home Secretary David Blunkett of the Labour party:

> We cannot be sure of when or where or how terrorists will strike.
>
> But we can be sure that they will try. They may attempt to use more familiar terrorist methods, such as leaving parcel or vehicle bombs in public places, or hijacking passenger aircraft.
>
> However, they may try something different, perhaps as surprising as the attacks on the World Trade Center, or the theatre siege in Moscow.
>
> Maybe they will try to develop a so-called dirty bomb, or some kind of poison gas, maybe they will try to use boats or trains rather than planes. The bottom line is that we simply cannot be sure. (Home Office, cited in BBC News 2002a)

Only minutes after it had been released, this statement was withdrawn and replaced with a "toned-down" (BBC News 2002c) version, in which the passage speculating about the possible use of chemical or nuclear weapons was deleted. The new version stated in more general terms that "today's breed of terrorist is looking for ever more dramatic and devastating effect" (BBC News 2002b). As Blunkett explained, the release of the original version was due to "a simple clerical error" (cited in BBC News 2002c). His statement, he added, had been made with due regard to "the risk of creating unjustified panic and disruption which would itself give the terrorists the victory they crave" (cited in BBC News 2002c). Although the Home Secretary thus acknowledged that unspecified warnings about terrorism can be productive of terror (and although he, somewhat revealingly, characterised such terror as "unjustified"), Blunkett insisted, nonetheless, that the key message of the statement concerning the need to be vigilant was not affected by the changes (see BBC News 2002c).

It is apparent in both versions of the press release that its primary function was to persuade the electorate of the necessity of the drastic measures taken by the Blair administration in the aftermath of 9/11. "[W]e have a duty to ensure we give priority to security", the revised version declares: "For government, it means continuing and developing the broad and vigorous programme of protective security work that we are already pursuing" (Home Office, cited in BBC News 2002b). The logic underpinning that statement seems to be that if a constant level of anxiety is maintained in the public, potentially unpopular policies are more likely to be accepted.

Like Rumsfeld's speech, the UK Home Office statement combines an assertion of absolute certainty with an admission of complete uncertainty: "we can be sure" that after having attacked the United States one year ago, the terrorists will attack once

more, but "[w]e cannot be sure when or where or how" they will do it. This lack of concrete evidence seems to suggest that there is nothing else to say on the matter. Instead of ending there, however, the statement switches to a non-factual register, filling the gap in knowledge with speculative assumptions: in their choice of targets and weapons, future attacks *may* resemble those of the past, but they *may* also involve the use of poison gas or a dirty bomb. In the context of the whole document, these conjectures can easily appear like statements of fact; after all, they stem from government officials who (one would like to believe) have access to expert knowledge and intelligence resources. Yet, the employment of the subjunctive is clearly signalled by the repeated use of the modal "may", which explicitly indicates the hypothetical nature of the corresponding passage. After having thus "morphed into a narrative of fantasy" (Furedi 2007, 11), the text moves back to the indicative mood, albeit only to reiterate that "we simply cannot be sure", which completely undermines the previous specifications about nuclear or chemical weapons. As in Rumsfeld's speech, very little factual information is provided. The warning boils down to a simple "Even without any indications of an impending attack, we are strongly convinced that terrorism continues to pose a serious threat to our security." This is followed by statements to the effect that "While we do not know any details about this threat, various scenarios are conceivable."

This particular style of argument is not restricted to texts by ministers or other government officials. It is also common among intelligence officers. On 11 February 2003, FBI Director Robert Mueller gave testimony to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. After having listed the successes of the "War on Terrorism" up to this point (the main topic and title of his speech), he informed the American public that "[t]he greatest threat is from al-Qaeda cells in the US that we have not yet identified" (Mueller 2003). This statement is remarkable. Even while admitting that the ontological status of the danger is far from clear – the unidentified domestic terrorists may or may not exist – it is surprisingly adamant about the urgency of that danger. The use of the superlative suggests that the unknown (and as yet hypothetical) sleeper cells are more dangerous than any known enemy. According to the counterterrorist logic, the fact that federal agencies do not know whether potential bombers are present in the country does not diminish but increase the threat, because it makes it incalculable, regardless of statistical probability.

At another meeting of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence two years later, Mueller underlined that: "while we are proud of our accomplishments this year and the additional insight we have gained into al-Qa'ida's activity, I remain very concerned about what we are not seeing" (2005). Mueller's counterpart at the CIA, Director of Central Intelligence Porter J. Goss, was also present at the meeting. Not content with enumerating what his agency did not know or failed to see, he decided to list possible future scenarios: "It may be only a matter of time before al-Qa'ida or another group attempts to use chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons (CBRN)" (Goss 2005). Once again, the subjunctive mood was employed to indicate that Goss lacked concrete evidence and that his statement was no more than a conjecture ("It may be …"). Goss added, however: "We know from experience that al-Qa'ida is a patient, persistent, imaginative, adaptive and dangerous opponent" (2005).

When terrorists are "imaginative", counterterrorism has to be even more imaginative. True to this principle, Robert Mueller gave a small insight into the FBI's attempts at imagining possible terrorist schemes. In his February 2003 speech, he stressed that it would be wrong to assume "that al-Qaeda will rely only on tried and true methods of attack". Rather, several other possibilities were plausible:

- Multiple small-scale attacks against soft targets – such as banks, shopping malls, supermarkets, apartment buildings, schools and universities, churches, and places of recreation and entertainment – would be easier to execute and would minimize the need to communicate with the central leadership, lowering the risks of detection.
- Poisoning food and water supplies also may be an attractive tactic in the future. Although technologically challenging, a successful attempt might cause thousands of casualties, sow fear among the US population, and undermine public confidence in the food and water supply.
- Cyberterrorism is also clearly an emerging threat. Terrorist groups are increasingly computer savvy, and some probably are acquiring the ability to use cyber attacks to inflict isolated and brief disruptions of US infrastructure. Due to the prevalence of publicly available hacker tools, many of these groups probably already have the capability to launch denial-of-service and other nuisance attacks against Internet-connected systems. (Mueller 2003)

"Would be", "may be", "probably" … All of these examples confirm Frank Furedi's observation that after 11 September 2001, the limitations of counterterrorist intelligence were frequently described "as a problem of imagination rather than of information" (2007, xxiv). In the words of social anthropologist Joseba Zulaika, the what-if logic of counterterrorist discourse is part of "a politics whose reality is to be decided by the experience of what could happen in the future (the imagined horrors of a nuclear attack on a U.S. city) as much as by what is happening in the present; by alleged plots as much as by real ones; by what does not happen as by what does" (2009, 205). By repeatedly summoning the spectre of the next, even more terrible attack, counterterrorism officials make a substantial contribution to the terrorists' intended effect. Moreover, and equally problematically, they immunise their discourse against the corrective of empirical evidence – to the point of divorcing the discourse from (the present) reality:

> If the threat does not materialize, it still always would have if it could have. If the threat does materialize, then it just goes to show that the future potential for what happened had really been there in the past. In this case, the preemptive action is retroactively legitimated by future actual facts. (Massumi 2010, 56)

These effects are additionally reinforced by contributions from scientists, academics, and journalists acting as terrorism pundits. In June 2005, shortly before the coordinated suicide bombings on three London underground trains and a bus, the British public was presented with the following fictional scenario[3]:

> It is 12.45pm on Tuesday, 23 December 2004. Oxford Street, London is teeming with Christmas shoppers and office workers going to lunch. A post office van, later found to have been stolen, pulls up at the kerb. People ignore the van as the driver walks off. Soon the van explodes in a fireball. …
>
> The anti-terrorist police first assume that the explosion in Oxford Street was a usual terrorist bomb, probably exploded by the real IRA. It is now clear that it was, in fact, a radiological dispersal device, commonly called a dirty bomb, the most primitive terrorist nuclear device. Forensic scientists soon found that Semtex and thermite, an incendiary material, surrounded the radioactive material. …
>
> People in and around Oxford Street when the bomb went off pick up [*sic*] radioactivity on their clothes and bodies and carry it home with them, contaminating public transport on their way. Vehicles travelling away for [*sic*] the scene also pick up radioactivity and spread it.

> The authorities decide that a very large area will have to be evacuated and decontaminated. This operation will cost many millions of pounds and take months to achieve. The social disruption and economic cost resulting from the dirty bomb is exactly the point of the terrorist attack. (Barnaby 2005, 3–4)

If readers had to guess the source of this excerpt, many would probably assume that it is the outline for a potential disaster movie set in London, or possibly a novel (albeit one of seemingly limited literary merit), but the excerpt is, in fact, entirely unrelated to the realm of literary or cinematic entertainment. Its author is the British nuclear physicist, military technology expert, and defence analyst Dr Frank Barnaby, who wrote the above-quoted paper in his capacity as Nuclear Issues Consultant for the Oxford Research Group. Published in June 2005, Barnaby's paper sets out to enlighten readers about the likelihood and potential impact of terrorist attacks using either a radiological dispersal device, also known as a "dirty bomb", or primitive nuclear weapons.

The paper opens with the observation that "[b]oth Prime Minister Tony Blair and US President George W. Bush have warned us that nuclear terrorism is a, if not the, major threat facing the international community today" (Barnaby 2005, 1). To which Barnaby adds: "The public has the right to know the risks they face from nuclear terrorism and the consequences of a terrorist attack" (2005, 1). After such an introduction, one would expect Barnaby to counteract the emotionally overheated rhetoric of the War on Terror and its obsessive reference to weapons of mass destruction with a sober and well-balanced analysis that weighs the risks that terrorists may be able to procure nuclear materials or weapons against the difficulties of properly manufacturing, storing, maintaining, transporting, and deploying such bombs. Instead, Barnaby offers what-if scenarios that are strongly reminiscent of the political statements and documents analysed above. "[T]he next rung on the terrorist ladder of escalation of violence may well be the fabrication and use of a nuclear weapon" (Barnaby 2005, 2), he writes in the characteristic style of post-9/11 counterterrorist discourse. Barnaby, too, uses the subjunctive mood to indicate that what he describes are mere possibilities, things that may – or may not – happen in the future. Yet, he repeatedly insinuates that the use of weapons of mass destruction by terrorist groups is more than an eventuality. In a particularly revealing phrase, he asserts that "[t]errorists *should* be able to acquire radioactive material" (Barnaby 2005, 6, emphasis added).

In an earlier report for the Oxford Research Group, published one month after the 11 September 2001 attacks, Barnaby said the same with regard to chemical or biological weapons: as things stand, and unless the nations of the world make a collaborative effort to secure materials that could be used to develop weapons of mass destruction, terrorists can easily access them. This may be the reason for Barnaby's strange choice of title, which is not explained in his essay: "Waiting for Terror" (Barnaby 2001). This is exactly the formulation used by Joseba Zulaika to describe "the dominant political certainty" of the post-9/11 years (2009, 12). Zulaika observes that the notion that major terrorist incidents are inevitable entails "a surrender to a passive temporality that is simply inevitable Fate, rather than an active temporality emerging from a new political will to determine the actual reasons, sources, and solutions to the sudden violence" (2009, 4). Political scientist John Mueller noted in 2006 that "at present rates, the lifetime probability that a resident of the globe will die at the hands of international terrorists is 1 in 80,000, about the same likelihood that one would die over the same interval from the impact on the earth of an especially ill-directed asteroid or comet" (Mueller 2006, 2). This fact notwithstanding, the nebulous (and therefore all the more sinister) entity of "terrorism"

was built up into an acute danger, requiring extraordinary measures and large-scale resources.

In June 2002, the White House issued its plan for "a new government structure to protect against invisible enemies" (Bush 2002, 1). This new structure, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), would become operational in January 2003 after the passing of the Homeland Security Bill. It soon became the nation's third-largest Cabinet department with more than 180,000 employees (only the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs have larger workforces) and a yearly budget of over 40 billion dollars (Daalgard-Nielsen 2005, 39). As the earlier-cited speech by Donald Rumsfeld showed, counterterrorist discourse often argues that extraordinary circumstances demand extraordinary measures. But the argument can also be reversed: extraordinary measures (such as the establishment of a costly new government structure) demand extraordinary circumstances, which is why a text released by the White House in June 2002 postulated that "[t]errorists today can strike at any place, at any time, and with virtually any weapon" (Bush 2002, 8). Accompanying a detailed outline of the proposed new department, this statement was obviously designed to justify the expenditure of tax money for the DHS.

The supposition that terrorists are able to attack "with virtually any weapon" is symptomatic of the rhetoric under investigation here. Although the word "virtually" is used in the sense of "practically" or "almost", it also indicates the peculiar nature of the threat – a threat that is virtual rather than concrete. By legitimising political actions on the basis of fictional scenarios – the phrase "any weapon" insinuates that terrorists already have access to chemical, biological, or even nuclear arsenals – counterterrorism blurs the boundary between the imaginary and the real. At the same time, it greatly magnifies the threat of terrorism. Although its proclaimed aim is to prevent terrorist attacks from occurring (the top priority and, indeed, the very *raison d'être* of the DHS), it paradoxically postulates that such attacks are inevitable.

In his 2009 book *Terrorism: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy*, Joseba Zulaika offers the following perspective on the "'It is not *if*, but *when*' … mantra" of counterterrorism:

> On the one hand, the real success of counterterrorism is when a foreseeable attack does *not* happen. Thus counterterrorists can legitimately claim each day in which another 9/11 does not take place as a success; these non-events prove they are right in their premises. Yet, on the other hand, if and when an attack does occur, then counterterrorist thinking can also say "we told you so" and argue that they were *always* right in their predictions. In short, whether there are terrorist attacks or not, counterterrorist knowledge pretends to be always right. (Zulaika 2009, 3–4, emphasis in original)

Problematically, the "alleged certainty that one day it will happen" (Zulaika 2009, 203) can only increase the sense of insecurity among the public. Frank Furedi speaks of a "vulnerability-led" approach to the threat of terrorism, which encourages "an attitude of fatalism, pessimism and dread of terrorism" and thereby "helps consolidate a mood of helplessness" (2007, 13, 15). Moreover, the notion of an inescapable future seems to imply the futility of present action. To argue that nothing can be done about the occurrence of a terrorist act (apart from preparing oneself for the event) is to suggest that terrorist violence is entirely unrelated to the current state of affairs, that it is not the effect of present causes. What is implied, instead, is that violence is already underway and that there is consequently no time to search for its roots: rather, we should be concerned about protecting ourselves – or of striking at the source of the threat.

Conclusion

I would like to close by illustrating my main points with the help of a literary text. Published in early 2005, Ian McEwan's novel *Saturday* opens with a description of what initially appears to be the beginning of a British 9/11. Gazing out of the bedroom window of his house in Fitzrovia Square one early morning, the London neurosurgeon Henry Perowne notices a fiery object in the sky, which he first believes to be a meteorite, but which soon turns out to be a burning aircraft descending towards Heathrow airport. Overcome by a sense of déjà-vu, Perowne is struck by the uncanny familiarity of what he sees and, being of analytical mind, he immediately offers an explanation for this impression:

> It's already almost eighteen months since half the planet watched, and watched again the unseen captives driven through the sky to the slaughter, at which time there gathered round the innocent silhouette of any jet plane a novel association. Everyone agrees, airliners look different in the sky these days, predatory or doomed. (McEwan 2006, 16)

The assertion that "Everyone agrees, airliners look different in the sky these days" invites us to put ourselves in the position of the protagonist. It is likely that most early readers of the novel would indeed have agreed, even if they were much further removed from the events of 11 September 2001 than Perowne, for whom only one-and-a-half years have elapsed since the attacks. The automatic association of passenger planes with an act of aggression or disaster is one illustration of the impact of 9/11. As we are told later in the novel, the terrorist attacks have created an attitude of anxious anticipation. People are waiting for 9/11 to happen again, both fearing and desiring a "recurrence" of the "monstrous and spectacular scenes" of that day (McEwan 2006, 176).

The phenomenon described here is more than a simple return of a traumatic past. It is also the fulfilment of a future-oriented fear. What Perowne sees – or, rather, what he believes to see – in front of his window is exactly what he has secretly been waiting for:

> The government's counsel – that an attack in a European or American city is an inevitability – isn't only a disclaimer of responsibility, it's a heady promise. Everyone fears it, but there's also a darker longing in the collective mind, a sickening for self-punishment and a blasphemous curiosity. Just as the hospitals have their crisis plans, so the television networks stand ready to deliver, and their audiences wait. Bigger, grosser next time. Please don't let it happen. But let me see it all the same, as it's happening and from every angle, and let me be among the first to know. (McEwan 2006, 176)

In passages such as this one, *Saturday* reflects the emergence of "terror" in the sense introduced in this essay: anticipatory fear of a terrorist attack based on both the experience of past attacks and the repeated assertion by government officials that another attack is bound to happen. McEwan's novel reflects the condition of "waiting for terror" that such forecasts of disaster entail and it stresses the ambivalence of that state. Shortly after 11 September, social anthropologist Begoña Aretxaga described "waiting for terror" as "a prolonged moment of suspension and anxiety, of terror transformed into spectacle, of terror that is also a thrill" (2001, 141). It is precisely this uncomfortable connection between terror (the fear of a next time) and voyeurism (the desire of witnessing disaster, willingly catered to by the mainstream media) that McEwan articulates in *Saturday*. In so doing, he tries to establish a meta-discursive vantage point on counterterrorist discourse. As we follow the thoughts of the protagonist, we are constantly made aware that his concerns about security are the result of an unholy alliance between terrorist networks, government officials acting in the name of counterterrorism, terrorism pundits, and the

mass media – all of which target the same audience, namely citizens like Perowne, producing a "community of anxiety" (McEwan 2006, 176) across the Western world.

Because McEwan makes his protagonist a positivist who has the habit of scrutinizing his own behaviour and attitude, the author has ample room to insert essayistic reflections such as the ones quoted above. As a result, *Saturday* often resembles McEwan's non-fiction writings. More than once, Perowne's thoughts read like echoes and elaborations of observations made by the author in post-9/11 essays and interviews. In a *Guardian* article published one day after the attacks, McEwan recounts how the non-stop live broadcast from New York turned him into an "information junkie" (McEwan 2001) craving facts and images. In an apologetic, almost confessional tone, McEwan assures the reader that his "[television] set in the corner is mostly unwatched", but that on 11 September, his son and he "surfed – hungrily, ghoulishly – between CNN, CBC and BBC24" (2001).

In *Saturday*, Henry Perowne undergoes a similar metamorphosis. Throughout the day, he tunes in to news programmes whenever he has the opportunity to do so. Perowne resembles his creator in feeling uneasy, even guilty, about his media addiction, which makes him give in to the "pull, like gravity, of the approaching TV news" (2006, 176). McEwan uses the occasion for one of his many essay-like digressions that oscillate between interior monologue and authorial comment:

> Have his anxieties been making a fool of him? It's part of the new order, this narrowing of mental freedom, of his right to roam. Not so long ago his thoughts ranged more unpredictably, over a longer list of subjects. He suspects he's becoming a dupe, the willing, febrile consumer of news fodder, opinion, speculation and all of the crumbs the authorities let fall. He's a docile citizen, watching Leviathan grow stronger while he creeps under its shadow for protection. … Does he think he's contributing something, watching news programmes, or lying on his back on the sofa on Sunday afternoons, reading more opinion columns of ungrounded certainties, more long articles about what really lies behind this or that development, or about what is most surely going to happen next, predictions forgotten as soon as they are read, well before events disprove them? … He's lost the habits of scepticism, he's becoming dim with contradictory opinion, he isn't thinking clearly, and just as bad, he senses he isn't thinking independently. (McEwan 2006, 180–181)

In a moment of self-scrutiny, it seems to Perowne that he has turned into a passive consumer of pre-selected information and pre-fabricated opinions, in danger of losing his ability to think autonomously and critically. Wondering to what extent the media influence or even determine his thoughts and emotions, he asks himself whether his mind can still roam freely. This, the author emphasises, is part of the "condition of the times", the "new order" (McEwan 2006, 176, 180) heralded by the 9/11 attacks and the political response to them: the vast public interest in terrorism and the War on Terror – which is perfectly in line with current political priorities and interests – amounts to "a consensus of a kind, an orthodoxy of attention, a mild subjugation in itself" (McEwan 2006, 181). Collective fear increases the power of the state, which is portrayed here as controlling information.

Despite such moments of meta-discursive reflection on the interplay and debilitating effects of counterterrorist policy-making, media discourse, and the fear of terrorism, McEwan's novel makes no attempt to break that cycle. The protagonist remains convinced throughout that an attack on a European capital is only a question of time:

> London, his small part of it, lies wide open, impossible to defend, waiting for its bomb, like a hundred other cities. Rush hour will be a convenient time. It might resemble the Paddington crash – twisted rails, buckled, upraised commuter coaches, stretchers handed out through

> broken windows, the hospital's Emergency Plan in action. Berlin, Paris, Lisbon. The authorities agree, an attack's inevitable. (McEwan 2006, 276)

London, Berlin, Paris, or Lisbon – this list of potential targets does not mention Madrid. The Madrid train bombings of 11 March 2004 are nonetheless present in McEwan's novel. Whenever *Saturday* mentions the possibility of a terrorist attack on a European city, the Madrid bombings serve as a subtextual reminder that Perowne's evil premonitions are justified. McEwan wrote the novel with the benefit of hindsight. By setting it one year before the Madrid bombings (which, at the time of publication, lay one year in the past), he amplified the inevitability of terrorist attacks. This sheds a different light on Perowne's unquestioning acceptance of government warnings. Why should he be critical of the authorities' caution that "an attack's inevitable", given that this prediction was later proved to be right?

After the events of 7 July 2005, Perowne's perception that London was "waiting for its bomb" seemed downright prophetic. In its issue of 17 July 2005, German weekly *Der Spiegel* asked McEwan: "Your new book, 'Saturday', is written in expectation of an act of terrorism. Now it has happened. What was your first thought when you heard it was a terrorist attack?" McEwan's answer was as follows:

> It [i.e. the terrorist attack] confirmed my book. I mean, it's not that I take any satisfaction from it, nor did I share any great insight, everybody's been waiting. But at the same time as waiting they're also forgetting because, you know, it's been four years since 9/11. Even Madrid, [*sic*] was 18 months ago. And, yes, at the end of the novel when Henry Perowne (the protagonist) is standing in the window he talks of Londoners waiting for its [*sic*] bombs. Well, you know, here it was. It's a bit like the death of an old parent. You could be waiting for it but that doesn't stop you from being shocked by it. (Cited in Hage and Matussek 2005)

This reply displays the same fatalism as the author's *Guardian* essay of the day after the 7/7 attacks, which asked in its title: "How could we have forgotten that this was always going to happen?" (McEwan 2005). To describe the London bombings as an event that was "always going to happen", "like the death of an old parent", implies that they were *not* the result of a specific configuration of circumstances and factors, but a necessary and unavoidable occurrence.

Such an attitude is precariously close to political resignation – an apathetic subjection to the given. If the future is inescapable, no matter what we do today, then why should we think about alternative responses to terrorism? For even if we change the current state of things, we cannot prevent the next terrorist attack. One could argue that Perowne's passive acquiescence in government policies is intended as a critique of this very attitude. Yet, *Saturday* does little to actively challenge the discourse of the War on Terror. Although the novel critically reflects the "general conformity" (McEwan 2006, 181) in the Western public resulting from the media-fuelled fear of terrorism, it ends with a fatalistic acceptance of that state, without attempting to establish an alternative frame of reference. This suggests the degree to which the perpetrators of 9/11 have been successful in establishing a sense of dread – aided, paradoxically, it would seem, by counterterrorist discourse and its media-circulated imaginations of even worse things to come.

In his study *Premediation: Affect and Mediality after 9/11*, new media scholar Richard Grusin argues that what he calls the "premediation of future events before they happen" (2010, 126) can be understood as a "form of medial pre-emption": "Premediation works to prevent citizens of the global mediasphere from experiencing again the kind of systemic or traumatic shock produced by the events of 9/11 by perpetuating an almost constant, low

level of fear or anxiety about another terrorist attack" (2010, 2). Grusin is convinced that "the shock of 9/11 generated a medial desire never to experience another catastrophe that had not already been premediated" (2010, 13).

As the examples given in the present article indicate, however, there is clearly more at stake in "premediation" than a prophylactic effort to prepare the public for the next disaster. Speculative threat scenarios serve the purpose of legitimising political measures in the name of counterterrorism and the very existence of counterterrorist institutions. For that reason, it would be misleading to consider them only as responses to the terror evoked by terrorist acts; they are also politically motivated contributions to the culture of fear and the imaginary of terrorism that this culture engenders. Utilising what I have described as the future-orientedness of fear, counterterrorist discourse veers away from the present reality by placing its focus on upcoming events. In the process, it loses sight of alternative approaches to the threat of political violence – approaches that lie beyond the preparation for, and "preemption" of, the next attack, and that do not assume that current violence "was always going to happen".

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. Studies of what is alternatively termed the "culture" or "politics of fear" in contemporary America and Britain usually do not investigate the phenomenon of fear itself (see, e.g., Furedi 1997, 2005; Altheide 2006; Linke and Smith 2009). Brian Massumi's essay on "The Future Ontology of Threat" is alone in specifying that "[f]ear is the anticipatory reality in the present of a threatening future" (2010, 54), a fact that Massumi connects with the "logic of preemption" in the discourse of the Bush administration. Counterterrorism's privileging of the imagination over information has been pointed out by the social anthropologists Joseba Zulaika and William Douglass in their important book *Terror and Taboo* (1996) as well as by the sociologist Frank Furedi in his study *Invitation to Terror*, which provides ample evidence of how "[Western leaders] enthusiastically demonstrate to the public that they are constantly capable of imagining the worst" (2007, 9). As the present article will argue, both of these aspects – the future-orientedness of fear on the one hand and the imaginative character of counterterrorist discourse on the other – need to be considered together.
2. As one example of many, see the influential definition proposed by Bruce Hoffman (also of the RAND Corporation) in his much-cited study *Inside Terrorism*: "[Terrorism is] the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change. … Terrorism is specifically designed to have far-reaching psychological effects beyond the immediate victim(s) or object of the terrorist attack. It is meant to instill fear within, and thereby intimidate, a wider 'target audience' that might include a rival ethnic or religious group, an entire country, a national government or political party, or public opinion in general" (2006, 40–41).
3. Interestingly, however, it was only *after* the London bombings that a British newspaper ran an adapted version of the scenario: On 10 July 2005, *The Independent on Sunday* featured an article appropriately titled "What if… there was a 'dirty bomb' attack on London?" See Guelke (2006, 178–179).

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