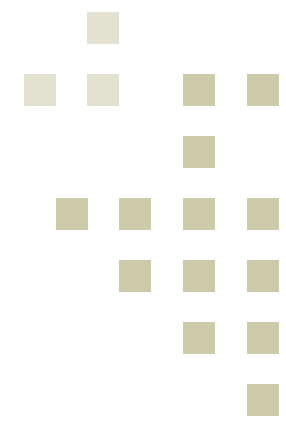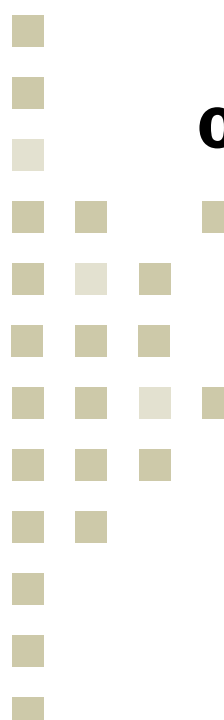# [729] Working Paper

How We Talk about the "War on Terrorism"

Comparative Research on Japan, Russia, and the United States

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[**Abstract**] This paper focuses on how leaders in Western countries talk about the "war on terrorism." The paper discusses the difficulties of defining "terrorism," because, unlike Marxism or capitalism, "terrorism" is not an ideology. Instead the term may be used to designate actions that are used by members of non-governmental organizations against civilian targets. In the case of the "war on terrorism," the signifier, "terrorism," is used widely. However, the signified, the perpetrators and what they do, are quite different. Because the designation of the signified depends upon the speaker, the concept of terrorism seems to be subjective and fluid. The signified switches radically both by context and over time, while the only aspect that is stable is the signifier, "terrorism." The paper goes on to analyze the "war on terrorism" as an ontological metaphor. The paper concludes by arguing that although figures of speech contribute to the cognitive dimension of meaning by helping us to recognize the equivalence to which we are committed and suggesting new equivalences, metaphors like the "war on terrorism" raise problems and do little to increase our understanding. Considering different cultural codes and world views, this type of metaphor is highly counterproductive for communication on the global level.

Introduction

The carefully planned and coordinated terror attack of September 11, 2001 was the bloodiest attack on the American mainland in modern times. Live TV coverage where CNN had the standing title of "America under attack" enabled the whole world to witness the unprecedented catastrophe. President George W. Bush said among other things: "Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts… These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve." This is how President Bush put the "war on terrorism" on the international agenda. But how does one make war on terrorism or any other "ism"?

Our Research: The "War on Terrorism"

Our research on the "War on Terrorism" focuses on the problem of comparing the linguistic formulations of policy officials in a number of Western countries. Comparative research like this is a challenge, because we can not rely on any single theoretical approach. Cognitive psychology is useful because we can examine the world views of the officials, but other approaches, like semiotics and critical metaphor analysis, are needed to capture the culturally-specific cognitive structures and cultural codes embedded in the linguistic structures. Our contribution is to combine these approaches to analyze the communicative problems involved in talking about terrorism and understand better the policy implications that are drawn by officials in different countries.

Interviews with Japanese Officials

We began our research in April 2006 with a series of interviews with eight Japanese officials, including officials in the Cabinet Secretariat, Japanese Defense Agency, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Defense Academy, National Police Agency, and independent think tanks. We asked these officials to define "terrorism," distinguish between "terror" and "terrorism," discuss causes of terrorism, and talk about the "war on terrorism" and the "global war on terror." In addition to these interviews, we have done a close reading of the speeches of (former) Prime Minister Koizumi from September 2001 until April 2006. We have also read the speeches of President Putin from the same time period in both Russian and English translation. Later, we will interview government officials in Russia, selected European countries, and the United States.

Research Questions

The research is composed of two parts: one descriptive, where we focus on widely different perceptions expressed by policy-makers in Western countries, and make use of concepts from semiotics and analytical tools like cognitive mapping and critical metaphor analysis to help explain why this is so. The

second part is prescriptive, where we offer policy proposals on how to cope with the societal risks linked to terrorism. Here the assumption is that consensual policies will be more optimal in dealing with the problem.

Descriptive Research Questions

1. What are the cultural codes linked to the central concepts used by policy-makers in different countries, when they talk about the "war on terrorism"?   Here we hypothesize that the even though the signifier, "terrorism," may be the same for everyone, the signified is not. For example, when Japanese officials talk about terrorism, they use the word, "*tero*," a shortened form that does not distinguish between "terror" and "terrorism" as understood in the United States, for example.

2. What are the cultural codes linked to figures of speech evoked by policy-makers in different countries, when they talk about the "war on terrorism"? Metaphors are typically historically determined and will serve to explain differences in the way terrorism is viewed. In the Japanese context, for example, "war" is considered to be a conflict between sovereign states, which Japan has renounced in Article Nine of their Constitution.[1] As a consequence, Japanese officials always use the term "fight" rather than "war" against terrorism, except when they are talking to officials from the United States.

3. What are the cultural codes linked to different themes evoked by policy-makers when talking about the war on terrorism? Here we hypothesize that there are variations in the themes that are evoked, when talking about terrorism and these differences illustrate the lack of consensus on what constitutes the problem. President Putin, for example, often explains terrorism as a consequence of "internal conflicts and inter-ethnic divisions that were once firmly suppressed by the ruling ideology," but "have "now flared up."[2]

We would expect to find predictable differences between the cognitive frameworks of officials in various Western countries: the United States, which has a global perspective as the only remaining superpower; Russia, a former superpower, which is attempting to cope with the problem of Chechnya; Japan, which has experienced attacks from domestic terrorists; Great Britain, which faces terrorist threats from domestic Muslim groups; France, Germany, and Italy, which have a European perspective; and Canada, which shares a border with the United States. For example, we would expect United States (and Russia) to talk

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[1]   ARTICLE 9. Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. 第九条　日本国民は、正義と秩序を基調とする国際平和を誠実に希求し、国権の発動たる戦争と、武力による威嚇又は武力の行使は、国際紛争を解決する手段としては、永久にこれを放棄する。

[2] Address by President Vladimir Putin, The Kremlin, 4 September 2004 (author's translation).

mostly about "how to hunt down terrorists," while the Europeans and Japanese will be more focussed on the root causes of terrorism, such as poverty.

Prescriptive Research Questions

The prescriptive part of our research rests on the assumption that even though there are a whole set of variables that help to explain differences in both the perception of terrorism and appropriate action, cultural codes constitute an important residual in explaining both differing perceptions as well as actions taken against terrorism. This residual variable deserves particular attention in policy relevant research, since perceptions are fluid and subject to change. Different cultural codes linked to the concept of terrorism may have a potential impact on the ability of these countries to work together constructively and reach a common understanding.

1. To what extent are perceptions of the war on terrorism being used by policy-makers in different countries to promote their own world view and justify their actions?

2. To what extent can rhetorical devices used by policy-makers such as concepts, figures of speech, and themes be said to create biased perceptions of the terrorist threat?

3. How can our knowledge of biases in perceptual processes derived from our research improve the analytical quality of research on terrorism?

4. How can we reach a more consensual understanding of what constitutes the problem and thereby cope with it in a more optimal way both within societies and between different countries?

The research will be particularly pertinent to the concerns expressed in the United States, but even more so in Europe, on the widely differing perceptions of terrorism and what actions should and ought to be taken to reduce societal risks embedded in the problem.

Approaches and Methods

We propose to analyze and compare the linguistic formulations of policy officials in Western countries as they talk about the war on terrorism, describe the causes of global terrorism, and discuss consequences of terrorism for international affairs. We are especially interested in their use of culturally-specific cognitive structures, including figurative language, to discuss the possibility of terrorist attacks, and we will conduct a comparative analysis of these structures to help explain differences in policy prescriptions.

To support this analysis of the linguistic formulations of policy officials, we will use both the technique of cognitive mapping and critical metaphor analysis. Interviews will be conducted (and recordings) made with primarily policy officials about how they would characterize such terrorism. The analysis will compare the conceptualizations of the various Western officials, including the cognitive structures and the figurative language used.

In each country, we will identify national security, foreign affairs, intelligence, and internal security officials who deal with terrorism and related issues. We will interview these officials using a standardized instrument. The interviews will be recorded and transcribe for further analysis.

We have developed the technique of cognitive mapping to study a wide-range of policy issues, including conflicts in the Middle East, the Limited Test Ban negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union, and oil policy in Norway.[3] In a cognitive map constructed the text of an interview with a policy official, the concepts of the official are described by nodes and the perceived causal links are shown by signed arrows. An arrow with a plus sign indicates a positive causal relationship ("leads to," "contributes to," "a condition of," etc.), while an arrow with a minus sign denotes a perceived negative causal or quasi-causal relation ("aggravates," "diminishes," etc.), and a zero sign indicates the denial of any causal linkage ("does not depend on"). All of the causal links of the official can be aggregated and combined into maps for describing the perceived causal relationships of a political collective.[4]

The analysis of cognitive maps is accomplished by treating them as directed graphs or "diagraphs," and uses the rules of diagraph theory for making calculations. Diagraph theory, a formal system with elaborate rules for moving about in a network of interrelated elements, provides an inference structure that is convenient for seeing how concepts are relate to each other and the overall structure of the set of causal relations.[5] Calculation is greatly facilitated because the developers of diagraph theory have worked out the relationships between and among the elements. The set of rules (axioms, primitives, theorems, etc.) that constitute the theory of directed graphs is far too elaborate to treat here.[6]

In addition to the coding technique described above, we will also subject the interview texts to "processual coding," a cognitive mapping technique that has been developed to capture and compare cultural codes that are embedded in

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3   See G. Matthew Bonham, Michael J. Shapiro, and Thomas Trumble, "The October War: Changes in Cognitive Orientation toward the Middle East Conflict." *International Studies Quarterly*, 1979, 3-44; G.Matthew Bonham, Victor Sergeev, and Pavel Parshin, "The Limited Test-Ban Agreement: Emergence of New Knowledge Structures in International Negotiation." *International Studies Quarterly*, 1997, 215-240; G. Matthew Bonham, Michael J. Shapiro, and Daniel Heradstveit, "Group Cognition: Using an Oil Policy Game to Validate a Computer Simulation." *Simulation and Games*, 1988, 379-407.

4   Michael J. Shapiro, G. Matthew Bonham, and Daniel Heradstveit, "A Discursive Practices Approach to Collective Decision-Making." *International Studies Quarterly*, 1988, 147-174.

5   Robert Axelrod, *Structure of Decision.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 5.

6   See Frank Harary, Robert Norman, and Dorwin Cartwright, *Structural Models: An Introduction to the Theory of Directed Graphs.* New York: John Wiley, 1965.

linguistic formulations. This technique has been used to portray cultural codes embedded in Soviet statements from the Cuban (Caribbean) Missile Crisis, the foreign policy pronouncements of Gromyko and Shevardnadze, and to compare Kennedy and Khrushchev with respect to cultural differences in understanding political reality."[7]

Many linguistic expressions used by officials are metaphorical, and various metaphors of causation are quite common in political texts. For example, in the Limited Test Ban negotiations President Kennedy said "the cold war *brings* burdens and dangers to so many countries….nuclear powers must *avert* those confrontations which *bring* an adversary to a choice of either a humiliating retreat or a nuclear war." In these passages words with originally spatial semantics are used to suggest causal meaning through metaphorical transfer from spatial image schemas to causal target domains.[8]

To help identify and analyze the connotative language used by the officials whom we interview, we will use the technique of critical metaphor analysis. Critical metaphor analysis is an approach "that aims to identify the intentions and ideologies underlying language use."[9] The approach is based on the work of Lakoff and Johnson, which has been further modified by others.[10] "The basic claims of this approach are that the mind is inherently embodied, thought is mostly unconscious and abstract concepts are largely metaphorical."[11] The technique provides an economical way of identifying metaphorical and metonymic thinking, as well as describing and conceptual metaphors. Additional analysis is necessary, however, to provide the social and cultural context of the metaphor.[12]

After completing the interviews with Western officials, we will subject the interview transcripts to critical metaphor analysis. This involves three stages: Identification of the metaphor (or metonym) used by the official; interpretation of the metaphor; and explanation of the metaphor.   For example, in a newspaper interview, President Putin said, "We do not engage in dialogue with those who

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7 See Pavel Parshin and Victor Sergeev, "Conceptual Reconstruction and Conflict Resolution: Further Reflections on the Caribbean Crisis. Paper presented at the 31st Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, Washington, DC, 1990; Victor Sergeev and Pavel Parshin, " Processes, Metamorphoses, and Procedures; 'The New Thinking as Reflected in Linguistic Structures. Paper presented at the third NAS-AS USSR Workshop on Models and Concepts of Interdependence between Nations, Berkeley, California, 1990; G. Matthew Bonham, Victor Sergeev, and Pavel Parshin, "The Limited Test-Ban Agreement: Emergence of New Knowledge Structures in International Negotiation." *International Studies Quarterly*, 1997, 215-240.

8 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson**,** *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

9 Jonathan Charteris-Black, p. 26.

10 See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999; George Lakoff, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987; George Lakoff, "The Contemporary Metaphor" in A. Ortony (ed**.)** *Metaphor and Thought*, 2nd edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 202-51; and George Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 2nd edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002; George Lakoff and Turner, More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989; Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

11 Jonathan Charteris-Black, p. 26.

12 Jonathan Charteris-Black, p. 29.

have the blood of Russian citizens on their hands…" (7 February 2007). Here the conceptual metaphor is CONFLICT IS BLOOD. The interpretation of Putin's use of this metaphor would involve a discussion of his characterization of "terrorists" in the Republic of Chechnya as criminals and murders. The analysis would focus on Putin choice of this metaphor and Russian cultural codes.

Defining Terrorism

A major problem for the United States and other Western countries is their inability to agree on what they are fighting against. As Robert Kagan has pointed out, "It is time to stop pretending that Europeans and Americans share a common view of the world, or even that they occupy the same world."[13] If there is no agreement on the term, "terrorism," oppressive regimes will add their own separatists, insurgents, and dissidents to the list of "international terrorists" One of the problems is that the "ism" suffix is usually associated with an ideology, such as Marxism or communism. But "terrorism" is not an ideology; instead, it is a method that is used against civilian targets. The term is used to designate people who are doing things to others, the victims, for a wide variety of reasons. Here both the perpetrators and the victims are important in the definition. The perpetrators are members of non-governmental organizations and the victims are civilians.

To help clarify this problem we can turn to the continental semiotic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure. For Saussure, a sign consists of a **signifier** and a **signified.** The relationship between the signifier and the signified is referred to as **signification**, which is represented in the Saussurean diagram by arrows. The horizontal line marking the two elements of the sign is referred to as the bar. For example, the word "terrorist" is a *sign* consisting of the following: A *signifier*, the word "terrorist," and a *signified* concept—a person who attacks innocent civilian targets. A sign must have both a signifier and a signified. You cannot have a totally meaningless signifier or a completely formless signified. The same signifier could stand for a different signified (and thus be a different sign).

In the case of terrorism, the signifier, "terrorism" is used widely by many including the governments of the USA, Russia, and Sri Lanka. But the signified, the perpetrators and what they do are quite different: Al-Qaida, the Chechens, and the Tamil Tigers. Because the designation of **signified** depends upon the speaker, the concept of terrorism is seems to be subjective and fluid. The **signified** switches radically both by context and over time. The only aspect that is stable is the **signifier**, "terrorism."

The rhetoric of terrorism is being waged with weapons that are loose, diffuse, and highly flexible. The signifier is clear-cut, but the signified is not. Thus, the "war on terrorism" is largely a rhetorical instrument—a form of political

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13 Robert Kagan, "Power and Weakness," *Policy Review*, June 2002.

communication that packs an emotional punch. In the case of former Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi, for example, neither the signifier nor the signified are clear cut: "Fight against terrorism" *(テロリズムとの戦い);* "War on terrorism" （対テロ戦争） and "Terror" or "Terrorism" (テロリズムとの闘い).

The War on Terrorism as Political Communication

Denotative language uses many words in a neutral, precise manner to describe a phenomenon. For this reason it functions very poorly as a rhetorical instrument, for rhetoric works best with connotative language, i.e., using few words in a loose, diffuse and flexible manner. Rhetorical language is also affective, and there are few words that pack such an emotional punch as "terrorism."

The use of metaphors, such as the "war on terrorism," can be a highly effective technique of political communication. Such figures of speech are often used by political leaders to persuade others, including the leaders of other countries as well as their own people. Metaphors are powerful, because they exploit "the associative power of language and represent "a certain way of viewing the world that reflects a shared system of belief as to what the world is and culture-specific beliefs about mankind's place in it….Metaphor *provokes* affective responses because it draws on value systems…embedded in a culture where certain types of entity are associated with positive or negative experiences or may be universal."[14]

In the United States, for example, an ancestor of the "war on terrorism" is the "war on drugs," which similarly legitimized extraordinary measures with consequences for due process and civil liberties. Common to both "wars" appears to be the financing of American police departments by forfeiture of assets considered to be drug- or terrorism-related, which offers certain players a powerful stake in the continuance and development of the system.

Metaphor and Metonymy

How does metaphor create new insight, a new understanding? Ricoeur, quoting Black,[15] uses an example to describe the mechanism: Let our metaphor be "Man is a wolf." The focus, "wolf," operates not on the basis of lexical meaning, but by virtue…of the opinions and preconceptions to which a reader in a linguistic community, by the fact that he speaks, finds himself committed….To call a man a wolf is to evoke the lupine system of associated commonplaces. One speaks then of the man in "wolf-language." Acting as a filter or a screen, "The wolf-metaphor suppresses some details, emphasizes others—in short, organizes our view of man." In this way metaphor confers an "insight."[16]

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14 Jonathan Charteris-Black, *Politicians and Rhetoric. The Persuasive Power of Metaphor*. Houndsmill and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 20.

15 Max Black, *Models and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962).

16 Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 87.

In the study of discourse rhetoricians distinguish between metaphor and metonymy. Schofer and Rice characterize metaphor as a "semantic and referential relationship of *resemblance* made possible by the possession of one or more common features." The metaphorical processes involve a transfer of meaning. Metonymy, on the other hand, can be characterized by a "semantic and referential relationship of *causality* made possible by the category of semantic feature *cause*. Their definition of metonymy suggests a major limitation of this trope.[17]

Sapir proposes that metaphor "states an equivalence between terms taken from separate semantic domains," such as "George the Lion," when applied to a football player. Metonymy, according to Sapir, "replaces or juxtaposes contiguous terms that occupy a distinct and separate place with what is considered a single semantic or perceptual domain." For example, Homer will often be used instead of the Iliad: "you will read in Homer."[18] Sapir treats metonymy as the logical inverse of a metaphor. Rather than emphasizing the relationship between two terms taken from different domains, metonymy "emphasizes the whole, the entire domain shared by two terms, and its success as a trope depends upon how fully this idea of wholeness can be conveyed."[19] Lakoff has elaborated the idea of "metonymic prototypes." "If B is a category and A is a member, or subcategory, of B, the result is a metonymic category structure, in which A is a metonymic prototype." He further describes a "classical category" of a metonymic prototype as follows:

Consider a cognitive model containing a feature bundle that characterizes a classical category B. If A has all the properties in the feature bundle, it is a best example of B. An element C, having some of the properties in the feature bundle, may be judged as a less good example of B. Strictly speaking, C will be outside B; but people, in such cases, may consider B a graded category, such that elements bearing a degree of similarity to members of B will be viewed as being members of B to a degree.[20]

In the case of the "Axis of Evil," metaphor, for example, it can be said that Iraq and North Korea are viewed by the Bush Administration as A, that is, best examples of the feature bundle B, a coalition of evil countries and their terrorist allies that are engaged in terrorist activities against the West. Iran is element C, a less good example of feature bundle B, because some of Iran's leadership is democratically elected.

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[17] Peter Schofer and Donald Rice, "Metaphor, Metonymy, and Synecdoche Revis(it)ed," *Semiotica* Vol. 21, No. 1/2 (1977), pp. 122-123.

[18] J. David Sapir, "The Anatomy of Metaphor," in *the Social Use of Metaphor*, ed. J. D. Sapir and J. C. Crocker (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), p. 4.

[19] Sapir, p. 20.

[20] Lakoff, 1986, pp. 288-289.

The War on Terrorism as Ontological Metaphor

Lakoff and Johnson argue that our experience with physical objects provide the basis for ontological metaphors, that is metaphors about "being." For example, we often view inflation as an entity: "We need to *combat inflation*"; "Inflation is *taking its toll* at the gasoline pump"; "If there is much *more inflation*, we will not survive"; "*Inflation makes me* sick." Viewing inflation as an entity enables us to refer to it, quantify it, identify a particular aspect, see it as a cause, and act with respect to it. Nevertheless, viewing a non-physical thing as an entity does not allow us to comprehend much about it. To do this, the metaphor has to be elaborated to specify different kinds of objects.[21]

Ontological metaphors like these are so natural that they are usually taken as self-evident, direct descriptions of mental phenomena. We believe the statement, "He cracked under pressure" to be either true or false. The fact that it is metaphorical never occurs to us…and we do not bother to analyze its appropriateness as a metaphor. For example, Former Prime Minister Koizumi described terrorism as follows: "International terrorism is a despicable act that threatens the lives and lifestyles of people all over the world and the peace and security of all countries of the world (8 October 2001)." Here, terrorism, a non-physical thing, is treated as an entity or thing that has an objective reality.

Like inflation, this view of terrorism enables us to suggest how to act. As Koizumi pointed out, we must "…prevent and eradicate international terrorism." (8 October 2001). Note also here that another metaphor is evoked: "terrorism is contagion" that must be eradicated. As in the case of disease, we must "actively contribute to international efforts to prevent and eradicate terrorism (8 October 2001)." Although the treatment of terrorism as an entity helps us to talk about terrorism, it does little to increase our understanding of the phenomenon or communicate effectively across cultures.

In short, the "war on terrorism" metaphor communicates a simple message to the public. The message divides the world with respect to friends and enemies. The message also suggests what is to be done, namely, wage a struggle against an entity--terrorism. However, like the "cold war," the metaphor suggests little meaning and explains nothing about the phenomenon and its implications.

Conclusion

We hope this research will be instrumental in promoting greater understanding of terrorism by increasing the cognitive complexity of policy-makers on this issue. The basic assumption is that up to now the Western response to terrorism and, especially that of the United States, has not promoted understanding of the problem and how to respond to it. Strategies have been built on intuitive reactions rather than true insight. By comparing and contrasting different

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21 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

perceptions and exposing them to policy-makers in the United States and other Western countries, more complex thinking about terrorism may evolve. We also hope that the research will help policy makers to discuss terrorism using a common language. Although they appear to be talking about the same thing, it is clear that they often have different understandings of terrorism. As President Putin has pointed out, "Unless we learn to speak the same conceptual language, we shall never achieve our common goals and will never protect our people— ours, yours, all the people on the planet against this threat, this plague of the 21st century, from terrorism."[22]

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22 Vladimir Putin, "Final Words at the World Congress of News Agencies," 24 September 2004 (author's translation).