

Talking about terror: Counterterrorist campaigns and the logic of representation

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Abstract

Counterterrorist state forces and terrorist insurgents compete to control not only territory and populations but language. The success of counterterrorism, therefore, hinges crucially on representational practices. Defeating terrorism in the long run requires both undermining the legitimacy of political violence and its purveyors and opening space for the pursuit of a less violent but still legitimate politics, and these are fundamentally rhetorical projects. Yet the literature has not shed much light on either the range of conceivable counterterrorist representational strategies or on states' particular representational choices. This article presents and illustrates a typology of counterterrorist representational strategies. It argues that state leaders should ideally delegitimize the extremists' means while politicizing some of their aspirations. Leaders often do not pursue this rhetorical path, however, due to the constraints imposed by existing understandings of terrorist organizations and especially by foundational discourses. These arguments are explored empirically through studies of the Indian, Spanish, and Turkish counterterrorist campaigns. The article concludes by extending the framework to clarify why the militarized rhetoric of the so-called 'War on Terror' is counterproductive.

Keywords

counterterrorism, discourse, representation, rhetoric, terrorism

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Introduction

Since the attacks of 11 September, 2001, there has been a vigorous debate in the West about how to classify the struggle against Islamist adversaries who employ violence against civilians for political ends. While the Bush administration long insisted that it was a 'war,' many critics, in the United States and abroad, contended that it would best be characterized as a law-enforcement campaign. Although President Barack Obama declared in his inaugural address that 'our nation is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred,' he has typically avoided this militarized metaphor in favor of more subtle formulations, as in his much-publicized speech in Cairo: 'America is not — and never will be — at war with Islam. We will, however, relentlessly confront violent extremists who pose a grave threat to our security.'¹ This is a matter of some consequence, not mere semantics. More accurately, it is a matter of both semantics *and* some consequence. Insurgents may attack civilians for strategic reasons, but they also communicate in the quest for legitimacy. In Bruce Hoffman's formulation, they sequentially seek the audience's attention, acknowledgment, and recognition of their pursuit of 'authority' and ultimately 'governance' (Hoffman, 2006: 255). States compete with insurgents on this communicative terrain, and thus how state leaders represent adversaries who employ 'terrorist' tactics and how they represent 'counterterrorist' operations are not incidental.²

The success of counterterrorist efforts, therefore, does not hinge only on military tactics, operations, and strategy. Also important, if not equally important, is the state's rhetoric. Coercion can temporarily suppress resistance, and co-optation can temporarily sap protest. Defeating terrorist insurgency in the long run, however, requires both undermining the legitimacy of political violence and opening space for the pursuit of a less violent, but still legitimate, communal politics. These are fundamentally rhetorical projects. An enduring settlement depends on either direct dialogue between the state and the aggrieved group or the emergence of a moderate politics that mediates between the two, and both paths demand a sustained rhetorical effort to transform the game of politics. Paul Pillar (2001: 18) nicely characterizes counterterrorism as 'an effort to civilize the manner in which any political contest is waged.' Force alone can hardly civilize politics. Remolding the culture of contention requires rhetorical intervention. To the extent that the insurgents' violence is redirected into non-violent contestation, and to the extent that this transformation can be attributed to the state's efforts, counterterrorism has succeeded.

The familiar war-versus-crime dichotomy has dominated the contemporary transatlantic conversation about terrorism. We began this study with the intuition that cross-national representations of terrorists likely came in a richer catalog than foot soldiers and criminals, and that turned out to be true. In fact, the rhetoric of 'war' makes hardly an appearance in the three prominent cases we examine — India's campaign against Sikh extremism; Spain's struggle against ETA (Basque Homeland and Freedom); and Turkey's battle against the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) — even when the human costs of the cycle of violence are high and even when the authorities' response is militarized. If, as we demonstrate, counterterrorist representational strategies are varied, two questions follow: (1) what is the range of conceivable representational strategies? And (2) why do states adopt a particular strategy? This article is devoted to answering these questions. We focus empirically on ethnonational violence, which until recently has been

responsible for the most sustained terrorist campaigns and the majority of terrorist organizations (Cronin, 2002/03: 40, 42–5). Readers may doubt whether our typology and findings have purchase beyond the ethnonational sphere, and specifically whether they are applicable to the contemporary Western struggle with Islamist-inspired violence: we justify this study's relevance to the so-called 'War on Terror' in the conclusion. Readers may also doubt whether the state's rhetoric matters much to the fate of counterterrorism: due to space constraints, we cannot properly support that position here, but have done so elsewhere (Chowdhury and Krebs, 2009).

After briefly reviewing the history of insurgent violence and state response (as well as state violence and insurgent response) in the three cases, we present and illustrate a typology of counterterrorist rhetorical strategies — politicizing, depoliticizing, and delegitimizing. We then consider whether there is an ideal representational strategy from which we might measure deviations. We maintain that state leaders should seek to *delegitimize* terrorist insurgents while *politicizing* some of their aspirations. Too often, we observe, leaders do not pursue this rhetorical path, and we explore empirically two constraints under which they labor: (1) dominant discourses, whose roots lie in the regime's foundational periods and which limit what rhetorical commonplaces may be deployed and what narratives may be spun; and (2) existing, relatively settled understandings of the insurgent organizations and the populations they represent. The Turkish, Spanish, and Indian cases represent three outcomes with respect to counterterrorist rhetoric: India over time came closest to the ideal rhetorical strategy, albeit inconsistently and often unintentionally; Spain diverged by engaging in politicization without delegitimation; and Turkey departed from the ideal by pursuing delegitimation without politicization.

While this article focuses on the representational politics of counterterrorist campaigns, it speaks to larger theoretical concerns. First, it builds on an existing body of work that theorizes the political import of public rhetoric. That literature shows how a dominant political language constitutes the terrain of contestation, privileging particular courses of action and impeding others. The key concept is legitimation: the articulation before key audiences of publicly acceptable reasons justifying concrete actions and policy positions (Elster, 1995: 244–52; Suchman, 1995).³ Legitimation is ubiquitous in politics because those who do not care to legitimate their claims will be rejected or ignored (Perelman, 1982). Policy alternatives at odds with underlying discourses are not socially sustainable: the dominant discourse is, in James Scott's words, nearly always 'the only plausible arena of struggle' (Scott, 1990: 102). This insight informs our argument that discursive fields constitute the range of socially sustainable counterterrorist rhetorics and thus shape policy outcomes as well. Often, for analysts of politics in general and counterterrorism in particular, rhetoric is nothing more than 'cheap talk'; what is said privately matters far more than what is said publicly; and concrete policy initiatives are either independent of or determine public articulations. We proceed instead from opposed presumptions: what can be said shapes what policies can be pursued, and public rhetorical exchange consequently deserves a central place in the analysis of politics. Counterterrorism may even be considered a 'hard case' for a representational ontology. One might have thought that policy-makers, confronted with violence, would be free to eliminate terrorist adversaries without need of legitimation. One might have assumed that the battle for legitimacy would be tossed aside in the hail of bullets. One would have been mistaken.

Second, this article seeks to show that the logic of counterterrorism, like the logic of policy-making in general, is simultaneously social and strategic. Our approach, presuming that both states and insurgents are strategic actors who operate within evolving social (or relational) environments, thereby builds bridges between constructivist and rationalist treatments of counterterrorism: the former have sometimes tended to holistic accounts in which stable cultures appear to determine counterterrorist policy, leaving little room for contingency and thus for the intervention of human agents (e.g. Katzenstein, 2003), and the latter have sometimes abstracted too readily from the social context in which agency is exercised (e.g. Bueno de Mesquita, 2007). Contrary to the usual dichotomy, we hold that there is no yawning chasm between rationality and culture: actors cannot engage in rational action outside a cultural environment, and the complexity of culture leaves much room for strategic behavior (Bates et al., 1998; Fearon and Wendt, 2002). Constructivist research suggests that identity and social roles shape how states envision and provide for their security and thus that governments are not encumbered by material constraints alone. Abstracting from the communicative context in which counterterrorism must be legitimated blinds analysts to the reasons that governments often adopt counterproductive policies that block compromise and invigorate insurgency. However, collective identity does not translate directly into policy preferences, but rather constitutes (and is constituted by) discursive fields that enable, facilitate, and simultaneously constrain strategic choice.

These theoretical engagements are also reflected in the article's penultimate section. There we rebut two alternative arguments: that actual policy — carrots or sticks — is what matters to counterterrorism, swamping the effects of rhetorical deployments; and that state leaders' rhetorical choices are the product of non-discursive situational factors. This article focuses on the problem of ethnonational terrorism, but its lessons are relevant to the challenge posed by Islamist extremism. The conclusion explores the implications for the 'War on Terror.'

A brief history of violence

Or, more accurately, a radically compressed history of insurgent and state violence, with a sometimes terrorist flavor, in Punjab, the Basque Country, and Kurdistan. Modern Sikh political activism dates well back into the imperial era. The Akali Dal, a Sikh political party with a substantial regional presence, has long been the voice of mainstream Sikh nationalism. After independence, the Akalis sought a Punjabi-speaking state, which was created in the mid-1960s with a narrow Sikh majority. Emboldened, the Akalis formulated far-reaching demands in the early 1970s, and they were a thorn in the side of the Congress Party during the Emergency of 1975–7. Later that decade, seeking to weaken the Akali Dal, the Congress abetted (if not plotted) the rise of the radical Sikh preacher Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. Yet it soon lost control of Bhindranwale, whose affiliates increasingly pressed for Sikh independence and whose immense popularity forced the Akalis to embrace more radical positions. Escalating tensions and violence culminated in the military's bloody 1984 assault on the holiest Sikh shrine, the Golden Temple in Amritsar. The assassination later that year of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards led to Congress-orchestrated riots that killed over 2000 Sikhs. During the ensuing elections, the new Congress leader, Rajiv Gandhi, rode anti-Sikh rhetoric to the

prime minister's office, succeeding his mother. These sticks had the predictable effect of radicalizing moderate Sikhs. After ascending to office, however, Rajiv swung in the other direction, opening negotiations with the Akali Dal and offering substantial concessions. The newly proffered carrots, however, did not stanch the violence, as extremists increased the pace and intensity of their attacks dramatically in 1986 and beyond.

However, by 1993, the insurgency had been brought under control. Insurgent leaders had fled abroad, and their organizations had collapsed. This outcome is conventionally attributed to a more discriminate counterinsurgency effort, exemplified by Operation Black Thunder (1988), which was also conducted in the Golden Temple (Gill, 2001; Wallace, 2007: 440–52). Yet the early 1990s witnessed a brutal police campaign in rural Punjab that, while effective in rooting out extremists, did little to win affection or legitimacy for the Indian state. Insurgent and counterinsurgent violence was responsible for the deaths of some 10,000 civilians, though sources disagree on how to apportion the blame (Human Rights Watch/Asia, 1994: ix; Wallace, 2007: 432). The counterinsurgency was nevertheless a success: by the mid-1990s, democratic politics had returned to Punjab and a moderate Sikh politics had re-emerged (Brass, 1994; Singh, 2000).

In India both licit and illicit groups competed to represent Sikh aspirations, and Basque politics has been similarly divided. Under the Franco regime, traditional Basque prerogatives had been repealed and Basque nationalism had been suppressed. After 1978, when Spain entered the democratic fold, the dominant political organization in the Basque Autonomous Community was the Basque Nationalist Party (commonly known by its Spanish acronym, PNV). While the PNV played by the rules of the political game, ETA, which had broken from the PNV two decades before, declared the new democracy a sham and ramped up its violent activities. The government's initially repressive response succeeded only in confirming ETA's allegations, but human rights violations declined as police reforms took hold. ETA's popularity declined among Basques as Spain's democracy consolidated, as the Basque region prospered and Basque culture thrived, and as ETA's attacks grew more desperate. Yet these measures did not fully break the organization. It continued, if at a diminished tempo, to conduct attacks on civilian targets across the nation, and it demonstrated its enduring regional power by orchestrating destructive mass street violence, known as the *borroka*. The Spanish public, eager to close the book on its authoritarian past, supported negotiations with ETA throughout the 1990s, and national governments across the political spectrum kept back channels open and periodically launched talks. With nationalist sentiment strong, the PNV remained dominant in the Basque Country (until 2009, when a non-nationalist party for the first time led the regional government), and its criticism of ETA's methods was tempered by its treatment of the organization as a legitimate, if misguided, expression of Basque nationalism. Spain's struggle against ETA was a qualified success, as the organization was marginalized but not crushed (Reinares and Alonso, 2007; Shabad and Llera, 1995).

Whereas Spain and India gave constitutional protection to subnational identities, in Turkey all non-national alternatives were deemed threatening to the Kemalist state. Periodic Kurdish uprisings were brutally suppressed, and the military again embraced these methods in the mid-1980s, as the PKK embarked on an aggressive campaign of violence. Turkey undertook a massive military build-up — as many as 300,000 security personnel in the early 1990s were assigned to the southeast provinces — and employed indiscriminate force

to crush this formerly obscure organization. Turkish leaders, moreover, refused to acknowledge the existence of the Kurds as a people, insisting that they were ‘mountain Turks’ whose complaints were rooted in local poverty and who were being manipulated by international, especially Communist, forces. Turkish repression boosted the PKK’s popularity, and as the organization grew, its strategy evolved from terrorist provocation to rural insurgency. The government quelled the insurgency in the late 1990s, partly because its forced resettlement program had depopulated the countryside, rendering PKK guerrillas vulnerable, and partly because it had captured the organization’s charismatic leader, Abdullah Ocalan, who from prison called on his forces to lay down their arms. Yet this was, in Barkey’s estimation, a ‘pyrrhic victory,’ for Turkish tactics had won the battle, but the state’s cruelty had laid the foundation for a renewal of Kurdish violence. With the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003 providing a safe haven in northern Iraq, the PKK re-emerged from semi-hibernation (Barkey, 2007; MacDowall, 2004). The Turkish government has occasionally followed through on its threats to conduct offensive operations in northern Iraq to rein in the PKK, and, for years after the war, regional tensions have remained high.

A typology of representational strategies

What is the range of counterterrorist representational strategies from which state leaders select? In Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) translations of media coverage from India, Spain, and Turkey related to terrorist and counterterrorist operations, we encountered a range of representations well beyond soldiers and criminals.⁴ Unfamiliar with any typology of counterterrorist rhetoric that might impose order on the data, we classified officials’ rhetorical deployments according to two questions. First, are the purveyors of terrorism, notwithstanding their embrace of an odious and immoral tactic (as the term implies), represented as having a *political* agenda? Second, are the terrorists, notwithstanding the illegitimacy of their means, represented as potentially *legitimate interlocutors*? Table 1 presents the resulting scheme for classifying counterterrorist rhetoric regarding the constitution of the terrorist Other.

Table 1. A typology of counterterrorist rhetorical strategies

		Political Agenda?	
		Yes	No
Legitimate Actor?	Yes	Politicizing (e.g. recognition)	Depoliticizing (e.g. infantilization)
	No	Delegitimizing (e.g. internationalization)	Delegitimizing (e.g. criminalization)

Implicit is a controversial proposition: assailing insurgents as ‘terrorists’ — a representation, not a reflection, of reality — does not alone close off all political possibilities. For nearly a century, ‘terrorism’ has suggested an illegitimate means of political contest. Few have welcomed the appellation, instead fashioning themselves as ‘freedom fighters’ and/or blaming political forces that have blocked non-violent change (Hoffman, 2006: 1–41). State officials have employed the terrorist label to indict their adversaries, but they have also leveled other charges, such as ‘separatism,’ that highlight actors’ ends. Such overlapping representations make possible a more diverse communal politics. Condemning actors as terrorists and their actions as terroristic is certainly delegitimizing, but it also creates space for other communal actors to distance themselves from violence, to disavow violent means while professing allegiance to widely shared communal goals. The Irish case suggests how the charge of ‘terrorism’ does not itself preclude negotiation with ethnonational activists.

In fact, for state officials, assailing insurgents as terrorists is normally not enough: they have often sought to deny that insurgents have a properly political agenda. Rhetoric *delegitimation*, depriving terrorists of political standing, takes two forms. First, leaders may represent terrorists as uncivilized, perhaps even inhuman — as Turkish politicians often did with regard to the PKK, labeling them, for instance, ‘mad dogs and bloodsuckers’ — or as criminals — as when the same leaders characterized the PKK as ‘bandits’ or ‘gangs’.⁵ In both cases, they thereby assert that the terrorists are destructive interlopers who lack the right to levy claims on the polity (lower-right cell). Second, leaders have often represented local actors as engaged in violence on behalf of interests beyond the nation’s borders. Such ‘internationalization’ fingers outside forces as ultimately responsible for the violence perpetrated by local agents. Violence is then cast as in the service of a political agenda, but an illegitimate one (lower-left cell). Thus Indian leaders have, with some cause, laid the violence in Kashmir and Punjab at Pakistan’s feet, as when Punjab’s governor described terrorism as ‘external aggression by proxy’ or when the Indian Prime Minister called Punjabi militants ‘a handful of extremists with external support from Pakistan.’⁶ Turkish leaders have made similar charges against cross-border forces in northern Iraq and elsewhere. ‘Internationalization’ represents local terrorists as either the willful agents or the unwitting dupes of foreign powers: in either case, they are not to be accorded respect.

Two other strategies are possible when those engaging in or supporting violence against civilians are represented as potentially legitimate interlocutors. Relatively rare is *politicization* (upper-left cell) that acknowledges popular grievances while recognizing terrorists as communal representatives in good standing. Spanish and Indian leaders employed such rhetoric, but even they did so only with a caveat: they welcomed negotiations if Sikh and Basque extremists forswore violence.⁷ Such politicization was conditional: conceding that the terrorists had a recognizably political agenda, it denied them the status of interlocutors, or even legitimate representatives of communal interests, until they renounced violence. Conditional politicization may be accompanied by a delegitimizing rhetoric, such as internationalization, if the terrorists do not accept the terms of the offer, as was the case in India.

More common is *depoliticization* that recognizes violent actors as members of the polity but attributes their violence to non-political causes (upper-right cell). In India, and to some extent in Turkey, this often took the form of ‘infantilization’: in the marginalized

areas of the Northeast and Kashmir, the violence was regularly attributed to ‘misguided youth’; in Punjab, decision-makers often referred to Sikh insurgents as ‘the boys.’ When combined with internationalization, the implication was that the perpetrators, having been misled by outside actors, did not harbor grievances requiring redress. The entrenched tribal insurgencies of the Northeast were represented as a bloody relative of joy riding, a natural expression of youthful boundary-testing that the insurgents would outgrow as they matured.⁸ Another depoliticizing strategy, especially common in India’s Northeast and in Turkey, represents violence as a reflection of economic underdevelopment.⁹ Political grievances are thus but a veneer covering economic ‘root causes,’ and once the latter are addressed, the former will cease to be voiced. Developmentalist discourse treats those ‘to be developed’ as passive objects and the authorities assigned the task of ‘developing’ them as active agents (Escobar, 1995: 47-54). It enables the state to transform an irresolvable nationalist problem into a manageable economic one.

The rhetoric of ‘war,’ which belongs in the lower-left cell, did not feature in these cases, even when states employed substantial force. At first blush, this is surprising. But labeling terrorism ‘war’ situates terrorists clearly outside the political community. Secessionist groups, however, are normally liminal — neither purely Other nor completely Self. Declaring ‘war’ on ethnonational insurgents runs counter to the population’s liminal status and is consequently not an option, at least for states that envision a peaceful *modus vivendi*. As long as the threat to the United States has come from transnational Islamists, not its Muslim minority, ‘war’ has remained a rhetorical option — even if unwise. For European authorities, the threats to whom have lain among liminal Muslim populations, ‘war’ has seemed less rhetorically apposite (Shapiro and Byman, 2006).

We did not find leaders consistently employing a *single* representational strategy. States pursue a variety of counterterrorist measures — both over time, because policy-making proceeds by trial and error, and simultaneously, because any single tool has weaknesses for which other instruments can compensate. Moreover, political factions implement different counterterrorist policies as they gain sway. This helps explain why leaders’ pronouncements often embody multiple representational strategies: it is sometimes necessary (when failure gives way to a new tack), sometimes productive (when complementary strategies are married), and sometimes disastrous (when competing authorities voice contradictory formulations). However, the inherent incoherence of discourse contributes to representational diversity as well: all discourses contain contradictory strands that facilitate contestation, and even hegemonic discourses must be maintained through ‘ceaseless work’ (Hall, 1988: 133). That said, despite constant experimentation and political jockeying, counterterrorist rhetoric was structured across the cases: each contained silences and missed opportunities, systematic deviations from the ideal, that were revealing of the rhetorical constraints under which state leaders labored to legitimate policy.

An ideal representational strategy?

Counterterrorist policy cannot be separated from representational, or rhetorical, politics because legitimation is normally an imperative, not a mere nicety. Meaning cannot be imposed unilaterally or through the exercise of material power alone. The effort to forge

shared meaning implicates some audience in the process, and those who do not legitimize their claims will be rejected or ignored. Legitimation consequently cannot be invoked only when outcomes seem puzzling: it *is* 'politics as usual.' Furthermore, representational politics is inseparable from policy choice. That which cannot be legitimated cannot be pursued, and not everything can be legitimated: rhetoric is not infinitely elastic, and speakers may not say just anything they would like in the public arena. Finally, how policies are legitimated at t_0 limits what can be said at t_1 . We presume that speakers are subject to some consistency constraint that limits, but by no means eliminates, overt rhetorical contradictions in the face of attentive publics capable of imposing substantial audience costs.

What is said and done publicly does not always align with what is said and done privately, and governments often maintain secret back channels to organizations they treat in public as beyond the pale. But the very secrecy of such negotiations ensures — even if they were to be revealed! — that they cannot play any role in the legitimation of a particular counterterrorist approach or in the legitimization of any insurgent organization. Legitimation is inherently a public process. Secret negotiations, accompanied by public condemnation, may prove useful in allowing frank exchange and facilitating unpopular concessions away from the glare of publicity, but they are not a replacement for legitimation. Ultimately any policy that is to win public assent must be justified in public.

These legitimation requirements are perhaps particularly pressing in the arenas of terrorism and counterterrorism, which are fundamentally communicative and symbolic enterprises (Hoffman, 2006; Kydd and Walter, 2006). Terrorism is open-air theater, seeking to attract large audiences through spectacular displays (Jenkins, 1975: 16). Counterterrorism does not always need equally large audiences, and the spectacular is often ineffective (Bueno de Mesquita, 2007). But counterterrorism is equally theater. If terrorists avidly seek publicity for their causes and adopt methods designed to signal their resolve, so too must the terror-fighting state be centrally concerned with what messages it sends to what audiences. Thomas Schelling (1966: 142) observed that force could be 'an expressive bit of repartee ... [which] took mainly the form of deeds, not words.' But deeds accompanied by words are that much more expressive, and there is a good reason that leaders devote effort to molding that interpretive context.

Identifying the ideal representational strategy requires elaborating the strategic context facing the state, the audiences with which it wishes to communicate, and the substantive messages it wishes to send. The state's pre-eminent goal is to end the violence while conceding as little as possible of the terrorists' agenda. Five audiences are conceivably relevant and attentive to the counterterrorist game. First, of course, are the terrorists themselves. Terrorists are often highly motivated, but their organizations are typically composed of individuals whose level of commitment ranges widely, thus making possible efforts to deter future attacks (Trager and Zagorcheva, 2005/6). If the terrorists cannot be persuaded or compelled to end the violence, counterterrorism becomes brute force, in which communication is no longer germane. Second is the population the terrorists claim to represent. Cross-national studies have emphasized the importance for effective counterterrorism of 'mobilizing moderates,' and thus states should seek to boost the appeal of communal actors who enjoy local legitimacy but are committed to non-violence (Abrahms, 2007: 243–4; Art and Richardson, 2007: 575–6, 594).¹⁰ Third,

the state-wide population must be persuaded that security from terrorist predations is being provided at a reasonable cost. Fourth, in multinational states containing other populations that may harbor secessionist aspirations, leaders wish to signal both that secessionism will not be tolerated and that grievances can be addressed without violence. Finally, international audiences may be attentive, but the state's incentives are cross-cutting. Leaders may want to emphasize their commitment to human rights, but they may also want to stress the pre-eminence of sovereignty.

In short, counterterrorism entails several tasks: (1) render insurgency politically unpalatable (in part by casting political violence as terror); (2) undermine the insurgents' will or capacity to engage in violence; (3) sustain a moderate, yet legitimate, communal political voice; and (4) concede few substantive demands. What makes counterterrorism challenging is that these tasks are potentially at odds with each other. Aggressive measures to weaken insurgents (task 2) may boost their political appeal (contrary to task 1), pressure moderates to profess allegiance to the extremists' cause (contrary to task 3), and perhaps even provide the insurgency with new recruits (contrary to task 2). Sustaining the moderates (task 3) may seem to require substantial concessions, which may in turn weaken the majority population's faith in the government (contrary to task 4). Most existing studies focus on tasks (2) and (4), leaving undeveloped the representational strategies critical to tasks (1) and (3).

We are primarily concerned here, however, precisely with those representational strategies. Consider again Table 1. Delegitimizing rhetoric alone might be appropriate for task 1, but it cannot by itself sustain a moderate communal politics (contrary to task 3). Depoliticizing rhetoric alone might legitimate a hard-nosed policy, in line with task 4, but it would fail to insert space between the insurgents and the populace (contrary to task 1). A purely politicizing rhetoric might not only embolden the current organization (contrary to task 2) but inspire other groups to take up arms. It might also give rise to domestic pressure to negotiate and perhaps even to pressure from abroad to adjudicate the dispute in international forums (contrary to task 4).

This analysis points toward a more subtle representational strategy that would simultaneously *delegitimize* terroristic violence and its purveyors and *politicize* the substantive grievances of the communal populace. Narrowly targeted delegitimizing rhetoric — such as allegations that the terrorists represent foreign rather than national interests — could distance the former from the population (task 1). It could still facilitate the use of military force against the insurgent apparatus, give less-committed insurgents incentives to cut their ties, and deter activists elsewhere (task 2). Meanwhile, a focused politicizing rhetoric — recognizing communal grievances as legitimate subjects for discussion — could help create the space in which a moderate communal politics could flourish (task 3). Such rhetoric could lay the foundation for the population's reintegration into the political system, without necessarily entailing large concessions (task 4). This rhetorical strategy could promote and sustain not only the terrorist organization's fracturing, but the transformation of the insurgency as a whole. When most perfectly implemented, it would focus its delegitimizing efforts on terrorist violence and the terrorist organization, not on individuals, and it might thereby facilitate extremist leaders' integration into conventional political contention and their reinvention as spokespeople of mainstream communal politics.¹¹

States and insurgents are thus engaged in an intertwined struggle for legitimacy. If, as we have argued, the ideal counterterrorist representational strategy combines targeted delegitimation with partial politicization, then a plausible research strategy would focus on three outcomes: one that approaches the ideal, and two that deviate (delegitimation without politicization, politicization without delegitimation).¹² The three cases examined below are in line with this research design. India eventually most closely approached the ideal, albeit inconsistently and imperfectly: delegitimizing Sikh extremists while politicizing some Sikh grievances, opening political routes, and enabling dialogue with Sikh representatives even at the height of the violence. Spain's representational strategy remained less than ideal: Basque aspirations were rhetorically politicized, but this was not accompanied by a consistent delegitimizing rhetoric directed toward ETA. Turkey's strategy was most severely suboptimal: its leaders delegitimized the PKK, but they also depoliticized Kurdish grievances.

Choice and constraint: discursive fields and representational strategy

Two constraints limit the range of representational strategies leaders might employ. First, foundational experiences deeply shape the polity's dominant discursive fields and pre-eminent symbols. Political actors are by no means 'cultural dopes,' blindly acting out cultural dictates, but weak and strong alike are deeply cultural creatures. Within a bounded contestatory episode, no matter actors' desires to transform the discursive space over the long run, they must draw on existing rhetorical universes constituted by currently dominant discursive fields. This would not be much of a constraint if any discourse could support all the representational strategies contained in Table 1. However, even state leaders who embrace the logic developed in the preceding section may find themselves without access to the rhetorical materials they would need to delegitimize violent extremism and to politicize the population's grievances. In post-Franco Spain, the authoritarian state was the constitutive Other, and delegitimizing rhetoric was not easily deployed. In Turkey, the statist logic of Kemalism prevented leaders from drawing the distinctions among Kurds that are essential to the ideal representational strategy.

However, foundational discourses do not alone constitute the representational realm. More specific relatively settled public understandings of terrorist organizations, moderates, and their past relations to the political center are the second key constraint. These too cannot be readily undone. ETA's prominence in undermining the Franco regime and in representing Basque interests closed off other routes of depoliticization, notably representing Basque terrorists as criminals. In India, the Akali Dal's long political history, including its alliance with Indian nationalist forces during decolonization, reinforced the incentives against depoliticization of Sikh nationalism. The remainder of this section explores how these factors shaped the representational strategies Indian, Spanish, and Turkish leaders employed.

This structural analysis does not deny that the rhetorical contestation between insurgents and the state is dynamic and interactive: states' representational strategies are designed partly in response to insurgents' rhetoric, and vice versa.¹³ We argue simply that that rhetorical thrust-and-parry bumps up against discursive constraints that cannot be

evaded, at least not in the short run. The dynamics of insurgent–state rhetorical exchange cannot account for the state’s systematic deviations from the ideal strategy. That puzzle draws our attention to the structuring of contestation in specific contexts and requires us to step back from the rhetorical fray: to identify and map the limits of rhetorical contestation and to explore how, in its course, discursive fields are reproduced.

Turkey. In Turkey a monolithic statist discourse, central to Atatürk’s post-imperial nation-building project, had long reigned supreme. The Turkish center conceived of minority status in religious, not ethnic, terms, and the center sought to address the Kurdish problem ‘by pretending it did not exist.... Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin were Turks like the rest, with the same duties, rights and opportunities’ (Lewis, 2002: xvi–xvii). Imagining Turkey to be ‘nationally and culturally homogenous,’ it defined the nation as ‘a sum of citizens without consideration of ethnic identity and negate[d] in its legal interpretation the existence and protection of ethnic minorities.’ (Gürbey, 1996). This discourse left little room for the legitimation of sub-national identities, and it identified the assertion of sub-national claims, even of a distinctive language and cultural heritage, as an existential threat to both nation and state (Gürbey, 1996: 10). Rather than separate the PKK from the mass of Kurds in whose name it claimed to speak, Turkish representational practices elided any distinction between the PKK and less extreme Kurdish nationalists, treating all as beyond the pale: as Prime Minister Tansu Çiller bluntly put it in 1993, ‘there is no Kurdish or minority problem in Turkey.’¹⁴

This rhetorical strategy underpinned a policy that sought not only to eliminate the PKK, but to prevent the public expression of Kurdish identity and nationalism. The dream of militarily crushing the PKK and, equally important, the Kemalist spirit that dream embodied was seductive, but the approach ultimately proved counterproductive: the PKK was defeated, but counterterrorist violence stirred the pot of Kurdish nationalism and set in motion the possible undoing of the Kemalist project (Barkey, 2007: esp. 368–71). Turkey is often hailed as an instance of counterterrorist success (Art and Richardson, 2007: 570–2; Kocher, 2002), but Kurdish nationalism, the true target, emerged from the counterterrorist experience with greater popular appeal (Barkey, 2007: 369). The resurgence of PKK activity after the Iraq War, facilitated by the safe haven in northern Iraq but bolstered by local Kurdish support, suggests that Kurdish nationalism in Turkey remains vibrant (Marcus, 2007: 295, 302). Turkish leaders were so easily seduced because the alternative — producing Kurdish moderates, which would have entailed acknowledging Kurdish distinctiveness — was at odds with the dominant national discourse.

This rhetorical move was possible, moreover, because the Turkish public shared little common understanding of Kurdish nationalism, giving the state substantial leeway in its representations of the PKK and the Kurds. Politically marginalized, predominantly rural, relatively poor, and without a history of organized nationalism, the Kurds did not constitute a recognizably political force in Turkish eyes. The PKK itself was quite new: it had emerged in the late 1970s as an urban Marxist student-led organization that had few ties with existing Kurdish or left-wing groups (Marcus, 2007: 37–40). The state was therefore free, in representing the violence, to mobilize various specters that articulated with long-present public fears of communist infiltration as well as of Iranian and Syrian machinations. Such delegitimizing rhetoric, pinning the blame on international forces,

was easily combined with a depoliticizing developmentalist rhetoric that denied political agency to the local insurgents.

Dominant discourses are rarely challenged from within, but those rare moments reveal how discursive discipline is maintained. Occasionally, establishment institutions and figures called into question the decades-old denial of Kurdish identity, but they were always widely denounced. This was the fate of the Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry when it commissioned a study of the problems in the southeast and of the study's author, who came under police scrutiny. It befell Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel, who acknowledged Turkey's 'Kurdish reality' upon ascending to office in 1991, but then swiftly abandoned that turn of phrase when bombarded with criticism (MacDowall, 2004: 433, 446). The most sustained call for an alternative came from Turgut Özal, prime minister from 1983 through 1989 and then president until his death in 1993. Özal had long reproduced the dominant discourse, but in 1990 he reversed course, maintaining that 'since 1984 the main issue was the Kurdish question.' The following year he struck explicitly at the heart of Kemalism: 'we must discuss everything, including the issue of a unitary state.'¹⁵ Even claiming Kurdish heritage for himself, he sought to create space within Turkish discourse for Kurdish identity, revoking laws that banned all languages aside from Turkish and proposing that Kurdish-language broadcasts be permitted. Özal made overtures to Iraqi Kurds and toyed with the idea of a comprehensive amnesty. But all this was 'much to the consternation of the governing elites,' regardless of partisan affiliation. Demirel, then prime minister, publicly opposed not only Özal's policies, but his efforts to open up the discourse.¹⁶ When accused of doing away with the Kemalist vision, Özal backtracked from even his avowed intention to discuss the issue.¹⁷ Even leaders with strong nationalist credentials cannot willy-nilly transgress discursive boundaries.

Spain. In Spain, which had just emerged from four decades of authoritarian rule, *democracy* constituted the essential rhetorical terrain. Spain's new democracy was ushered in with overwhelming support — 94 percent of the voting public approved the Law for Political Reform by referendum — and the central government's 'clear commitment to democratization and country-wide elections' was critical, in Linz and Stepan's account (1996: 101–2), to the successful regime transition. 'The new Constitution,' Edles writes, 'celebrated and institutionalized a "new beginning" of "convivencia" and "democracy,"' and during the 1977 campaign, sloganeers identified their parties with democracy: 'to vote Communist is to vote democracy' and 'the center [the government] is democracy' (Edles, 1998: 141, 151). Between 1978 and 1993, between 69 and 79 percent of the Spanish public regularly affirmed in opinion surveys that 'democracy is the best system for a country like ours' (Linz and Stepan, 1996: 108). Not surprisingly, democracy featured prominently in Spanish discourse surrounding terrorism: whereas Turkish leaders emphasized the threat terrorism posed to the *state*, Spain's leaders stressed the threat terrorism posed to the *consolidation of democratic governance*. Prime Minister Felipe González Márquez said, in opposing negotiations with ETA, 'in a democratic society, authority lies in the ballot box.'¹⁸ Democracy required that conflicts be settled in the political arena, not with violence. The Spanish Senate in 1979 similarly stated that terrorism would not 'achieve [its] objective of preventing the consolidation of democracy, the

development of the Constitution, and the passing of the statutes of autonomy.¹⁹ Over 15 years later, Spain's Justice Minister called ETA 'the worst enemy of [Spanish] democracy,'²⁰ reproducing this enduring trope. Perhaps most revealing, ETA legitimated its activities in these terms too. Spain's democratization continually splintered ETA (Sullivan, 1988; Zulaika, 1988: 184–6), and even those who remained committed to violence framed their attacks as efforts 'to continue trying to save democracy.'²¹

These legitimation requirements confronted Spanish leaders with a rhetorical dilemma. On the one hand, depoliticization was not available. The political nature of ETA's agenda could not be gainsaid: the new democratic regime had restored the Basque provinces' tradition of autonomous rule, and ETA's calls for independence fell within the sphere of legitimate politics, overlapping with those of the PNV. Nor was delegitimation readily available in the form of internationalization. Although there was an international component to Basque resistance — through the mid 1980s ETA members regularly retreated to safety in southern France — this rhetorical strategy would have strengthened the army, an institution that had been tainted under Franco and was seen as inimical to democracy. In post-Franco Spain, both the king and the political leadership worked to marginalize the military, especially after the 1981 attempted coup d'état (Edles, 1998: 144–5). Moreover, France finally cracked down on ETA in the mid to late 1980s, rendering internationalization implausible. With neither depoliticization nor delegitimation readily available, the Spanish government turned instead to conditional politicization alone.

Yet this strategy left ETA within the sphere of legitimate Basque politics. Although the PNV criticized ETA's methods, it rarely treated ETA and its political wing, Herri Batasuna (HB), as pariahs that did not deserve a seat at the political table and as anything other than a sincere expression of Basque nationalism. PNV leaders declared that, in one scholar's paraphrase, 'although ETA-M's strategy was mistaken and many of its actions were indefensible, most of its members were motivated by genuine patriotism' (Sullivan, 1988: 266). In 1988, after a particularly intense wave of attacks in the Basque Country, the PNV joined other local actors in condemning terrorist violence, but it still treated ETA as within the pale: 'we call on those who continue to use or who legitimate violence to abandon arms out of respect for the popular will and to integrate into institutional activity *through which they can legitimately defend their platforms*.'²² In the early 1990s, the PNV even seriously considered an alliance with HB. In 1998 the PNV joined a nationalist front that included HB, as a prelude to ETA's announcement of a ceasefire. ETA was Basque nationalism's wayward child, but its misguided passion reflected how Basque aspirations were being denied (Shabad and Llera, 1995: 453, 459).²³ Basque nationalists, extremists and moderates alike, were members of the same often-quarrelsome family (Douglass and Zulaika, 1990: 252; Sullivan, 1988: 268). By the late 1980s ETA no longer posed a serious threat to the stability of Spain's democracy, but Spain was stuck with a low-level conflict that stubbornly refused to die, in part because Spanish political leaders' representational practices failed to cast ETA outside the legitimate sphere and thus permitted the PNV to avoid choosing sides. As two Spanish experts put it, in language that makes their politics clear, 'The radicalization of constitutional nationalism in the Basque region ... contributed to the continuation of terrorism ... [by] strengthening ETA's will to carry on with its campaign' (Reinares and Alonso, 2007: 128).

In contrast to the PKK and the Kurds, ETA in particular and Basque nationalism in general had an established track record in Spain, further tying the center's tongue. During the Francoist era, Basque political organizations of all sorts had been formally banned, but they remained active openly in exile and secretly at home, providing some measure of resistance to the regime. One of the more spectacular events that contributed to the regime's demise had been ETA's assassination of Franco's designated successor in 1973. Thanks to their treatment under Franco, Basques could, and did, occupy the ground of victimhood, and ETA could lay claim to having ended Francoism. With ETA featured so prominently in the new national narrative and with Basque demands for self-determination formally recognized, the Spanish center was hard-pressed to deny that ETA lacked a recognizably political agenda: depoliticizing rhetoric was off the table. ETA was, moreover, clearly a home-grown entity: internationalization too was unavailable.

India. In India the dominant discursive field was that of the *nation*. Unlike Turkey, however, the nation was represented not as a monolithic and unified entity, coextensive with the state, but as a pluralistic body that, thanks to its colonial heritage, stood in partial opposition to state power (Chatterjee, 1993). The founders of post-colonial India had recognized that a state could not be sustained in that diverse, multi-linguistic, and multi-confessional society that did not devolve substantial authority and that did not recognize the legitimacy of different languages, regional practices, and ethnic identities (Khilnani, 1997). The Indian center thus could not reject as illegitimate political formations based on Sikh allegiance, and, in contrast to Turkey, which treated all expressions of Kurdish nationalism as beyond the pale, its leaders distinguished between the Akali Dal, the long-time political voice of identified Sikhs and a major player in Punjabi politics, and more extreme Sikhs who dreamed of an independent state of Khalistan.

However, state officials frequently asserted that pluralism and accommodation of religious difference had to take place *within* the nation and thus threats to 'national unity and integrity' would be resisted.²⁴ This contrasted with Spain, where the nation ranked below democracy in the polity's discursive pantheon. As a result, in India, techniques of delegitimation — notably in the form of internationalization — were very much available. Without a history of authoritarian, and specifically military, rule, without a fear of overweening state power — in fact, the Indian problem has more often been one of central state weakness — and with democracy less important than national unity, internationalization was consistent with India's dominant discourse and posed little threat, in contrast to Spain. The Indian center was consequently well positioned to launch a rhetorical campaign in the late 1980s to delegitimize Sikh extremism by representing its purveyors as the product of Pakistani forces; during the Punjab insurgency's earlier phase, it had been represented largely as a domestic problem, with the exception of the contribution of the radicalized Sikh diaspora.

India's leaders thus groped their way — inconsistently, tentatively, and only after several false steps — toward what we have identified as the ideal representational strategy: one combining a delegitimizing rhetoric that casts political violence and its perpetrators outside the political community and a politicizing rhetoric that acknowledges the legitimacy of communal grievances and creates space for the politics of moderation. In Punjab the former took the form primarily of internationalization, representing Sikh

insurgents as Pakistani agents. But this was complemented by an erratic politicization of Sikh grievances. In 1985 Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi concluded an accord with the Akali Dal leader, Harchand Singh Longowal, that conceded numerous long-standing Sikh demands; the accord foundered when the responsible Sikh leaders were pilloried and some, like Longowal himself, assassinated and when the center failed to implement the agreement's terms. After that, the center periodically initiated short-lived and half-hearted efforts to conduct a political dialogue between 1988 and 1991. At the level of political rhetoric, Indian leaders consistently held out the promise of negotiations, under the condition that they would be conducted within the framework of the Constitution.²⁵ Chandra Shekhar even suggested that he would be open to amending the Constitution to accommodate certain Sikh claims.²⁶ These frequent overtures, even if rarely backed by sufficient political will, represented at least a limited slate of Sikh demands as within the Indian pale.

What made this particular representational configuration possible? We have already pointed to the implications of India's dominant discursive fields, but the more specific representational past mattered as well. The Sikhs' long-standing prominence in Indian politics meant that the center did not have easy access to a depoliticizing rhetoric casting the Sikhs as backward, inhuman, or criminal. The Punjab, a major beneficiary of the Green Revolution, was relatively prosperous: these were not backward peasants whose insurgency could be blamed on relative deprivation. The Akali Dal had long been a significant player in Punjabi and national politics: these were recognized political figures, not plausibly represented as criminals (Deol, 2000: 93–6). Finally, Sikhs had long disproportionately served in the military as a traditional 'martial race,' and the insurgency's backers included retired generals: these were not just misguided youth who would eventually outgrow their immature violent impulses (Cohen, 1990). Moreover, the fact that so many Sikhs had died defending India from Pakistan and other adversaries meant that the charge of treason, implicit in the rhetoric of internationalization, could not be applied indiscriminately. The ramifications of Sikhs' prominence in state institutions are brought into bold relief by the rhetoric the center employed to confront the insurgencies of the Northeast — a region whose tribes were not well represented in central institutions or in the political system. Here little impeded the center from turning to a depoliticizing rhetoric that cast the violence as reflective of the tribal peoples' need for economic development and civilization.

However, the language of 'representational strategy' may suggest more consistency and intentionality than the Indian case warrants. Reflecting conflicting political and strategic incentives, the center vacillated when it came to the politicization of Sikh grievances. To offer negotiations or concessions, even conditionally, and then to follow through would have strengthened the Akali Dal, and thus partisan competition gave the Congress reason to undercut the Akalis. To offer far-reaching concessions, particularly in this strategically crucial region, also might inspire insurgents across India. It was in principle possible to pursue a representational strategy delegitimizing the Akalis — in fact, this helped the always suspect Akalis establish their local legitimacy as loyal to the nationalist cause — while still politicizing many elements of the Sikh political agenda, but Indian leaders had difficulty sustaining this combination. The Akalis were represented at times as extremists in mufti, virtually indistinguishable from the perpetrators of violence — the militants' 'political voice' and 'overground apparatus,' in intelligence

officials' words — and they were regularly incarcerated.²⁷ But Indian leaders often went further, suggesting that fundamental Sikh claims were intolerable. For example, in 1989, at a party rally, Rajiv Gandhi equated the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, the 1973 document encapsulating the Sikh political vision and a focal point in Sikh communal politics, with the 1940 Muslim League resolution demanding Pakistan, and in the Lok Sabha he accused all those who sympathized with the Resolution of being co-conspirators in his mother's assassination.²⁸ Relative to Spain and Turkey, Indian representations of the Sikhs were erratic. But the fact that they approached the ideal, even if inconsistently, was not fortuitous: the discursive space was structured in ways that made it possible for Indian leaders, and even pressed them, to adopt that representational tack.

Alternative explanations

Critics might suggest that actual policy matters more to the success or failure of counterterrorism than does rhetorical strategy. We cannot rebut this counterargument here: we have, in *this* article, presumed that rhetorical strategy has substantial ramifications so we might devote analytical attention to its sources, and we have suggested only in *passing* what consequences flow from rhetorical choices. But we also disagree with the posing of this as an alternative. It presumes, wrongly in our view, that policy can be clearly separated from the politics of legitimation. But these two cannot be neatly divorced, since a sustainable counterterrorist policy must be capable of public legitimation. It presumes that instruments should be placed in competition with each other — carrots or sticks; rhetoric or policy? — but it is more useful, we believe, to explore when and how multiple instruments interact (Byman and Waxman, 2000). From our perspective, it is more productive to inquire into the relationship between rhetoric and policy. Do particular representational strategies limit or facilitate particular counterterrorist policies? Conversely, do particular counterterrorist policies render particular representational strategies unsustainable? In short, this opens up a range of research questions that would otherwise be occluded.

A critic might also portray state leaders' rhetorical choices as the product of material situational factors. For instance, one might argue in a realist vein that the greater the threat posed by insurgents — in terms of their mobilizable assets, organizational coherence, proximity, and intentions — the more hard-line a state response one might expect and the more the corresponding legitimating rhetoric would approach 'war.'²⁹ But the conclusion does not follow. Militarized policies and rhetorics seem to be ineffective, regardless of the threat's intensity: as a recent cross-national collaborative study of 14 cases concluded, militarization has tended to backfire, as indiscriminate force has 'made martyrs of terrorists, rallied recruits to the terrorist cause, and caused the uncommitted to lose confidence in the government' (Art and Richardson, 2007: 570–2, at 571). The obvious solution — use force more discriminately (Kydd and Walter, 2006: 72) — is easier said than done. Given complex organizations, the usual fog of war, and an especially foggy battle landscape, the killing of innocents is inevitable. State violence almost always appears indiscriminate to its victims, who understandably see even the exceptional tragedy as all too typical and who naturally ascribe errors to malign intent rather than situational challenges.

Moreover, this logic cannot account for the cases examined here. Turkey's approach and rhetoric were the most consistently hard-line. However, the intellectuals who founded the PKK in 1978 and initiated terrorist violence in 1984 were marginal early on compared to the Sikh preacher Bhindranwale, who enjoyed mass appeal before his violent death in 1984, or ETA, which had remained well-organized and locally popular after the establishment of democratic government. The PKK eventually became the largest of the three, but the size these organizations ultimately attained cannot be measured independently of counterterrorist practices: the PKK's base grew because Turkish policy was so brutal; moderate Sikhs joined the extremists' camp in droves after Operations Bluestar and its successor Woodrose; and ETA may have remained so small because Spain granted the Basques substantial autonomy and rarely responded to ETA provocations. Nor was the PKK the most threatening when measured by the disorder attributed to it: official Indian statistics ascribed nearly twice as many civilian deaths to Sikh extremists between 1981 and 1993 as did Turkish sources to PKK violence between 1984 and 1999 (Kocher, 2002: 130; Wallace, 2007: 432). Finally, in none of these cases did leaders embrace the rhetoric of war. In contrast, US leaders have been quicker to employ such rhetoric despite terrorist threats that were, based on objective indicators, less intense.

Finally, liberal rationalists have suggested hypotheses linking regime type to counterterrorist policy that might be extended to counterterrorist rhetoric. These propositions, however, tilt in contradictory directions. On the one hand, democratic leaders, recognizing that they cannot sustain harsh counterterrorist campaigns over the long run, have incentives to offer concessions to avoid future attacks; by this logic, such leaders are most likely to embrace a politicizing rhetoric (Art and Richardson, 2007: 570; Kydd and Walter, 2006: 79–80).³⁰ On the other hand, the involvement of mass publics in democratic governance gives elected leaders incentives to employ more visible but less discriminating and often counterproductive security measures; democratically elected leaders should then be least likely to reach out to aggrieved ethnic publics with a politicizing rhetoric (Bueno de Mesquita, 2007; but see Abrahms, 2007).

However, this article's empirics do not consistently support either proposition. The first hypothesis might explain why a quasi-democracy like Turkey felt little compulsion to politicize Kurdish grievances, while both Spain (from the beginning) and India (eventually) rhetorically sustained Basque and Sikh moderation respectively. But neither hypothesis can explain why democratic India adopted a delegitimizing rhetoric against extremist Sikhs, and even sometimes against moderate Sikhs, while democratic Spain did not adopt that stance against extremist or moderate Basques. Contrary to the first hypothesis, moreover, India's continual turns to negotiation, legitimated through a politicizing rhetoric, were not driven by broad-based domestic protest against the government's brutal tactics: in retrospect, writes one observer, despite 'evidence of widespread excesses by the police and paramilitary forces,' 'there was no obvious internal outcry[,] and the government's policies toward Punjab (as well as other areas of insurgency) were enthusiastically supported' (Thandi, 1996: 172). Similarly, Turkish liberalization, which proceeded steadily from the latter half of the 1980s, produced little protest against treatment of the Kurds and did not lead to a corresponding political liberalization of counterterrorist policy or rhetoric.

Conclusion

Attacks on civilians are often weighted with symbolism: the World Trade Center was targeted on 11 September 2001 precisely because it symbolized America's cultural and economic power. Terrorists are simultaneously highly strategic and culturally sensitive. This is not accidental: terrorists most effectively further their ends when they are attuned to the power of symbols. The literature, however, has less often recognized that, in this theater, there is a dialogue taking place on-stage, between terrorist and counterterrorist players. The latter may have superior material resources at their disposal, but they cannot stand outside culture. Complementing military, economic, and political measures, state leaders wage a rhetorical campaign that not only legitimates these approaches, but has a logic and effect of its own.

This article has focused on ethnonational insurgency, but its insights travel to the dominant concern of recent years — transnational Islamist terrorism. The basic purpose of counterterrorism is shared across national and transnational contexts: to help nurture an environment in which moderate co-ethnics (or Muslims), often themselves voicing nationalist (or Islamist) goals, can offer a credible alternative to extremists, leading to the latter's eventual delegitimation (Krebs, 2008). This article's analytical framework regarding the representational politics of counterterrorism also remains relevant to transnational terrorists, whatever their religious, ideological, or communal coloration. The two questions that structure Table 1 — Are the violent actors represented as having a political agenda? Are they represented as potentially legitimate interlocutors? — can be answered in either the affirmative or the negative, even if the terrorists are not national citizens and are therefore unquestionably Other. While this is obviously true of the first question, since Others often pursue recognizably political agendas in international politics, it may not be as self-evident of the second, as one might assume that clearly-drawn lines between Self and Other prevent the former from offering even the prospect of legitimacy to the latter. We do not see processes of identity construction as establishing impermeable boundaries, even in the international arena. The history of foreign relations — and we here cast our subject intentionally as *foreign* relations — is marked by continual bargaining with Others. Implicit in such negotiations, at least when they are conducted publicly and must be legitimated, is that the parties, notwithstanding their abiding differences, share enough to make conversation possible. Identity is nested, and there is always a conceivable basis for the discovery of sufficient higher-order commonality. In other words, Self and Other are always potentially liminal, and thus even foreign terrorists may be represented as legitimate interlocutors.

While the basic purpose of counterterrorism remains the same, the transnational nature of the contemporary challenge suggests two related differences of significance. First, the target audience for counterterrorist rhetoric is foreign: US authorities and Muslim publics do not share a common language or symbolic field. The former's capacity to play a constructive role is thus restricted because it does not share with the population the cultural resources through which legitimation and delegitimation can be pursued. Not surprisingly, direct US efforts to delegitimize terrorism have fallen on deaf ears in the Arab and Muslim world. For state actors, therefore, the first rule of counterterrorism should be 'do no harm.' The rhetoric of 'war,' which the Bush administration, and the

larger US body politic, embraced from 2001 onwards, violated this rule: by relegating target audiences to an oppositional role, it made it harder to communicate with them, and it complicated moderates' efforts to maintain their local legitimacy (Krebs, 2008).

Second, and related, the US government rarely has direct political ties with these Muslim target audiences. This absence of direct engagement elevates the need for a space within which a moderate interlocutor — that is, a political actor who articulates a platform that gives voice to Islamist aspirations while advocating their pursuit through non-violent means — can emerge (Chowdhury and Krebs, 2009). Here US rhetorical strategy could move beyond 'do no harm' and play a more productive role. The US penchant for representing moderates as like-minded 'allies' in the War on Terror threatens moderates' legitimacy with their co-religionists. The cause of moderate Muslims, and their willingness to articulate the politics of moderation, could be advanced if the US was instead to ignore or, under certain circumstances, even criticize them (Krebs, 2008). At the same time, by acknowledging and politicizing some Muslim grievances, the US could make it possible for moderates to participate in dialogue without being perceived as America's stooges. The rhetoric of 'war,' in contrast, fails to acknowledge, much less politicize, the grievances broadly felt among Muslims, and it impedes the emergence of a legitimate politics of moderation.

Yet President Barack Obama's overtures have also deviated from the approach we would consider optimal. Obama did politicize Muslim grievances in his much-anticipated speech in Cairo in June 2009, acknowledging at the very start the 'great tension between the United States and Muslims around the world' which 'has been fed by colonialism that denied rights and opportunities to many Muslims, and a Cold War in which Muslim-majority countries were too often treated as proxies without regard to their own aspirations.'³¹ He also clearly sought to delegitimize political violence, particularly 'the killing of innocent men, women, and children.'³² To his credit, Obama did not, in the fashion of the 'War on Terror,' call for supporting regional 'allies,' nor did he single out specific moderate 'partners.' And Obama forthrightly addressed policy differences, from the Israel–Palestine conflict to nuclear proliferation to the rights of women, even as he identified potential areas of agreement.

But, in his Cairo address, Obama failed to appreciate the dilemmas facing moderates in the Arab world, and his rhetoric only exacerbated those dilemmas. He did not draw lines of difference that might have boosted moderates' local credibility, as we might have advised. Indeed, he did just the opposite, erasing lines of difference by focusing on the 'common principles' and 'common aspirations' that inform 'people of all faiths.' Casting Muslims and Americans as members of a 'common humanity' whose shared values outweigh their political disagreements, Obama implied that these differences were minor compared to the 'common ground' they jointly inhabit.³³ But his choices were not limited to the vision of common humanity (shared values, political differences) and an irreconcilable 'Clash of Civilizations' (cultural and political differences). He might rather have embraced a rhetoric that acknowledged cultural differences while asserting sufficient shared political interests to sustain negotiation and agreement. This rhetorical tack might have helped moderates oppose political violence while avoiding the appearance of being American stooges. The ambivalent reaction after Obama's speech among Arab commentators may reflect these pressures.³⁴ While Western observers saw the speech as

a radical departure from the Bush administration's rhetoric, Arab and Muslim listeners often emphasized the continuities. Even those who did perceive substantial rhetorical differences expressed skepticism that Obama's fine words would be matched by changes in policy — their skepticism sustained by Obama's decision to follow his predecessor in asserting universal values shared between the West and the Muslim world and downplaying the goals shared by 'extremists' and the majority of Muslims.

Experts typically counsel state leaders to treat terrorism publicly as more a weapon of mass disruption than a first-class security threat (Mueller, 2006). There is much wisdom in this advice, but this article suggests that it requires emendation. A well-constructed and necessarily public representational strategy can be a useful device in the counterterrorist tool kit.

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Notes

- 1 Inaugural Address. 21 June 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/President_Barack_Obamas_Inaugural_Address/; Remarks by the President on a new beginning. Cairo University, 4 June 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Cairo-University-6-04-09/.
- 2 Both 'terrorism' and 'counterterrorism' are contested categories, as are their referents: violence, the civilian, the political. We recognize that these are loaded terms: although the resonance of 'terrorism' has varied over time, it has been used for nearly a century to cast adversaries as illegitimate. However, we are not aware of neutral shorthand expressions that capture either violence perpetrated against civilians for political ends (whether by state or non-state actors) or efforts to counter it. Though cognizant of the term's political overtones, we employ it henceforth without quotes. This move is also justified partly by our focus on the state's representations; in the state's eyes — and words — the insurgents are terrorists and the state's actions counterterrorist. Furthermore, we examine only cases in which the state identifies certain actors as engaged in terrorism. While this delegitimizing language appears in all three cases, the complementary representational strategies differ. Our analytical focus is on these variants *within* counterterrorist rhetoric.
- 3 For related work among scholars of international relations and foreign policy, see, among others, Goddard (2009); Jackson (2006); Krebs (2006); Krebs and Jackson (2007); Nexon (2009).
- 4 FBIS is the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, today part of the US government's Open Source Center. Located for much of its history in the CIA, FBIS began in the late 1960s to selectively translate and publish material from foreign media. FBIS country coverage is incomplete and skewed toward US government concerns, but US policy-makers have an interest in translations that convey local nuance. Coverage expanded dramatically within and

across countries in the late 1990s, presumably because foreign media increasingly became available electronically.

- 5 Turkey defends special police, attacks PKK. *Türkiye*, 8 August 1995 (FBIS-WEU-95-155); Interior Minister discusses security measures. Ankara Domestic Service (hereafter, ADS), 17 October 1985 (FBIS VII, 21 October 1985); Interior Minister reviews terrorist incidents. ADS, 5 June 1985 (FBIS VII, 6 June 1985).
- 6 Commentary examines Pakistan's role in Punjab. Delhi General Overseas Service, 25 April 1988 (FBIS-NES-88-083); Gandhi on Pakistani support of terrorists. Delhi Domestic Service (hereafter, DDS), 8 June 1988 (FBIS-NES-88-110).
- 7 Regarding Spain, see Spain: Aznar offers 'helping hand' to those who renounce violence. RNE-1 Radio, 21 July 1997 (FBIS-WEU-97-202). Regarding India, see Minister notes dialogue with Punjab militants. Delhi All India Radio (hereafter, DAIR), 1 December 1991 (FBIS-NES-91-231).
- 8 See, regarding Punjab, State resolved to end militancy. DAIR, 2 March 1993 (FBIS-NES-93-039). Regarding Kashmir, Steps to restore normalcy in Kashmir. DAIR, 9 March 1993 (FBIS-NES-93-044). Regarding Assam, Assam state orders ULFA cadres to surrender by 31 Jan. DAIR, 1 January 1993 (FBIS-NES-001).
- 9 See, regarding India's Northeast, Singh speaks on Assam, Kashmir, Punjab Issues. DDS, 3 January 1990 (FBIS-NES-90-002). Regarding Turkey, General Gures in Iraq operation, Kurdish 'Problem'. *Anatolia*, 18 November 1992 (FBIS-WEU-92-225).
- 10 Elsewhere (Chowdhury and Krebs, 2009) we have explored why 'mobilizing moderates' is so difficult and how and when it can be done.
- 11 Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this.
- 12 There is in principle a third deviant outcome — neither delegitimation nor politicization — but this seems to us unlikely on both theoretical and empirical grounds.
- 13 Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing us on this point.
- 14 Turkish Prime Minister sails confidently into a sea of troubles. *Irish Times*, 28 July 1993.
- 15 Özal on election, terrorism, Madrid peace talks. *Tercuman*, 1 November 1991 (FBIS-WEU-91213).
- 16 Özal: Army plans "major offensive" against Kurds. *Anatolia*, 1 February 1992 (FBIS-WEU-92-022); Demirel discusses PKK, other issues. TRT TV Network, 24 April 1992 (FBIS-WEU-92-081).
- 17 Özal interview on Kurdish question, party issues. *Hurriyet*, 19 August 1992 (FBIS-WEU-92-165); Özal interview on Kurdish issue, violence. *Milliyet*, 23 August 1992 (FBIS-WEU-92-172). See, in general, Barkey (2007: 365–8).
- 18 Prime Minister discusses talks with ETA. Madrid to Europe, 6 March 1988 (FBIS-WEU-88-044).
- 19 Senate plenum held on terrorist activities. Madrid Domestic Service, 13 June 1979 (FBIS VII, 14 June 1979, N1).
- 20 Justice Minister's Statement. RNE-1 Radio, 19 April 1995 (FBIS-WEU-95-076).
- 21 Prime Minister discusses talks with ETA. Madrid to Europe, 6 March 1988 (FBIS-WEU-88-044). Senate plenum held on terrorist activities. Madrid Domestic Service, 13 June 1979 (FBIS VII, 14 June 1979, N1). Justice Minister's statement. RNE-1 Radio, 19 April 1995 (FBIS-WEU-95-076).

- 22 Pact of Ajuria Enea, 12 January 1988, available at http://www.mir.es/DGRIS/Terrorismo_de_ETA/esp/ajuria.htm; emphasis added. Thanks to Margot Krebs for translation of this document.
- 23 This was of course a form of infantilization, but the PNV used this rhetoric simultaneously to criticize and to legitimize ETA. This is very different from the Indian center's deployment of infantilizing rhetoric to discredit tribal insurgents.
- 24 For representative examples, see: President on Pakistani support for terrorists. DDS, 10 October 1988 (FBIS-NES-88-196); Home Minister on dealing firmly with subversives. DDS, 31 July 1990 (FBIS-NES-90-148). A corresponding rhetorical tactic lodged the accusation that Sikh militant groups were 'anti-national': see Home Minister on President's rule in Punjab. DDS, 8 May 1989 (FBIS-NES-89-088). Similar rhetoric was also deployed against groups in Kashmir.
- 25 Gandhi ready to begin dialogue on Punjab. DDS, 11 March 1988 (FBIS-NES-88-049); Shekhar speaks on Akali arrests, other issues. DDS, 26 November 1990 (FBIS-NES-90-199).
- 26 Shekhar on Punjab, Kashmir, other issues. DDS, 22 December 1990 (FBIS-NES-90-247).
- 27 Vinayak R, Baweja H (1992) Accelerating alienation. *India Today*, 15 March, p. 49.
- 28 Pachauri P (1989) Another step backward. *India Today*, 15 May, p. 59.
- 29 It is not clear to us, however, how such a situational analysis would distinguish among, or generate predictions regarding, the various representational strategies contained in Table 1.
- 30 This presumes of course that democratic publics will not long tolerate well-publicized brutality, but this presumption may not be well-grounded. See Downes (2008) and Valentino et al. (2006).
- 31 Remarks by the President on a new beginning. Cairo University, 4 June 2009.
- 32 *ibid.*
- 33 *ibid.*
- 34 See Obama Cairo speech triggers mixed reactions. *Al Arabiya*, 4 June 2009, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/06/04/74887.html>; Obama speech reaction, from Gaza to Pakistan and Afghanistan. *Guardian*, 4 June 2009; <http://www.juancole.com/2009/06/reactions-to-obamas-speech.html>.

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Biography

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