It is often difficult to disentangle how news frames shape the social construction of reality from the “actual” reality of events. It is like being surrounded by an endless hall of mirrors. This is especially true if a consensual interpretation predominates in any society so that one-sided frames become taken for granted uncritically by politicians, reporters, and the public. To understand this process further, news coverage of an event needs to be compared against an independent benchmark. In particular, evidence of trends in terrorist incidents is needed for comparison with how the news media reported the threat of terrorism, and how this coverage in turn led towards the widespread American perception that international threats to U.S. domestic security suddenly surged to unprecedented levels post-9/11. A similar approach would compare official police crime statistics against reporting of these incidents, or government measures of the proportion of population below the poverty level compared with news stories about poverty. Admittedly official statistics also provide a social construction of reality, and these can also be affected by the news media, for example if the publicity surrounding cases of violent rape deters or encourages other victims to come forward to report cases to the police. Yet official statistics provide an alternative way to calculate the statistical risk of terrorism, especially if their construction is relatively independent of the media.

Attempts to monitor trends in the incidents of terrorism are often flawed and inconsistent, remaining heavily dependent upon the particular definition and classifications used by official agencies, and affected by the reliability of the record provided by the media’s reporting of these events. Estimates vary depending upon whether they count the frequency of terrorist events, or their effects in terms of the number of fatalities or wounded, or the costs of damage to property. It is difficult to compare cases since some types of terrorism are relatively common although they may involve only one or two victims in each event, exemplified by kidnappings in Colombia, while others may be rare but may involve many more victims when they occur, such as the airline bomb over Lockerbie. Different weightings of these factors can obviously generate alternative assessments of the statistical risks. It is also most difficult to compare
domestic terrorist incidents, since national crime statistics collected by Interpol’s database covering 180 nations depend upon the statutory definition of terrorism used in each country and the reliability of official records by member states, and the major crime statistics collected by Interpol since 1950 are not disaggregated in a way that could identify terrorist incidents.¹ The U.S. State Department report Patterns of Terrorism, 2001 provides the most consistent annual estimates of the number of international terrorist incidents around the world since 1969.² This data has been used by many scholars for secondary time-series analysis of the risks of international terrorism.³ The definition of international terrorism used by the State Department has been slightly broadened over the years, introducing some inconsistencies, but the data presented in Patterns of Terrorism 2001 has been adjusted to form a reliable time-series based on current definitions. For comparison, we can turn to the frequency of international terrorist incidents monitored from 1968 to 1997 by an independent source, the RAND-Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (RAND-MIPT). The major trends documented by the RAND-MIPT series closely parallel the U.S. State Department evidence, which lends greater confidence in the reliability of the official estimates.⁴ The FBI and U.S. Department of Justice collected comparable official statistics on incidents of domestic terrorism occurring within the United States borders from 1987 to 1999.⁵

The evidence about trends in terrorism in Figure 14.1, collected by the U.S. State Department and corroborated by the RAND-MIPT indicators, indicates that the frequency of international terrorist incidents fell significantly during the 1990s, rather than rising. Far from high risks, United States citizens have lived in the safest region in the world, whether measured by the number of attacks or the number of casualties on domestic soil, not the most vulnerable. These statistical indicators, extrapolating from past events, suggest that the Bush administration’s claims that threats from world terrorism have sharply worsened with 9/11, so that Americans live in an especially dangerous place, are exaggerated. The evidence suggests that the public misperceived the statistical risk of terrorist acts, which is not surprising given the general difficulty the public has in calculating risk and particular types of risks. In this regard, the threat of terrorist events is similar to the exaggeration or underestimation of many other social and physical risks, whether from car accidents, violent crime, or cancer.⁶

Clearly 9/11 had a devastating impact upon American perceptions of vulnerability and security, especially coming after a period of declining terrorism risk. The experience of 9/11 may be an aberration or a harbinger of heightened risk in the new decade of the 21st century. But even the scale of the tragedy of 9/11 incidents did not put the United States in a category of high terrorist vulnerability comparable to that of many other states in the world. In Peru alone, for example, it is widely estimated that long-standing conflict between the state
and the Shining Path rebel movement, involving terrorism on both sides, caused 30,000 deaths from the late-1960s until 1992, when the movement was severely weakened by the arrest of several rebel commanders. In the Philippines, three decades of fighting between the New People’s Army (NPA) and the government killed an estimated 40,000 people. In Sri Lanka, from 1983 when war began to the 2002 Oslo peace settlement, about 60,000 people were killed in conflict between the Tamil Tigers and the government.

Of course many factors contributed towards American feelings of vulnerability after 9/11. For example, there were dramatic changes in homeland security and transportation policy that directly affected hundreds of thousands of Americans. Official government policy and leadership speeches by the Bush administration heightened public fears by recommending that Americans build safe rooms with plastic sheeting and duct tape and by issuing a series of “yellow” and “orange” warnings of terrorist dangers—which have not yet materialized. The Bush administration also claimed that there were direct links between the Al-Qaeda organization and Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, links that other governments in France, Germany and Russia, as well as elsewhere, argued were never convincingly substantiated.

The power of consensual news frames, exemplified by the “war on terrorism” frame in America cannot be underestimated. A one-sided news frame can block the reception of contrary independent evidence. Feelings of threat are magnified.
by the constant use of the frame, although in the American case, it appears to have hardened the will to resist (see Leona Huddy et al., Chapter 13). The events, depicted so vividly live on American television screens, carried tremendous visual immediacy and symbolic weight, from threats to Wall Street to the attack on the Pentagon, and rumors about potential threats to the White House. The events were shocking because prior to 9/11, foreign attacks on American soil had been unknown since the Second World War. The closest parallel in recent years was the Oklahoma City bombing, a product of domestic terrorism. As Todd Schaefer has shown (Chapter 6), the local angle of terrorism is often the most powerful frame in reporting. When terrorists strike, concern rises most within the society being attacked. Even among the U.S. population, New Yorkers felt more vulnerable to terrorist attacks than Americans living in other parts of the country.

The 9/11 attacks also exerted powerful effects because they involved suicidal perpetrators, religious extremists, and thousands of deaths. Novel terrorist tactics involving mass casualties or deaths, such as airplane hijacking in the 1970s or suicide bombers in the early 21st century, may elicit greater news coverage and fear reactions than continuing “routine” threats affecting individual casualties, such as kidnappings in Colombia. When the government takes effective steps to counter terrorist threats, then news coverage, and perceived vulnerability, decline. There are therefore multiple reasons why the government authorities warned, the news media reported, and why many Americans felt, that there was indeed a new security threat to their everyday lives after 9/11, whether from airports, anthrax spores in the mail, or possibly some new deadly biological hazard, loose nukes, dirty bombs, or mass poisonings. But these fears should be put in historical and geopolitical context, and understood in terms of the statistical probability and trends of terrorist events.

Long-term Trends in Terrorism

To understand the framing of terrorism, we need to consider long-term trends and the origins of this phenomenon, which lie in acts of assassinations, repression, and massacres common down the ages, whether perpetuated by states or by dissident groups. Although practices can be identified since the earliest history of the Greek city-states, the concept was first used in 1795, to describe government by intimidation, arising from Robespierre’s reign of terror during the French Revolution. In this regard, the systematic use of terror was first understood as a coercive technique or method of subjection used by rulers to control the people. The term “terrorists” was rapidly extended to those groups or individuals who employed violent intimidation to further their views, especially members of extreme revolutionary societies in Russia. The nineteenth and early twentieth century saw sporadic outbursts from diverse insurgent groups using assassinations and bombs to attack monarchs, aristocrats and government officials, as exemplified by the Fenians (the Irish Republican Brotherhood), militant anarchists in Europe, and disaffected Russian revolutionaries.
Terrorism came somewhat later to the United States, although political violence was far from unknown, as illustrated by the assassination of President Lincoln. After the American Civil War (1861–65) defiant Southerners formed the Ku Klux Klan to intimidate supporters of Reconstruction and to coerce the African American population. The 1890s experienced multiple regicides in Europe, and estimates suggest that chiefs of state were murdered at the rate of nearly one per year.9 From the 1920s onwards, the resurgence of terrorism was closely associated with nationalist independence movements struggling against colonial powers, exemplified by the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya, the National Liberation Front of Algeria, and the Viet Minh fighting against French rule in Vietnam, with terrorism focused largely against governments within national borders. State terrorism during this era was exemplified by Stalin’s use of the Great Terror as a mechanism of Soviet control, as well as repression and death squads employed routinely by military juntas and authoritarian regimes in many Latin America countries.

Terrorism During the 1970s and 1980s
The modern era of terrorism is conventionally demarcated from the early-1970s onwards, a period that saw the growing spread of terrorism across national borders, in line with other trends in globalization. The trends in international terrorism around the world as monitored by the US State Department, illustrated in Figure 14.1, suggest that the number of incidents grew erratically from the early 1970s, after the Munich Olympic crisis, rising until they peaked around the mid-to-late 1980s. The most well-known incidents of spectacular terrorism in this era, widely reported in the international press, were exemplified by the Black September (pro-Palestinian) capture of Israeli hostages at the Munich Olympics in 1972, plane hijackings in 1975 by the Baader Meinhof organization in Germany, assassinations and kidnapping by the extreme left-wing anti-capitalist Red Brigade in Italy in 1977, the Iranian U.S. Embassy hostage taking in 1979, the hijacking of TWA-847 by Islamic Jihad in Athens in 1985, and the Libyan downing of PanAm-103 over Lockerbie in Scotland in 1988. Although receiving far less international media attention,10 more routine and deadly incidents of terrorism continued in many world regions, especially throughout much of Africa and Latin America. Sporadic terrorist violence, including occasional bombings, hostage-takings, hijackings, assassinations, arson, and armed assaults, was evident in many areas with multiple incidents in deeply divided plural societies, exemplified by Israel and the West Bank, Spain, and Northern Ireland.11

For the last three decades, planes have been downed, bombs exploded, and victims hurt. In Europe, Baader Meinhof, Carlos the Jackal, the Red Brigades, the IRA, and Eta killed and maimed their way across the 1970s and 1980s. During these years, groups using terrorist tactics around the world were as diverse as Shining Path in Peru, the PLO in Israel and the West Bank, Marxist guerrillas in Colombia, and the Afghan mujahadeen fighting the Soviet invaders.
Latin America, Asia, and Africa learnt to live with varying degrees of civil violence and political terror. Given the importance of the local angle in news reporting, during the 1970s and 1980s the U.S. news media, especially network TV news, paid little attention to terrorism in many parts of the world except in cases where American citizens, interests, or cultural affinities were directly involved. The most comprehensive study by Gabrielle Weimann and Conran Winn, comparing the number of terrorist incidents from 1968 to 1980 recorded in the RAND database against news coverage of these events by the three main American television networks in the Vanderbilt archive, estimated that only between 15–18 percent of terrorist acts were ever reported. The study also found that the New York Times, while more comprehensive, still covered only a third of all such incidents. Following the general pattern of international news coverage, U.S. networks covered terrorist events in Africa and Latin America the least, and on North America and the Middle East the most. The relative neglect of U.S. media coverage of terrorism in countries such as Colombia, Peru, Sri Lanka and the Philippines persisted despite the existence of widespread armed conflict, major violations of human rights, and substantial civil unrest.

**Terrorism During the 1990s**

The end of the Cold War in the late-1980s and early-1990s generated a significant peace-dividend. Far from a growing threat, the 1990s witnessed a substantial fall in the frequency of international terrorist events. The mean number of international terrorist incidents per annum was estimated in *Patterns of Terrorism 2001* by the U.S. State Department. There were 437 incidents per year during the 1970s, rising to 535 per year during the 1980s, before falling to 383 per year during the 1990s. In total, 348 incidents occurred during 2001, the lowest level since the series started. Nor was this just a statistical aberration or change of classification: similar trends were confirmed in the RAND-MIPT series. Larry C. Johnson concluded that during the last decade of the 20th century, fewer countries confronted significant terrorist threats, the number of terrorist groups fell, and fatalities from international terrorism also declined. The main factors driving this development can be found in the dramatic spread of democratization that occurred worldwide since the late 1980s, which facilitated greater autonomy or self-determination for many ethno-political groups, and the end of some of the most repressive state regimes. The most reliable independent estimates of long-term trends in armed conflict and ethnic conflict, provided by the Minorities at Risk (MAR) project based at the University of Maryland, confirms that the 1990s saw a sizeable and consistent fall in the number of incidents of ethnic conflict and of armed conflict around the globe: “The number and magnitude of armed conflict within and among states have lessened since the early 1990s by nearly half.”

Of course global incidents of international terrorism could fall while cases of local terrorism grew on American soil, but in fact the FBI also documented fewer
cases of domestic terrorism. Incidents monitored by the FBI dropped from 23 cases per annum during the 1970s down to only 5 cases per annum during the 1990s. During the 1970s many domestic incidents were attributed to radical left-wing groups, anti-war extremists, and Puerto Rican separatists, including the Weather Underground, Armed Forces of Puerto Rican Liberation (FALN), the Black Liberation Army and the Symbionese Liberation Army. The fortunes of these groups declined in the mid-1980s, due to law enforcement initiatives and changes in the political culture. During the last decade the overall number of domestic incidents remained low, although some right-wing anti-government and racist fringe radicals, militia and ‘patriot’ groups became more active in the US, such as Aryan Nation, along with some radical environmental and animal rights activists.

During the 1990s, however, terrorist events, which had been common in many countries, sometimes came closer to home for Americans. The most spectacular acts that affected Americans during the last decade included the bombing of the New York World Trade Center underground car park in 1993, the 1995 demolition of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, the Unabomber’s 18-year campaign that ended in 1996, the 1998 destruction of the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, as well as the dramatic events of 9/11. What is remarkable with hindsight, however, is how few terrorist events had occurred within the borders of the United States prior to 9/11 compared with regional patterns elsewhere. The U.S. State Department noted only 15 international terrorist attacks took place from 1996 to 2000 within North America (see Figure 14.2), compared with 151 incidents in Africa, 159 in the Middle East, 251 in Asia, 309 in Western Europe, and 637 in Latin America. A comparison of the total casualties produced by international terrorist incidents shows only 7 casualties within North America from 1996 to 2000, compared with 253 hurt in Latin America, 404 in Asia, 945 in Western Europe, 1754 in the Middle East, and a remarkable 6411 casualties in Africa. Against this background, threats from international terrorism that had become widely familiar to citizens in many nations around the world, as well as to U.S. citizens when traveling abroad, were largely unknown within U.S. borders. Figure 14.3 shows the number of American citizens hurt or killed by incidents of terrorism from 1991 to 2001, with relatively low numbers throughout the decade, with the clear exceptions of the Oklahoma bombing and 9/11.

Trends in Terrorism Coverage

So how did the U.S. news media cover these developments? The levels of coverage of terrorism in the U.S. national news can be compared from 1969 to 2002 using simple keyword searches for stories featuring the term ‘terrorism’. We can compare coverage on the major network TV evening news programs ABC, CBS, NBC, PBS and CNN, using the Vanderbilt archive, and we can use a similar process to analyze coverage in the New York Times, using the
LEXIS-NEXIS DATABASE. Clearly the keyword search procedure is only an approximate indicator, and more refined analysis could examine coverage using alternative keyword terms such as 'political violence', or specific types of terrorism employed in different regions. Nevertheless the broad search for story summaries including the term 'terrorism' provides at least a rough gauge of the extent of coverage.

The results (see Figure 14.4) confirm what many previous studies have documented, namely that international terrorism attracted the greatest attention in the American press in the most dramatic cases, particularly those involving American victims. Weimann and Winn found that certain factors helped to predict which terrorist incidents attracted the most coverage in U.S. network news during this period, including the level of violence (the number of injuries or deaths involved), the location (in the Middle East or North America), the type of event (with most coverage for airline hijackings), and if responsibility for the incident was known. These traits were exemplified by the Iranian U.S. Embassy hostage-taking in 1979, the Hezbollah truck bombings of the U.S. Embassy and U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in 1984, the hijacking of TWA-847...
The Lessons of Framing Terrorism  

Fig. 14.3  U.S. Citizens wounded or killed by international terrorism, 1991–2001. Source: US State Department. Patterns of Terrorism, 2007. Washington, DC. Appendix C. Note that this does not include the case of the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, where 647 people were wounded and 168 were killed, as this was classified as an act of domestic terrorism.

290  •  Montague Kern, Marion Just, and Pippa Norris

by Islamic Jihad in Athens in 1985, the Libyan state sponsorship of the bombing of La Belle disco in Berlin in 1986, and the downing of PanAm-103 over Lockerbie in Scotland in 1988. These ‘spectacular’ events generated distinctive peaks of coverage in American news media. During the 1970s, the New York Times contained on average one story about terrorism every other day. Coverage doubled to just over two stories per day on average during the 1980s. U.S. network TV evening news covered on average about one story about terrorism every week during the 1970s, and rose to 4 stories per week during the 1980s. In addition the American news media also provided coverage of routine domestic terrorist conflict in countries and regions with long-established cultural ties to the United States, particularly events in Israel and in Northern Ireland.25

During the 1990s the trends in U.S. TV news followed the real-world decline. The average number of stories about terrorism on the U.S. network news was four stories per week during the 1980s but this dropped to two stories per week during the 1990s (when international coverage in general was sharply reduced on U.S. TV news).26 The events of 9/11 were therefore all the more shocking to Americans, in part because of the sheer extent of the death and destruction in New York and Washington DC, but also because the United States had seemed so immune from these risks at home for so long. As expected, news coverage of terrorism following 9/11 reached record levels; one simple indicator is that the number of news stories about terrorism on the three major networks jumped from around 178 in the 12-months prior to September 2001 to 1345 stories in the twelve months afterwards, not counting, of course, the extensive number of 24/7 extended news bulletins, round-the-clock cable news, local news programs, news magazine special reports, and documentaries.27

Not surprisingly, public concern mirrored the network news coverage. Chapters in this book have explored the direction of causality in this relationship, but simple correlations here can be examined by comparing the public’s concern about terrorism with levels of TV network news of this subject. When Americans were asked by the Gallup Report about “the most important problem facing the country” the proportion nominating “terrorism” shot up from zero in the three months prior to September 2001 to almost half the population (46%) immediately after 9/11. Levels of anxiety subsided again in subsequent months, although remaining at relatively high levels. As illustrated in Figure 14.5, without assuming the direction of causality in this relationship, levels of public concern roughly reflected patterns of coverage of terrorism shown on national TV network evening news. Twelve months after September 11, despite continuing economic problems, and the persistence of major domestic issues such as health care and social security, one fifth of the public continued to regard terrorism as the “most important problem” facing America. By spring 2003, the levels of public concern about terrorism were about half what they were just after 9/11, but five times what they were before 9/11. Clearly the decline over time represents a “distance from the event” phenomenon, which is also common to other
kinds of misperceptions of risk (such as of earthquake fault lines), while the increase over the pre-9/11 period may represent an exaggerated sense of risk. The question remains whether we can expect a further continued decline in the perceived risk of terrorism, as memories fade, as with previous incidents such as Lockerbie or Oklahoma, or whether the government, the news media, and possibly events themselves, continue to fuel this sense of threat, so that concern about terrorism remains relatively high on the American public’s agenda.

Public concern in America needs to be set in context: what changed with 9/11 were not the overall levels of international terrorist incidents in the world. Obviously American citizens had long been directly affected by terrorism prior to 9/11, with lives lost and people hurt both abroad (as exemplified by the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979, the Athens hijacking of TWA-847 in 1985, or the downing of PanAm-103 over Lockerbie in 1988) and also at home (as shown most dramatically by the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995). Certainly risks remain difficult to assess and some new threats against American interests may have been either deterred or prevented by strengthened security measures at airports, border crossings, or official buildings. Given the vulnerability of modern societies, terrorist threats directed against American citizens will continue, even with increased security. There could always be a ‘contagion’ effect from 9/11, if other groups seek to replicate the suicide attack to gain global publicity. The
events of 9/11 were also different from many previous terrorist incidents since no political demands were made prior to the attacks, and religious fanatics willing to commit suicide committed the acts. The multiple coordinated simultaneous attacks upon different symbolic American targets, as well as their visual immediacy and live coverage, also immeasurably strengthened their impact. The events of 9/11 understandably brought a new feeling of vulnerability to many Americans, as security threats that were long familiar elsewhere around the globe directly affected U.S. citizens in New York and Washington DC, creating the broader climate of support for the ‘war on terrorism’. For many Americans, and for the Bush administration, the events of 9/11 justified the subsequent attacks on Afghanistan and on Iraq, even if many critics deeply questioned the claimed linkage of Al Qaeda with President Saddam Hussein.

**Terrorism and the “Framing” Model**

What then does this book tell us about the role of the press, government, and public opinion in the framing process, especially when the War on Terrorism frame emerged in the period immediately after 9/11? Here we evaluate this question in the light of the framing model (Chapter 1) that underpins the analysis in this book. The schematic model presented earlier in figure 1.1 distinguishes between the factors leading to the news frame—including the societal culture, the competing government and terrorist frames, and the events themselves—and the consequences of the news frame for public opinion and the policy process.

**Influences on News Frames**

**Culture**  The comparative focus of this book offers important insights into how societal cultures affected the framing of terrorism. As Tamar Liebes and Anat First point out (Chapter 4), the comparison of Israel and the West Bank shows how events may be manipulated to limit, or attract press attention, in order to achieve a narrative or iconic victory. Although accurate portrayal of factual events is the goal of journalism, reporters necessarily engage in processes of selection and emphasis as they construct the news. Problems of reportorial omission and commission are contentious, especially when there is no consensus on the frames or where different communities within the same nation adopt conflicting frames for events. Conflicting news frames of terrorism embody the difficulty journalists face in representing “reality.” Given the potential for manipulation by state and non-state combatants, such as the Israel Defense Forces or the Palestine Liberation Organization, what does it mean for journalists to produce accurate news coverage? The difficulties are enormous. Simply staying alive in the face of opposing forces is a problem for journalists around the world. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 389 journalists were killed around the world for practicing their profession from 1992 to 2001.28 Covering conflict, including terrorism, represents an ongoing and dangerous challenge for the press.
The case of Northern Ireland points to a different way that society influences the terrorism frame. As the British government welcomed the IRA pledge to renounce violence, Tim Cooke (Chapter 5) documents how journalists struggle to define new ways to characterize the struggle between the IRA and the Unionists. Former ‘terrorists’, whose views have previously been delegitamized due to use of violence, have become elected politicians. They may even become a central figure on the global political scene, as in the case of Nelson Mandela. Mandela was the former leader of the African National Congress, a movement long delegitimized by the U.S. government, and by global news coverage because of its embrace of terrorism against the minority Apartheid regime. The question for journalists and media scholars is: Whose cues should journalists follow in characterizing non-governmental organizations? How should they understand conflict in events that may involve insurgent action, especially when those rebel groups might transition to partners in waging peace?

As many previous studies have found, contributors stress that geopolitical position, and domestic political perspectives strongly shape news coverage of political violence. It is hardly surprising that terrorism is framed from a geopolitical perspective since news has, as Robin Brown (Chapter 3) points out, emerged as diplomacy by other means. Journalists around the world cover terrorism from a local angle, in terms of either the location of events or the nationality of victims and perpetrators. The result is a record of frustration. As Schaeffer points out in Chapter 6 the focus of the U.S. media was on the meaning of the Kenyan embassy terrorist attacks for the U.S. and what America should do in response. U.S. news stories ignored African perceptions, and concerns, for example, for aid for African victims. Similarly, in conveying the meaning of the September 11 attacks, African media depicted American viewpoints through news coverage of government officials and to some extent, those of average American victims (using global news which included this focus), and their editorial interpretations were almost entirely in line with African governmental points of view. Both media de-emphasized the global concerns of the other and searched for local angles.

While news of 9/11 portrayed American politics as defined by a renewed sense of national community and purpose, Brigitte Nacos and Torres Reyna (Chapter 8) describe the influence of culture in the use of stereotypes in news coverage. Stereotypes have had a significant impact on all media in all cultures, and over the course of American history. Prior to 9/11, news coverage particularly in New York, but also national newspapers, characteristically employed negative frames for Arabs and Muslims. Despite improving images of Arab Americans and Muslim Americans during the post 9/11 period, Huddy et al. found that negative stereotypes had a persistent impact on public opinion of Arab Americans after 9/11 (Chapter 13).

**Government** Another force shaping frames on terrorism is censorship and self-censorship of journalists. Governments have, what is widely perceived to be,
Montague Kern, Marion Just, and Pippa Norris

legitimate power to constrain press coverage in wartime. As Doris A. Graber (Chapter 2) points out, however, balancing the security interests and freedom of the press is a critical goal in democratic societies. The preservation of civilian oversight of the military, and popular oversight of government, depend on an informed public. It is extremely difficult for journalists to exercise their watchdog roles when they share official frames of events in the news. Given the inter-penetration of news and governance even in time of war, as explained by Brown (Chapter 3), it is in the interest of the military and the government to provide journalists with access to the news. The government and the military, on the one hand, and journalists, on the other, exist in a symbiotic relationship and struggle for control. The way that journalists were ‘embedded’ with the military during the Iraq war, and able to provide live coverage from the front-line, provides the latest important twist on this story. Recognizing the needs of other players and establishing trade-offs can help officials and the press to meet the needs of democratic citizens. Graber’s review of the history of free press in wartime suggests, however, that journalists need to err on the side of getting the story if they are going to give the public information vital for democratic governance.

Content analyses conducted for this book show that U.S. news had a common theme in the post-9/11 period—that America had been attacked, the world had changed, and the U.S. must respond when threatened. Narratives portrayed the United States and its allies as besieged, and placed the blame for the attack squarely on Osama bin Laden and his supporters. As is common in crisis coverage, American news closely tracked official views both in national newspapers (Schaeffer Chapter 6) and on CNN television (Jasperson and El-Kikhia Chapter 8). President George W. Bush went on television, echoing the rhetoric of World War II to rally and comfort the nation (“We are beginning another front in our war against terrorism, so freedom can prevail over fear.”)29 His ratings soared. Immediately after 9/11, political leaders from around the world, including European allies, repeated Bush’s message. Elite messages blended with “ordinary, heroic American” interviews that focused on the bravery of Americans and their renewed sense of national pride and purpose. At the same time, U.S. television also visually emphasized the savagery of the terrorist acts, and their impact on innocent victims, families and communities.

Real World Events As we have seen, government and other political actors can shape news coverage. Journalists’ use of alternative frames has been rare in the post-Vietnam era of American war journalism, due to censorship and self-censorship. In early October 1991, however, CNN, which was generally deferential in regard to the framing efforts of the U.S. president and generals (Jasperson and el-Kikhia Chapter 7), also aired some news stories based on information obtained from an Arabic-language news service, al-Jazeera.30 These stories included frames that referenced the human cost of the U.S. attack on al-Qaeda,
The Lessons of Framing Terrorism

295

the Taliban, and the population in Afghanistan. Since CNN is itself a global network, its use of an Arabic-language TV news source no doubt enhanced its credibility in other parts of the world—although it may have offended the U.S. government. At the same time, the use of alternative frames by a widely watched news network expanded American media and public resources for deliberation.

Public Opinion

How did the American public react to the news coverage of 9/11 and its aftermath? Did the public find information that facilitated the cognitive construction of judgments necessary to understand events? In general, media coverage is an important resource for public opinion. In this case, did news frames build, or disrupt bonds of national social and political trust? And did they contribute to emotional reactions that could immobilize citizens, making them fearful and unable to respond rationally to future terrorism risks? If this latter goal in particular was achieved, it could be argued that news coverage of 9/11 served the terrorists rather than American public interest.

At one level, news coverage clearly served U.S. interest. As Michael Traugott and Ted Brader (Chapter 10) point out, newsmagazine frames held terrorists responsible for their own actions, and public attention to such news far exceeded normal information-seeking demographics. It can be concluded that although newsmagazines helped put terrorism on the public agenda, it did not prime public opinion in a fashion sympathetic to terrorists, indeed the reverse.

Nor does it appear that a terrorist attack, amplified in press coverage, is likely to lead to major problems of social disaffection on the national level, another terrorist goal. Instead, during the months following 9/11, it became clear (Brewer et al. Chapter 12) that a worrisome trend toward increasing distrust of political institutions was reversed by 9/11. In the wake of the news event, greater trust in one’s fellow citizens had a positive effect on symbolic patriotism, or attachment to the nation and its symbols. Increasing levels of social trust led to positive, mutually reinforcing evaluations of government institutions. The president was a particular beneficiary of this process—as citizens who rallied around the flag also rallied around George W. Bush. Interestingly, system support fueled the dramatic rise in Bush’s approval ratings. In this case, popular support for an administration did not drive system support, but rather the other way round.

Beyond that, on the psychological level, did the United States experience an increase in fear and anxiety sufficient to preclude rational response to terrorist actions? Huddy and colleagues make it clear that Americans were extremely concerned about the risk of a future attack in the months following 9/11 (Chapter 13). Debilitating fear and other negative emotional reactions were less prevalent, although evident in a small minority of cases. A small number of Americans were emotionally shaken by the attacks, including younger people, Hispanics, Republicans, women, northeasterners, and those who knew a victim. Education and regular viewing of TV news increased both the perceived risk of terrorism, as well as fear and anxiety. The link between personal experience and physical...
proximity to the attacks clarified the additional power of terrorist events to frighten individuals most immediately affected by them.

Huddy et al. caution that the great majority of Americans were not affected emotionally by the terrorist attacks. Still, in a finding with important implications for the field of political communication, television viewing of repetitive, and rebroadcast visual images of homeland terrorist attacks increased fear, and those made fearful were less able to learn cognitively from news. Fear elicited by the 9/11 terrorist incidents had two further implications in regard to social dislocation and disaffection: 1) the extent to which other Americans can be trusted, on the individual level and 2) the extent to which respondents thought that Arab-Americans supported the 9/11 terrorist acts, and thus were disloyal. Interestingly, these findings square with high levels of anti-Arab American sentiment reported in public opinion polls, and significant stereotyping of Arab Americans, Arabs, and Muslims, as terrorist sympathizers, both before and after 9/11 (Nacos and Torres-Reyna Chapter 8). Finally, according to Huddy, et al. in the United States fear and anxiety increased patriotism and positive feelings about America, while making people more wary in their daily interactions with others, particularly Arab-Americans. These are significant findings, which indicate that, although the vast majority of Americans did not experience debilitating emotional responses to 9/11, some did, with consequences both for the emergence of patriotism and social wariness, particularly in regard to an enemy “within”. This psychological effects research lends support to Nacos and Torres-Reyna’s conclusion, based on content analysis, that news frames gave legitimacy to anti-Arab and anti-Muslim policies. Huddy et al.’s public opinion findings demonstrate that news can have a positive impact on the audience’s political knowledge and ability to assess risks. Television frames also increase levels the audience’s emotional responses, which were significantly greater among individuals who watched television and who lived in proximity to terrorism incidents or experienced loss as a result of terrorism. People who had strong emotional experiences in regard to 9/11, were more likely to stereotype Arabs and Muslims, and were more wary of their fellow citizens, but also felt increased patriotism.

The chapters in this book have shown how interdependent the press, the military, and the government are in wartime, even in a conflict as diffuse as that caused by terrorism. In democratic societies, public opinion is an important player in this game. Politicians and generals require public support for their military efforts and seek to stimulate that support by promoting and discouraging dissent. To promote their messages, however, public officials must have the cooperation of journalists. In times of shared crisis, a sense of threat often means that journalists freely offer their collaboration. Even if journalists seek opposing views on government war policies, they are constrained by their dependence on government access in order to write the news. Balanced presentation is difficult in wartime if official opposition leaders are unwilling to counter government views—either because they concede leadership to the party
The Lessons of Framing Terrorism • 297

in government or out of fear of being accused of lack of patriotism. Mass media scholars have observed a phenomenon in which news is “indexed” to the policy debates of official or what journalists perceive to be “legitimate” sources.\(^{32}\) In the case of U.S. foreign policy, this index is based heavily on views expressed by the Administration and the opposition party in Congress. That debate in the U.S. was absent or muted from 9/11, through the war in Afghanistan, and for many months of the troop build-up for the war in Iraq. It was not until the diplomatic failures of the Administration to secure broad allied support and the imprimatur of the U.N. Security Council for war with Iraq that members of Congress and aspiring presidential candidates raised questions.\(^{33}\) The press carried these criticisms of the President’s policies both at home and abroad, covered domestic and foreign peace demonstrations against the war, and reported ambivalence in public support for the war based on opinion polls. Several surveys that probed opinion about going to war against Iraq found significant public concern that the Administration had not sufficiently made its case for war against Iraq and worried about a preemptive war without broader allied and U.N. support. The divide between the President’s supporters and those who hung back was marked by partisanship, gender, and race—factors, which tended to coincide.\(^{34}\)

The core of President George W. Bush’s support for War on Iraq, before March 19, 2003 was made up of Republicans and conservatives who voted for him in 2000. Thus, just as Democrats and liberals were more hawkish in support of President Bill Clinton’s attack on Serbian-led Yugoslavia in 1999, sectors of the public that had supported Bush in 2000, notably white evangelical Protestants and rural citizens, were his greatest supporters on the war front. Men were also more hawkish than women were, although the gender gap was not terribly large, except in California. Polls taken after the invasion found that support for the war (and for President Bush) was weakest among African Americans. In fact African Americans were the only group to register a majority opposition to the war and to the President.\(^{35}\)

One aspect of the opinion divide is particularly relevant for media framing of terrorism. Survey respondents who believed that Saddam Hussein was directly involved in the September 11 attack were disproportionately strong supporters of the war.\(^{36}\) One journalist, who analyzed eight press and Pew Research Center polls dealing with the issue from September 13, 2001-February 10–12, 2003, in comparison with carefully worded explicit and implicit claims by the President, members of his administration, intelligence agencies, Congress, the President of the Czech Republic, and Osama bin Laden, concluded that the theory of a link between al-Qaeda and Iraq was “explored, dispelled, suggested, dismissed and approximated over a year and a half.”\(^{37}\) The finding that misinformation and impressionistic clues were closely tied to American support for the war in Iraq suggests broad governmental power to shape public opinion, given news routines, and the expressed desirability of self-censorship among a significant segment of the press.\(^{38}\)
The chapters in this book demonstrate that news coverage that unquestioningly adopts government frames—such as the war on terrorism—does not serve the public well. Official frames may not only exaggerate levels of terrorist activity, as in the U.S. case, but also fail to explain the complex range of economic and national issues that confront the world today. If news organizations take advantage of global resources they will be able to counter the gun-barrel vision produced by political, military, and cultural frames at home. The way news about terrorism is framed is both contentious and consequential. In a society that is consensual around acts of terrorism, the domestic news frames of terrorism can go unchallenged. Government elites and journalists will usually largely concur in their perceptions about the conflict and the most appropriate steps necessary to contain the threat. Even if politicians and journalists have doubts or disagreements, they will probably suppress explicit criticism out of concern for damaging public morale or fear of public backlash.

The U.S. in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 is a case in point. The consensual or one-sided news frame leaves little room for democratic debate. In divided societies, opposing sides can frame news about conflict differently, such as by Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. These competing frames provide the possibility of debate, to the extent that these frames penetrate the warring communities, although this process will probably not lead to the kind of deliberation bridging social divides that helps to resolve conflict. In the age of global media, the reach of competing frames may be enhanced. Information about 9/11 that had been withheld from the U.S. public, penetrated the media via reports of debates in the British House of Commons. CNN reported information about U.S. operations in Afghanistan that had been similarly withheld from U.S. audiences, by utilizing news coverage from Al Jazeera. Official hostility to media inclusion of competing global frames was exemplified when U.S. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, called on American network television executives to refrain from broadcasting statements by Osama bin Laden (Graber, Chapter 2). This incident illustrates the extent to which global media is a recognized threat to official frames, even in an open and democratic society. This volume shows that people do learn from news and improving the quality of news can produce a more informed, trusting public, even in crises characterized by terrorism frames.

It is important to understand the framing process, not just for its own sake, but also because of the influence that frames can have upon the political process, public policy and international affairs. We argued in the introduction to the book that the War on Terrorism frame had replaced the older Cold War frame in American foreign policy. This process was dramatically illustrated by subsequent events in Afghanistan and then in Iraq. The hunt for the perpetrators of 9/11 was expanded to war in Afghanistan, where members of Al-Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden were thought to be hiding. Then by extension, President Bush, in alliance with Prime Minister Tony Blair, launched war against President Saddam Hussein in Iraq, on the grounds that President Hussein constituted a potential
risk if he possessed “weapons of mass destruction” which could make their way into the hands of terrorists. As President Bush declared in his speech justifying the declaration of war on Iraq:

"It (Iraq) has a deep hatred of America and our friends and it has aided, trained and harbored terrorists, including operatives of al-Qaeda. The danger is clear: using chemical, biological or, one day, nuclear weapons obtained with the help of Iraq, the terrorists could fulfill their stated ambitions and kill thousands or hundreds of thousands of innocent people in our country or any other.

The United States and other nations did nothing to deserve or invite this threat, but we will do everything to defeat it. Instead of drifting along toward tragedy, we will set a course toward safety. Before the day of horror can come, before it is too late to act, this danger will be removed. The United States of America has the sovereign authority to use force in assuring its own national security.

That duty falls to me as commander-in-chief by the oath I have sworn, by the oath I will keep. Recognizing the threat to our country, the United States Congress voted overwhelmingly last year to support the use of force against Iraq... The terrorist threat to America and the world will be diminished the moment that Saddam Hussein is disarmed."

For the first time, the complex balance of power of multilateral organizations was left divided and in disarray and the United States, the only global superpower, launched a preemptive war, not because a specific terrorist act by President Hussein had actually occurred against America’s interests, but because such an act could have occurred at some undefined time in the future. The power of the War on Terrorism frame in America was such that, although there was no published intelligence of a proven link connecting President Hussein directly to the events of 9/11, in early-March 2003, prior to military intervention, when a representative sample of the American public was asked by Gallup polls whether they thought that Saddam Hussein was involved in supporting terrorist groups that had plans to attack the United States, most people agreed. When asked whether they thought that Saddam Hussein ‘was personally involved in the September 11th attacks, or not’, the majority agreed39. The fact that many other countries may not have shared these perceptions could be one reason why the world became so divided over the rationale for the Iraq war. Whether the War on Terrorism frame eventually diminishes as memories of 9/11 gradually fade in the public mind, or whether it continues to influence the future direction of American foreign policy and conflict in international affairs, becoming a self-reinforcing prophecy, remains to be seen.

Notes
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4. Data from the RAND-MIPT series is available from the website of the Oklahoma City National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT). http://db.mipt.org/6898_rep_in_out.cfm. As the series collection changed after 1997, and currently remains incomplete for 1999, the continuous U.S. State Department data was selected instead for analysis in this chapter.


15. In Colombia, there were usually about 3000 kidnappings a year, including prominent religious leaders, politicians, businessmen, and journalists.


17. http://db.mipt.org/6898_rep_in_out.cfm

18. Larry C. Johnson. 2001. ‘The future of terrorism.’ American Behavioral Scientist. 44(6): 894–913. There is some dispute about levels of fatality from each incident, and whether each event may have become more lethal, but the time-series evidence currently remains inconclusive on this point.

19. For the trends in democratization see Freedom House. www.freedomhouse.org


21. U.S. Department of Justice. 1999. Terrorism in the United States, 1999: 30 Years of Terrorism. Washington, DC: FBI. Domestic terrorism is defined in this report as ‘the unlawful use, or threatened use, of force or violence by a group or individual based and operating entirely within the United States or its territories without foreign direction committed against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.’

22. Note that the U.S. State Department defines ‘international terrorist attacks’ as terrorism involving the citizens or territory of more than one country. The U.S. State Department. Patterns of Terrorism 2001. Washington DC: U.S. Department of State. The report does not monitor purely domestic terrorist incidents such as the Oklahoma bombing. A comparison of the total number of U.S. citizens killed or wounded by international

23. The number of stories about ‘terrorism’ in the network evening news broadcasts from the major U.S. national broadcast networks, ABC, CBS, NBC, PBS and CNN, was estimated from a keyword search of the summary records provided since 1968 by the Vanderbilt News Archive, excluding special news programs such as current affairs documentaries as well as commercials. http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/


26. Pippa Norris. 1996 ‘The Restless Searchlight: Network News Framing of the Post Cold-War World.’ Political Communication 12(4): 357–370. Although it is worth noting that during the 1990s coverage of terrorism in the *New York Times* followed a slightly contrary trend, increasing from just over two stories about terrorism per day to about two-and-a-half stories per day during the 1990s.


28. See the Committee to Protect Journalists. http://www.cpj.org/killed/Ten_Year_Killed/stats.html


30. This represented about 17 percent of a selective thematic sample, which does not represent all CNN stories.


33. Tom Daschle, the Senate Minority Leader questioned the quality of the diplomatic effort, the strength of the administration’s case against Iraq, and its application of preemptive war doctrine in this case. The leading Democratic contender, Senator John Kerry raised questions about the relative threat of Iraq vs. North Korea in the context of the War on Terrorism (although he maintained support for the President’s war policies). Other Democratic candidates such as Governor Howard Dean of Vermont, former Senator Carol Mosley Brown and the Reverend Al Sharpton were overtly critical of the Iraq war policy but were marginalized in the media based on their modest levels of public support.


35. Richard Morin and Claudia Deane “Public Support Remains Strong for War Effort” www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A18075-2003Mar24. Washington Post Monday, March 24, 2003 The Washington Post poll was based on an RDD sample of 580 Americans interviewed on March 23rd. A separate sub-sample of 69 African Americans was also interviewed, for a total of 103. Margin of sampling error for the overall results is plus or minus 4 percentage points.

36. Overall 84% of those who believed Saddam Hussein was involved in 9/11 supported the war, compared with 49% who did not believe it, according to cross-tabulations of *New York Times/CBS* News poll of March 10 provided to Hank Zucker, Creative Research Systems www.surveysystem.com and reported on AAPOR-Net March 21, 2003. The level of misinformation was highlighted in a summary article about support for the war. “A recent New York Times/CBS News Poll showed that nearly half of Americans
said they believed that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the Sept. 11 attacks. A Knight Ridder poll taken in early January showed that half said they believed that at least some of the 19 hijackers on Sept. 11 were Iraqis. None were.” Jim Rutenberg and Robin Toner, “Critics Say Coverage Helped Lead to War,” *New York Times* March 22, 2003.


38. “Some reporters investigating claims against Iraq said they felt no compunction to poke holes in the administration’s case because they did not find it to be so off base. Many reported being in the same position as the administration: confident that Mr. Hussein is hiding weapons of mass destruction but unable to definitively prove it.” Jim Rutenberg and Robin Toner, “Critics Say Coverage Helped Lead to War,” *New York Times*, March 22, 2003.


39. CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll. March 3, 2003. N = 1,007 American adults nationwide. “Do you think Saddam Hussein is involved in supporting terrorist groups that have plans to attack the United States, or not?” Form A (N = 488, MoE ± 5). Yes 88%, No 9%, no Opinion 3%. “Do you think Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the September 11th terrorist attacks, or not?” Form B (N = 519, MoE ± 5) Yes 51%, No 41%, No opinion 8%.