On September 9, 2001, a Maryland state trooper stopped Ziad Jarrah for a traffic violation. Having no reason to do otherwise, the trooper sent Jarrah on his way. Two days later, he was the hijacker-pilot of Flight 93, which crashed in rural Pennsylvania. Citing incidents like this stop, the 9/11 Commission found that the intelligence community had failed to “connect the dots.” In response, the new Department of Homeland Security (DHS) promised to link the entirety of domestic intelligence—from municipal police departments to the federal intelligence community—with a new National Network of Fusion Centers. At the same time, the spread of intelligence-led policing (ILP) complemented the rise of these networked intelligence hubs with a “smarter” approach that uses intelligence to preempt threats.

The resultant process of intelligence fusion starts with information: massive databases decades in the making; open-source data gleaned from the web and social media; and streams of information created by new surveillance systems like automated license plate readers. To “fuse” data into useful information, analysts often use powerful computers and specialized software to “connect the dots” and, in theory, draw out the signal from the noise of data. Different tools offer different insights. With specialized software, analysts can turn unintelligible and interminably long lists of phone calls into a pattern of use, and, from there, a social network analysis. They can map unwieldy agglomerations of information—such as geospatial data drawn from police files, the census, and other public records—to create “predictive” heat maps to anticipate where the next shooting is likely to occur. Intelligence fusion also “connects the dots” in simpler ways. Often, fusion centers operate as data brokers, providing investigative support to law enforcement partners. Data brokerage can also mean doing even less: in so-called “pass-throughs,” fusion centers simply disseminate another agency’s intelligence reports.
For the most ardent proponents, the intelligence fusion never really ends. Traditionally, there is an iterative tendency built into intelligence: a cycle in which decision-makers demand information, officers collect information, and analysts process the data into intelligence. The feedback executives provide helps orient the next turn of the intelligence cycle. Intelligence-led policing tries to transcend this reactive model with a proactive approach. It collapses intelligence collection and analysis into a conjoined and continuous activity. Intelligence producers strive to maintain the situational awareness necessary to preempt and disrupt behaviors deemed criminal and disorderly. Hence, their ever-creeping reach: first, government records and private data brokers; next, the integration of old surveillance systems like closed-circuit TV cameras and new ones like automated license plate readers; and, most recently, wholesale data-mining of social media and other forms of open-source intelligence.

Intelligence-led policing is also an administrative philosophy. The goal is efficiency. About three decades ago, police executives started using crime mapping to manage police departments. With crime hot spots identified, they knew where to direct patrols and investigators and which middle manager to hold accountable. Today, ILP strives for proactive crime control with increasingly individual targeting, a shift from “hot spots” to “hot people.” Under this pressure, officers target “chronic offenders.” Detectives try to refine leads out of data. Analysts work to stay ahead of events and otherwise divine the future. They collaborate with police on long-term investigations, providing a variety of services from simple database searches, to routine crime analysis and mapping, to in-depth criminal profiles and social network analyses. In theory, intelligence fusion and ILP will produce more proficient policing.

One decade and upwards of a billion dollars later, the results are unimpressive. In October 2012, the US Senate excoriated fusion centers. After two years of investigation, they could not identify any “reporting which uncovered a terrorist threat . . . [or any] contribution such fusion center reporting made to disrupt an active terrorist plot.” The report brought uncomfortable national attention to fusion centers. “DHS ‘fusion centers’ portrayed as pools of ineptitude and civil liberties intrusions” read the Washington Post’s headline. The New York Times had a more subdued title but opened with an equally damaging assessment: “One of the nation’s biggest domestic counterterrorism programs has failed to provide virtually any useful intelligence.” “It’s brutal,” one federal official involved in funding and management of fusion centers later told me. “It’s one-sided. Definitely. But it’s not totally wrong. We have some problems to work
Seven months later, the Senate’s findings were confirmed in spectacular fashion by the Boston Marathon bombing. In the preceding two years, the FBI and CIA had neglected to share information about Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the elder brother implicated in the attack, with the Boston Regional Intelligence Center. Even if they had, Boston’s fusion center was preoccupied with other matters: spying on Occupy Boston.  

The wider conversation on fusion centers reflects the major themes of the Senate report: dysfunction, mission failure, and abuse. From the very start in 2004, when DHS began encouraging state and local governments to create fusion centers, journalists criticized the new program for its ineffectiveness, the potential for mission creep, and civil liberties violations. By 2008, government researchers and auditors identified the factors contributing to these problems: an ill-defined, vague mission, poor coordination, over-classification, and incompatible information systems. Policy advocates repeated many of these concerns and recommended reform. Liberal organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the Brennan Center for Justice focused on protecting civil liberties and recommended greater oversight, while conservative groups like the American Enterprise Institute argued that centralization could reduce costs and increase information sharing.  

Despite all the criticism and bad press, neither politicians nor the public have subjected fusion centers to meaningful oversight or sustained scrutiny. Not only did all of the DHS-recognized fusion centers survive the public sector austerity that followed the Great Recession, the network expanded, increasing from seventy-two centers in 2009 to seventy-nine in 2018. The funds continue to flow: state governments increased their investment in intelligence fusion, and federal support, although reduced, has not stopped. Surely, there is more to the story than organizational failure? Even the sharply critical Senate report acknowledged that “[f]usion centers may provide valuable services in fields other than terrorism, such as contributions to traditional criminal investigations, public safety, or disaster response and recovery efforts.” Perhaps fusion centers are effective, just not at counterterrorism? Even if fusion centers have failed, it begs the question: what are the unintended consequences of this apparent institutional failure?
A wider view brings more urgency to these questions. The DHS-recognized National Network of Fusion Centers is only part of the story. In 2013, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) identified five kinds of “field-based information-sharing entities” totaling up to 268 interagency intelligence taskforces in the United States, including the then seventy-two fusion centers recognized by DHS and predecessor intelligence centers like the thirty-two investigative support centers set up under the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Program as well as the six multistate Regional Intelligence Sharing Centers administered by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. This count only includes federally funded initiatives, which leaves out, for example, at least thirteen county intelligence centers in New York State alone. The history of fusion centers, then, extends beyond DHS and the “War on Terror.” The first intelligence-sharing operation that could be labeled a “fusion center,” the Drug Enforcement Administration’s El Paso Intelligence Center, was founded in 1974. Furthermore, counterterrorism is not the mission of all these interagency intelligence centers. 16 The mission of most DHS-recognized fusion centers quickly crept from a narrow focus on counterterrorism to a broader “all crimes, all threats, all hazards” mission. 17 Altogether, the institutionalization of intelligence fusion cannot be explained by 9/11 and the increased emphasis on counterterrorism. The scathing Senate report should not be the final word on the subject.

Fusion centers and the related rise of ILP, I contend, provide a window into larger changes, the scope and consequences of which are obscured by the fear of terrorism, the immediate focus on policy implementation, and the apparent failure of fusion centers. To appreciate the full significance of fusion centers, it is essential to connect the dots beyond counterterrorism and see past the discourse of organizational failure. The hyperbolic concerns with terrorism and the perpetual efforts to reform fusion centers are examples of the prose of pacification—that is, the productive play of discourse that organizes and animates the state apparatus. While immediate policy questions are usually determined within these domains, these administrative discourses do not adequately explain how intelligence fusion and ILP are changing the criminal legal system and reshaping the social world. The prose of pacification obscures the materiality of power—the concrete social relations that tie the haves and have-nots together in historically enduring systems of domination and exploitation.

Quieting all this sound and fury requires some theoretical reflection on the power of language to shape social reality. To this end, this chapter first considers the meaning of the term terrorism in order to elaborate the concept of the prose of pacification, which was introduced in the prologue.
From here, I demonstrate how concerns about counterterrorism, organizational dysfunction, and privacy miss the broader consequences of the long-term institutionalization of intelligence fusion. Instead, these administrative concerns are productive investments in fusion centers that shape the practice of intelligence fusion as much as they explain it. In this way, this chapter situates the larger study within the relevant literature on fusion centers while also advancing a materialist methodology that recuperates the poststructural approach of discourse analysis and explains the overarching comparative logic of this study. This approach incorporates the comparison within its constitutive historical moment. The goal is to construct a larger whole—in this case, the processes remaking the United States—not deduce causal relations (the factors that enhance information sharing at fusion centers, for example). Traditional comparative approaches define the systemic totality out of existence. It becomes a mess of complicating details to be “abstracted” away. “Incorporating” the comparison means that institutionalization of intelligence fusion in New York and New Jersey are not distinct “cases” that can be abstracted out of their time and space. Instead, they are interrelated “instances” that form and are also formed within a greater whole: our contemporary historical moment and, more specifically, the US state apparatus. This approach is less likely to lead to fraught entanglements with the prose of pacification because it focuses analysis on the larger questions other approaches tend to avoid.

THE MEANING OF TERRORISM AND THE PROSE OF PACIFICATION

The language used to define reality also shapes it. Consider the term terrorism. Critical terrorism scholars like Richard Jackson and Lee Jarvis show that labeling political opponents “terrorists” places them beyond politics and beyond understanding, creating a dichotomy between irrational, barbarous “terrorists” and virtuous, civilized states. Incidents labeled “terrorism” are also defined as exceptional acts outside the normal confines of war and beyond any historical or social context. Hence, the “War on Terror” became a timeless struggle between good and evil. This kind of rhetoric is not just limited to public proclamations of politicians. Lisa Stampnitzky finds that the expert conversation is “continually hybridized by the moral discourse of the public sphere, in which terrorism is conceived as a problem of evil and pathology.” Instead of a “rational” and “scientific” debate, “the language of evil creates ‘a black box’ around terrorism, which creates its own explanation: terrorists commit terrorism because they are evil.”

This understanding shapes the response to terrorism. Evil cannot be reconciled. It must be defeated. After 9/11, George W. Bush proclaimed, “No nation can negotiate with terrorists.” A decade and a half earlier Ronald Reagan insisted, “America will never make concessions to terrorism.” In 2009, Susan Rice, the then national security advisor for the Obama administration, repeated the mantra, “We don’t negotiate with terrorists.” With diplomacy off the table, the United States has engaged in a boundless, borderless, ceaseless “War on Terror.” After nearly two decades, an untold number of military operations in at least seventy-six countries, and some $7.6 trillion spent on a global pacification project, a grim accounting of the costs shows an immense human toll: nearly a million dead from fighting and the related predations of war and over ten million more displaced in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, to say nothing of other affected regions. Importantly, this immense violence has not ended terrorism. Instead, foreign interventions have devastated Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, creating the conditions for intensified conflict and more terrorism. For the United States, this massive investment in security has led to loose monetary policy, and increased indebtedness. It has diverted resources from pressing social problems like health care and infrastructure, helping to create the conditions for the Great Recession. As economists Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes explain, “With more spending at home, and without the need for such low interest rates and such soft regulation to keep the economy going in its absence, the bubble would have been smaller, and the consequences of its breaking therefore less severe.” This situation created the political opportunity to direct economic anxieties toward refugees. The resulting dynamics are destabilizing both the United States and Europe, where the far-right, including its paramilitary fringe, is ascendant. Despite the failure of the “War on Terror,” security remains the solution to the problem of terrorism. Why?

Critical terrorism scholars would say it is because the discourse of the “War on Terror” supports “power.” Hence, the aforementioned studies by Jackson and Jarvis analyzed the contemporary political rhetoric to reveal how the language of the “War on Terror” is, in Jackson’s words, “a carefully constructed discourse . . . designed to achieve a number of key political goals.” By “denaturalizing” the discourse of the “War on Terror,” these scholars make a vital contribution. They show that the “War on Terror” is not “an objective or neutral reflection of reality.” However, these studies cannot explain why the “War on Terror” advances such “key political goals” like “normalis[ing] and legitimis[ing] the current counter-terrorism approach” or “disciplin[ing] domestic society by marginalising dissent or
protest.” In short, they can show that the discourse of the “War on Terror” is “an exercise of power” but they cannot define what is specific about that “power.”

Getting at the particularities of “power” requires a different approach. Much of “critical terrorism studies” takes the work of Michel Foucault as its methodological and theoretical point of departure. Foucault famously upended the study of “power,” which he reconceptualized not as a thing that could be wielded by individuals or institutions but as a diffuse effect of social relations. In this conception, power is a productive force that resides in discourses, practices, and forms of knowledge. Hence, in his influential work on the prison, asylum, and hospital, Foucault analyzed the discursive construction of criminality, madness, and disease. He argued these power apparatuses developed in tandem with systems of knowledge, creating “heterogeneous ensemble[s] consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions.” These dispositifs are unique assemblages of heterogenous elements. They cannot be reduced to or derived from material relationships.

In his efforts to decenter the analysis of power, however, Foucault failed to give due weight to the historically produced differences in power among institutions and peoples. Nicos Poulantzas, the first Marxist to take Foucault seriously, noted that his “metaphysical and mystical” conception of power “dilutes and scatters power among innumerable microsituations.” Hence, Poulantzas concluded that, “for Foucault, the power relation never has any other basis than itself: it becomes a pure ‘situation’ in which power is always immanent.” As a theoretical intervention, the critique of security continues Poulantzas’s work and completes a Marxist recuperation of the poststructural theory of “power.” Hence, Neocleous, while working his way from Poulantzas to the critique of security, noted that Foucault’s great contribution—the focus “on the networks of administrative power mechanisms that operate in the ordering of capitalist society”—is lost to fuzzy theorization, where “the state is dissolved into power, in turn dissolved into the social.” As a result, Foucault—and, particularly, his poststructural followers who have canonized his work in an ever-proliferating number of academic subfields—are unable to see “the significant differences between different forms, modalities, institutions and exercises of power, most obviously the difference between the power of the state in relation to civil society and the relative power of individuals and groups within civil society.” This ill-defined, ahistorical theorization of “power” is evident in a “spurious materialism” that replaces legal subjects with “bodies,” reduces law and
sovereignty to mere repression, and denies the “wider constitutive, regulative, and policing functions” of the state. Indeed, “not all legal subjects are human beings and therefore cannot be treated as ‘bodies.’” The approach often fails to acknowledge, let alone analyze, the stark power differentials between individual workers and the massive multinational corporations with which they sign employment contracts or—more germane to this study—the “drug pusher” and the police.

Returning to Poulantzas’s critique of Foucault centers analysis squarely on the materiality of power relations, as expressed in the historically specific relationships among capital, state, and class struggle. Here, it is important to note that Poulantzas’s work was more than “a first shot at a materialist appropriation of Foucault.” In many ways, Poulantzas anticipated Foucault on the relational and productive nature of power, and the relation between power and knowledge, among other points. However, where Foucault developed a suggestive but ultimately ambiguous theory of micropowers that lacked any clear connection to actually existing social relations, Poulantzas tried to reinvigorate historical materialism. He developed his own conception of the productive and relational nature of power, reconceptualizing state institutions as “organically present in the generation of class powers.” The state plays a productive role in the reproduction of a social formation through the maintenance of production relations and the management of class conflict by varied means (repression, material concessions, institutional incorporation of subordinate classes and class fragments, and ideological and cultural production). At the same time, the state is neither an autonomous actor nor the subject of a greater locus of (economic) power. Instead, it is the “specific material condensation of a given relationship of forces.” The state does not wield power. Instead, it is the structural effect of the cacophony of competing class powers, defined as the capacity to realize historically specific material interests. In this way, Poulantzas conceptualized a relational “field of class practices,” where class interests could not be deduced from an “objective” position within the relations of production. Instead, class interests are historically specific outcomes formed through the subjective experience of individual and collective class relations.

The critique of security extends and elaborates Poulantzas’s state theory. The notion of pacification and the broader conception of policing derived from the critical read of police science add further specificity by identifying the key class strategies that have organized and animated state administration. In contrast to Foucaultian categories like discipline and biopower, which de-emphasize the state as “nothing more than the mobile effect of a regime of multiple governmentalities,” the idea of pacification brings
together a variety of social regulatory mechanisms—the coercive power of police and military agencies, the light touch of surveillance, and social policy more broadly—into a holistic and integrative account of the productive power of capitalist states to shape the societies they govern.33

The critique of security also continues Poulantzas’s polemics toward Foucault and extends it to contemporary debates. In this way, the critique of security represents an alternative research agenda to largely Foucaultian subfields like critical terrorism studies, surveillance studies, or securitization theory. Consonant with Poulantzas’s remarks on Foucault, these fields also advance a self-referential theorization of “power”: the discourse and practices of counterterrorism, surveillance, and security are freestanding processes grounded in themselves. In contrast, the critique of security considers these discourses and practices in relation to social relations expressed in given moments of the world-economy and specific instances of state-formation.34 As a project of critique, it begins with deep engagement with the histories and constitutive ideas that produced—and are produced within—the capitalist world-economy and the modern administrative state.

To advance this project, I read the relevant literature and my primary research as examples of the prose of pacification, or the discourses and performances that provide practical logic and functional coherence to the state apparatus. Pacification is both an administrative strategy to manage class struggle and a prose, a loosely connected but still coherent body of ideas, practices, and performances that animate and organize the provisioning of “security.” In contrast to the now well-known notion of discourse, my effort to highlight the discursive aspect of pacification is a deliberate attempt to avoid poststructuralism’s drift toward idealism. Rather than a free-floating idea of discourse, which can often be seen as the productive nexus of social relations, as in Foucault’s ambiguous and self-referential conception of power, the prose of pacification centers the discursive aspects of administration in the historically specific and changing relations among capital, the state, and class struggle. In this way, the prose of pacification is a reformulation of what Poulantzas called “a state discourse.” “[B]roken into segments and fragments according to lines intersecting the strategy of power,” these “discourses of organization” are “elements of state knowledge to be used for the purposes of political strategy.”35 The prose of pacification, while productive of social relations, is also produced by historically enduring relations that cannot be reduced, in a circular fashion, to the effects of discourse. The relationship is dialectic and nonlinear. Hence, “the state is not aware of its own strategy in advance and cannot formulate it at the level of discourse.” Rather, what I term the prose of pacification “constitutes the state
as a strategic field by giving expression to class interests in a selective manner consistent with the social relations of forces.”36

In the following two sections, I consider the counterterrorism intelligence produced at fusion centers and the related concerns about dysfunction and civil liberties voiced by criminologists, civil libertarians, and surveillance scholars. As examples of the prose of pacification, these expert debates provide voice and consistency to different classes and class fragments vying to control the state apparatus and dictate its dominant strategies. In the case of counterterrorism, police officers, intelligence analysts, and other security professionals speak the language of counterterrorism to claim authority over the definition of “threats” and, in so doing, assert control over distribution of resources within the state apparatus. Criminologists, surveillance scholars, and civil libertarians engage in similar struggle but at a distance from the state. They position themselves as experts capable of remedying the dysfunction and redressing the civil liberties violations associated with fusion centers. Insofar as criminologists form an essential part of what might be thought of as the law-and-order lobby, surveillance scholars and civil libertarians get caught up in traditional reformist politics; both of these expert conversations are constructive contributions to the institutionalization of intelligence fusion that do more to refine and perpetuate fusion centers than explain or analyze them.

CONNECTING THE DOTS BEYOND COUNTERTERRORISM

Concerns about their poor performance fail to acknowledge the actual work done at fusion centers. The politically inconvenient reality is that the threat from political violence is insufficient to warrant the amount of resources invested in counterterrorism. Since 9/11, there have been few fatalities from terrorism in the United States. According to the Global Terrorism Database, a comprehensive collection of open-source data on all attacks deemed “terrorism,” these incidents of political violence have killed 197 people in the United States from 9/11 to the end of 2016.37 In other words, the threat of terrorism is exceedingly remote. The chance of dying from terrorism in the United States is one in twenty million. These odds pale in comparison to other, more mundane threats like heart disease and cancer (one in seven); the flu, pneumonia, and emphysema (one in twenty-eight); suicide (one in a hundred); motor vehicle accidents (1 in 112); falling (1 in 144); assault by firearms (1 in 358); and even a host of exceedingly remote causes of death such as accidental suffocation during sleep (1 in 5,721), bee stings (1 in 55,764), or lightning strikes (1 in 164,968).38
While the threat of terrorism is statistically unlikely, mounting fears cannot be simply discounted. However, terrorism must be placed in a wider political context, beyond the hyperbolic rhetoric of security professionals, politicians, and terrorism experts. Acts labeled “terrorism” are forms of political violence that most often emerge from the breakdown of social order: civil war, revolution, and state failure or collapse. As such, most terrorism takes place in destabilized regions beset by armed conflict. In 2016, for example, most incidents of terrorism occurred in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria and Syria. The weakening of these states and surrounding regions, moreover, cannot be fully explained without considering military interventions and covert operations of Western states and, particularly, the United States. The current crisis is a day of reckoning that has been long in the making. It extends beyond the aggressive attempt to remake the Greater Middle East during the “War on Terror” to the long history of Western support for dictatorial regimes that constrained politics in much of the formerly colonized world during the Cold War. Such sober public policy data and broader historical context notwithstanding, the federal government has poured at least a trillion dollars into DHS, including, by some counts, over a billion dollars into fusion centers.

There is also little evidence to show that these counterterrorism programs actually prevent terrorism. Many of the highest-profile attempted terrorist attacks since 9/11—the “shoe bomber” in 2001, the “underwear bomber” in 2009, and the “subway bomber” in 2010—were not foiled by counterterrorism programs. Instead, bystanders observed alarming behavior and responded accordingly. These incidents fit within a general trend. In 2012, the US Senate concluded that “fusion center success stories” related to counterterrorism were fraudulent. They were “unable to confirm that the fusion centers’ contributions were as significant as DHS portrayed them; were unique to the intelligence and analytical work expected of fusion centers; or would not have occurred absent a fusion center.” Most of the terrorism convictions in the last decade, moreover, are either manufactured farces, a product of FBI entrapment operations, or legal artifices—smaller convictions enhanced to appear as counterterrorism coups. As of late August 2018, 864 people have been charged for terrorism in the United States, 569 defendants pleaded guilty, courts found 186 guilty, three have been acquitted and three have seen their charges dropped or dismissed, 365 are in custody with fifty-eight awaiting trial, 314 have been caught in FBI stings, and thirty-four have been cooperating informants who have served little to no prison time. Over half of those charged—453 people—have since been released, often without supervision, suggesting the courts do not
view them as threats. As Trevor Aaronson, the journalist who assembled and analyzed these data explained, “I could count on one hand the number of actual terrorists, such as failed New York City subway bomber Najibullah Zazi, who posed a direct and immediate threat to the United States."43

If terrorism is statistically an insignificant threat and intelligence produced at fusion centers cannot be linked to any foiled plots, then, is it correct to repeat the mantra about the misaligned mission and ineffectiveness of fusion centers? The content of the intelligence reports that the US Senate dismissed as “problematic and useless” provides some necessary perspective.44 Given the insignificant threat of terrorism to the United States, fusion centers cannot report on imminent threats. Instead, they often detail attacks in places with active armed movements in order to make the case that law enforcement and the private sector in the United States report information to fusion centers. This dynamic was evident in both of the DHS-recognized fusion centers I studied, the New Jersey Regional Operations Intelligence Center (ROIC) and the New York State Intelligence Center (NYSIC). In March 2012, the NYSIC, for example, released a threat assessment on major terrorist attacks on hotels in Afghanistan, Egypt, Indonesia, India, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Pakistan, and Somalia. The report contained no information about threats to the United States. It simply asserted that there was a threat to hotels:

Radical Islamic groups, including al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda linked groups, continue to plan attacks against the West, including the United States (US). These groups view civilians as potential targets and will continue to use a variety of attack methods. Lack of information pertaining to a certain category in this report does not necessarily represent the absence of a threat. However, the frequency and tactic of attack analyzed in this report may indicate the most common vulnerabilities to an attack on the hotel sector.45

The ROIC put out a similar report following a June 2012 attack on a hotel in Afghanistan. Like the NYSIC report, the ROIC’s briefing contained no specific threat information but made similar assertions about the nature of threat:

The threat to the hotel industry in New Jersey and the surrounding region is high because of frequent attacks domestically [—of which the report cites no examples—] and internationally, and the potential threat from [homegrown violent extremists] to the hospitality industry. As military and government facilities continue to improve their security measures, terrorists are likely to target hotels and other facilities that are easier to attack. While numerous terrorist groups have expressed
the intent to target the United States, the ROIC is unaware of any group that has specifically mentioned the hotel sector in New Jersey as a potential target. Law enforcement and private-sector security personnel should remain vigilant for suspicious activity that may be indicative of terrorist activity.46

Rather than sobering analysis of realistic dangers, these reports construct the threat of terrorism and call on others to gather intelligence.

This type of analysis is common. For example, I collected 163 of the ROIC’s reports, which were posted on a publicly accessible Google Group for New Jersey fire chiefs. This collection covers the period from January to July 2014. It includes fifty-seven examples of the “ROIC Intelligence and Analysis Threat Unit Daily Overview.” This report is broken into two sections. The first section, “Homeland Security Reporting,” includes three subsections: international terrorism reporting, which summarizes news pertaining to political violence abroad or cybersecurity; New Jersey Suspicious Activity Reports, which lists the content of recently vetted Suspicious Activity Reports; and State Threat Posture, which always closes with this disclaimer/call for vigilance:

The ROIC has no specific or current information regarding a threat to New Jersey; however, large-scale events may create potential targets of opportunity for international and domestic terrorist groups as well as lone offenders. Individuals or terrorists could attempt to utilize these high-profile/high-visibility events as a stage to make a statement or otherwise further their goals.47

During the summer months the language shifted slightly to:

The ROIC has no specific or current information regarding a threat to New Jersey; however, large-scale events during the summer season will likely generate a large amount of national and regional media attention. These events create potential targets of opportunities for terrorist organizations and Homegrown Violent Extremists (HVEs) that recognize highly populated, high-profile events as an opportunity to further their goals.48

The second section of the daily threat briefing is titled “International Threat Environment,” which covers developments in global conflicts, almost exclusively dominated by events in the Middle East. Clearly, these reports are of dubious analytic value, something both the intelligence analyst tasked to produce them and the law enforcement officers receiving them noted in interviews with me.49 As examples of the prose of pacification, however, these “problematic and useless” reports communicate a pedagogical mission:
to educate and encourage police officers, and private security to “remain vigilant” and report “suspicious activity.”

At both the NYSIC and the ROIC, managers consider this pedagogical mission to be important. As a senior supervisor at the NYISC told me:

After 9-11, obviously, everybody was on board. Everybody wanted to play their part and prevent the next 9-11 from happening, but, as time goes on, human nature kicks in and less and less do people want to be prevented from doing things in their lives or be inconvenienced in any way. So we fight that all the time, not only with the public but also with law enforcement, to keep people on track and keep this stuff in their mind.50

A senior supervisor at the ROIC also echoed these comments:

It really comes down to our ability to sell our services and educate the people on the importance of the work that we do. We need to get people to understand the threat environment better so they can act or be proactive in the proper manner and do their jobs better. A better-informed public, a better-informed police officer, a better-informed public safety official is somebody that is going to be doing their job at a higher level and, therefore, the safety of the citizens of New Jersey is impacted in a positive manner as a result.51

Whether or not fusion centers are effective at counterterrorism, these sentiments and related intelligence products are productive: they organize the work done at fusion centers, while also attempting to construct the threat of terrorism and encouraging others to report information.

This pedagogical mission is also evident in the national programming of DHS and the state-level initiatives of the ROIC and NYSIC. One of DHS’s main programs is the “See Something, Say Something Campaign,” a nationwide public education campaign “to raise public awareness of indicators of terrorism and terrorism-related crime, and to emphasize the importance of reporting suspicious activity to the proper local law enforcement authorities” and “underscore the concept that homeland security begins with hometown security.”52 The formal goal of the program is to encourage the public to report information to police who will create a “suspicious activity report” that becomes part of a national database, accessible to fusion center analysts and others. The wider effect of this National Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative, however, is “to encourage and facilitate a new vigilance in peer-to-peer monitoring—in making it as easy and natural as possible for lay individuals to be the ‘eyes and ears’ that listen to and watch their neighbors, family members, and fellow shoppers, travelers, and sports fans.”53
The ROIC and the NYSIC also run more focused programs with the same goal to recruit intelligence collectors. The ROIC runs a Fusion Liaison Officer Initiative, which, in the words of the trooper managing it, aims to “recruit folks from law enforcement, public safety and the private sector to attend the training. They would see an overview of about four hours of what fusion center is, what we do, how we process information, privacy and civil liberties, and the parameters we operate under.” The NYSIC makes a similar effort with the Field Intelligence Officer program to “provide basic training on intelligence and counterterrorism and familiarize officers with the NYSIC’s products and services and also national programs like the National Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative.” Both fusion centers also train private sector security personnel and produce a version of their daily reporting for the private sector.

The NYSIC takes their training even further. Through Operation Red Cell, they covertly assess the effectiveness of their outreach to the private sector. An analyst will go out to a specific area and inquire about information that should trigger that business to make a call or otherwise reach out to us. So, it is a way to see if we’ve been successful or if we need to do more outreach. It tells us what kind of information we’ve gotten out there and what need to improve upon. It’s a test.

The NYSIC also organizes a yearly State-Wide Intelligence Summit to train police executives. It is a “higher-level overview” on terrorism, crime trends, and intelligence tradecraft. An administrator described the goal of the meeting as “getting new people in the fold, making them aware of terrorism, and get them exposed to the other professionals at that level, and then the upper echelon of communication is opened up.” In 2012, two hundred police chiefs and sheriffs attended the meeting. For the NYISC, the conference is an opportunity to build their network of intelligence collectors. “We will have people who are unaware of our services. We have a booth set up at the conference and we market the NYSIC. . . . We’ll see new departments reaching out to us after the summit.”

These counterterrorism products and programs are more than examples of the discourse of terrorism that constructs a terror threat. They are also political acts that assert the professional authority to define “threats” and make collective claims about the appropriate distribution of resources and the direction of state strategy. The massive public investment in the name of counterterrorism is a class project in at least two senses. There is a “law-and-order lobby”—a segment of the capitalist class with allies in government, academia, and popular culture—that has a vested interested in “security.”
Homeland security has been a boon for this constituency. For police officers and other security professionals, an assignment at a fusion center can create opportunities for higher-prestige work in and outside of government. For example, the NYSIC catapulted New York State Police Colonel Bart Johnson, its first director, to principal deputy undersecretary for intelligence and analysis at DHS. “He saw an opportunity and made the most of it,” one interviewee told me.61 From here, Johnson moved to the private sector, becoming the executive director of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the influential professional association. After IACP, Johnson moved back to government. Today, he is the Transportation Security Administration’s federal security director for fifteen upstate New York airports.

Counterterrorism is also a class project in that it is a systemic reorganization of the state, one that recalibrates and intensifies the ability to pacify disturbances in an era of increasingly sharp social polarization. Drawing on Poulantzas, Christos Boukalas contends that DHS and the related rise of counterterrorism policies signals “the pre-emptive shielding of capitalist rule from anticipated popular struggles against political exclusion and economic dispossession.” Boukalas locates this authoritarian hardening in the reforms of the George W. Bush administration and the related rise of particular capitalist-class fragments—armaments and oil. This important work presents a formal logic of a particular structure of power. He writes:

In line with the discursive construction of the Enemy as being potentially anyone/anywhere, the scope of surveillance seeks to encompass all: all social interaction, by all individuals. The totality of social activity is the ultimate target of surveillance. Thus, the unified police mechanism, operating in a uniform space, is set to police an homogenised target: all of us.62

This provocative argument serves better as a hypothesis, which subsequent chapters explore at length. While a universal, total intelligence state could be activated, this process would be mediated through the previous history of political struggle, which shapes the specific character of the state. In other words, DHS exists to pacify those coded by the prose of pacification as a “threat.” As such, it seems more likely that surveillance and police power would operate along historical lines of power. Not only are more vulnerable groups more likely to feel the ill effects of security expansion, dominant groups are more likely to embody the prose of pacification and invest their energy and emotion into “security.” In this way, this study builds on Boukalas’s contribution to consider some questions: How has the massive investment in intelligence changed the practice of policing? How do these