



Portrayal of Terrorism in Media

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Abstract

The relationship between terrorism and the media has long been clear. Terrorists aim to provoke irrational fear among large numbers of people in order to influence policymakers and thus advance their goals. Terrorism, in its modern form, has its origins in the mid to late 19th century, in the same era that saw the spread of both the mass media and democracy. Without the media, only a small number of people would know that an attack has taken place, and without democracy, those wielding power would have little reason to heed the sentiments that such violence provokes. Terrorism is primarily a propaganda technique and like propaganda it is persuasive communication. Terrorism is not merely what terrorists do, but also implies, what spectators feel. To communicate very large number of people, their well-wishers and oppositions, terrorists exploit media. The aim of this research paper is to show the portrayal of terrorism in Media

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Terrorism is the activity of violence in order to get attention of the public, administration and government. Terrorism is in the broadest sense, the use of intentionally indiscriminate violence as a means to create terror, or fear, to achieve a political religious or philosophical goal. It is used in this regard primarily to refer to violence against peaceful targets or in war against civilian.

In November 2004, Secretary-General of the United Nations report: described terrorism as any act “intend to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population of compelling a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act.” Alternatively, responding to developments in modern warfare. Paul James and Jonathan Friedman distinguish between state terrorism against non-combatants and state terrorism against combatants including 'Shock and Awe' tactics. According the FBI "Terrorism" is the *Unlawful use of force and violence against person or property to intimidate or coerce government, the civilian population or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political and social objectives*”. In this definition three elements violence, fear and intimidation are focused.

Since 1994, the United Nations General Assembly has repeatedly condemned terrorist acts using the wing political description of terrorism acts using the following political description of terrorism : “*Criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other nature may be invoked to justify them.*”



Hoffman believes that it is possible to 'identify some key characteristics of terrorism he proposes that:

By distinguishing terrorists from other type's criminals and terrorism from other forms of crime we come to appreciate that terrorism is:

- Ineluctably political in aims and motives;
- Violent — or, equally important, threatens violence;
- Designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target;
- conducted either by an organization with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell structure (whose members wear no uniform or identifying insignia) or by individuals or a small collection of individuals directly influenced, motivated, or inspired by the ideological aims or example some existent terrorist movement and or its leaders;
- Perpetrated by a sub national group or no state entity,

A definition proposed by Carsten Bockstette at the George C Marshall European Center for Security Studies, underlines the psychological and tactical aspects of terrorism:

Terrorism is defined as political violence in a symmetrical conflict that is designed to induce terror and psychic fear (sometimes indiscriminate) through the violent victimization and destruction of noncombatant targets (sometimes iconic symbols). Such acts are meant to send a message from an illicit clandestine organization. The purpose of terrorism is to exploit the media in order to achieve maximum attainable publicity as an amplifying force multiplier in order to influence the targeted audience(s) in order to reach short-and midterm political goals and/or desired long-term end states.

Former U.S. president Barack Obama, commenting on the Boston Marathon Bombing of April 2013, "anytime bombs are used to target innocent civilians, it is an act of terror."

In his book "Inside Terrorism", Bruce Hoffman explained why the term terrorism becomes distorted: "On one point, at least, everyone agrees, terrorism is a pejorative term, It is a word with intrinsically negative connotations that is generally applied to one's enemies and opponents, or to those with whom one disagrees and would otherwise prefer to ignore. Brian Jenkins has described terrorism, 'thus seems to depend on one's point of view. Use of the term implies a moral judgment, and if one party can successfully attach the label terrorist to its opponent, then it has indirectly persuaded others to adopt its moral viewpoint.' Hence the decision to call someone or label some organization terrorist becomes almost unavoidably subjective, depending largely on whether one sympathizes with or opposes the person/group/cause concerned. If one identifies with the victim of the violence, then the act is terrorism. If, however, one identifies with the perpetrator, the violent act is regarded in a more sympathetic, if not positive (or, at the worst, an ambivalent) light; and it is not terrorism.

The 8th report on terrorism in India published in 2008 defined terrorism as the peacetime equivalent of war crime. An act of terror in India includes any intentional act of violence that causes death, injury or property damage, induces fear, and is targeted against any group of people



identified by their political, philosophical ideological, racial, ethnic, and religious or any other nature. This description is similar to one provided by the United Nations in 2000.

As we know that terrorism is not a new phenomenon. Many countries have suffered for decades from groups, both internal and external and including both State and non-State actors, wielding violence against civilians as political strategy. In many cases, the local population emerged stronger and more resilient, proving that brutality is no match in the long term for the progress of unity and shared values. In this context, the media are critical in providing verifiable information and informed opinion. During the tense environment of a crisis, with populations on edge and tempers flared, this becomes all the more important. The relationship between terrorism and media is complex and fraught. At its worst, it is a perverse symbiotic relationship terrorist groups devising spectacles of violence to continue drawing the world's attention, the media incentivized to provide wall to wall coverage due to huge audience interest. (UNESCO: Terrorism and Media).

”Terrorist attacks are often carefully choreographed to attract the attention of the electronic media and the International press. Terrorism is aimed at the people watching, not at the actual victims’ (UNESCO: Terrorism and Media)

The relationship between terrorism and the media has long been clear. Terrorists aim to provoke irrational fear among large numbers of people in order influence policy makers and thus advance their goals. Terrorism, in its modern form, has its origins in the mid to late 19th century - in the same era that saw the spread of both the mass media and democracy. Without the media, only a small number of people would know that an attack has taken place, and without democracy, those wielding power would have little reason to heed the sentiments that such violence provokes.

According Professor K.S.Sidhu, Media provides a disproportionately large share of news coverage to terrorism and can thereby, raise general awareness about their cause provoke policy debates and public discussions by highlighting their radical views, build sympathetic international environment, provide great attention to the terrorist outputs resulting in disruption and prevention in counter-terrorism operations. The sympathetic attitude of media, political leadership and human rights activists simply glorifies the terrorists without taking into consideration, the misery, destruction and death resulting from the ghastly acts.

Terrorists want to use mass media or publicity of social, religious or political ideas because mass media are weapons for achieving their goal. Hillel (1985) described factors that are considered by terrorists when dealing with the media:

- 1.Events' timing to meet historical significant date or response to political development
2. Choosing physical targets accessible to media coverage
3. Affecting large population with high casualties
- 4.Targeting governments or elite persons

Bruce Hoffman says on terrorist activities that “without the media's coverage the act's impact is arguably wasted, remaining narrowly confined to the immediate victim(s) of the attack, rather than reaching the wider "target audience' at whom the terrorists' violence is actually aimed”



Hoffman (2006:174). According for Yonah Alexander, terrorist groups have three purposes to interact with the media:

1. Attention
2. Recognition
3. Legitimacy

Terrorist Activists require along with perpetrator and victim, the public, for whom it is carefully choreographed, to gain Attention. "Gaining attention is strongly linked to agenda setting. (Cohen 1986). After getting attention terrorists carryout propaganda by proxy war. According to Hoffman, "The strategy to gain attention is meant, to an important extent, to intimidate the audience and the target government so that even the threat of possibly becoming victim of terrorist violence is enough to create fear, and thus to affect the policy making process."

Terrorists want to spread their objectives and messages among people for this they use mass media. The effects of this media strategy can be increased by trying to make the media frame issue in a certain way, In some cases, the media can even give a positive spin to the cause or Compare the means terrorists use to means that are used by others who are considered more legitimate than terrorist groups actually force media to publish their motivations, so that people throughout the world read about it (Pit: 1987)

Terrorists' attacks prepare their followers and supporters also By Media coverage they can achieve their purpose. People who are mildly interested in the action of particular militant group or organization is actually able to have an impact on the legitimate political establishment, they may become more respectful towards the terrorist cause or organization.

Perhaps the most lived viewed terrorist event in the world, terrorists attack on World Trade Center on 9/11. People around the world watched the attack because in USA it was unbelievable that twins towers attacked by the Airplanes. This attack alone spawned a global sense of terror an geopolitical reaction that would have profound and unparalleled impact upon world events for years to come.

Television news has changed since then Terrorism draws more television coverage at present than it did in the 1960's and 1970s. Owners of Television News channel recognized the power of their medium, and many have taken steps to limit how they cover propaganda. More coverage helps to inflate the terrorist threat and the perception of such groups. It enables them to cause far more terror than damage. According to a December 2015 Gallup poll, 51 percent of Americans said they were very worried or somewhat worried that they or their family members will become a victim of terrorism. Statistically, however, the odds that an American will die in a terrorist attack this year are about 1 in 29 million. These are long odds. Still, the perception of terrorism remains far greater than the threat it actually poses.

According the One India;

'26/11 Mumbai Terror attack: More horrifying than the attack was the TV coverage
One India News Mumbai, Nov 26 It is always good to be on top of the news. Having said that, one should also follow what BBC would also say, "the art is knowing when to stand back." What was



equally horrifying on November 26, 2008 other than the attack of course was watching the scores of television Journalists trying to outdo each other in terms of BREAKING NEWS, knowing very little that they were doing nothing but compromising National Security. The handlers in Pakistan who were in the control room at Karachi got live updates of the operations and they kept improvising as a result of which the operation dragged on for hours together.” **(Posted By: One India Staff Writer Updated: Wednesday, November 26, 2014, 17:46, 26/11 attack: Media pulled by Supreme Court for its role.**

Mumbai: The Supreme court why confirming the death of the alone Pakistani terrorist Ajmal Kasab, have pulled the media for its role and have hinted that them should be some regulatory should come within themselves, From the transcripts, especially those from Tai Hotel and Nariman House, it is evident that the terrorists who were entrenched at those, places and more than them, their collaborators across the border were watching the full show on TV. In the transcripts, there are many references to the media reports and the visuals being shown on the TV screen. The collaborators sitting in their hideouts across the border came to know about the appellant being caught alive from Indian TV, they came to know about the killing of high ranking police officers also from Indian TV. The court further said that at one place in the transcript, the collaborators and the terrorists appear to be making fun of the speculative report in the media that the person whose dead body's was found in Kuber was the leader of the terrorist group whom his colleagues had killed for some reason before leaving the boat. At another place in the transcript the collaborators tell the terrorists in Tai Hotel that the dome at the top of the building had caught fire. The terrorists holed up some room were not aware of this. The collaborators further advise the terrorists that the stronger they make the fire the, better it would be for them.

(S Ahmed Ali/ TNN/ updated : Aug. 31, 2012, 12:30 IST)

Raphael Cohen says, "There is a delicate relationship between terrorists and the media. Free speech and free media - the basic instruments (many would say values) of every democracy - provide terrorists the publicity they need to inform the public about their operations and goals. Indeed, democracy is the best arena for those who wish to reach their ends by violent means. Violent movements and individuals recognize the "democratic catch"- that the principles that underlie and characterize it may, through their application, bring about its destruction, and exploit the available liberal instruments to find "golden paths" (from their point of view) to further their ends without holding themselves to the rules of law and order. Those movements and individuals would be crushed immediately were they to employ similar tactics in autocratic systems.

Walter Laqueur, Explain that if terrorism is propoganda by deed, the success of a terrorist campaign depends decisively on the amount of publicity it receives. The terrorist's act by itself is nothing; publicity is all (Laqueur 1976, 1977,1987). Dowling (1986) goes as far as arguing that terrorists owe their existence the media in liberal societies. The media is helping terrorists orchestrate a horrifying drama in which the terrorists and their victims are the main actors, creating spectacles of tension and agony.



Conclusively it may be said that terrorists try to use media for their advantages and media gives more coverage to such kind of activities which is related to terrorism for their circulation and TRP. It is true that without media coverage terrorism could never be successful as it is present. For that reason former British Prime minister Marget Thatcher used to say, "Media Publicity is oxygen of terrorism."

Media is watchdog of the society and nation. It is fourth pillar of democracy. It is responsibility of the media that they should ensure that terrorists are not encouraged by them consciously or unconsciously because it will, in turn, endanger democracy itself.

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