The symbiotic relationship between the media and terrorism

Mass media and terrorism have become more interdependent in a mutually beneficial relationship often described as 'symbiotic.' This article addresses that dynamic, and demonstrates the need for news organizations to balance the public's right to know, against the ability of militants who exploit news coverage to promote their beliefs. Mass media capitalizes from the confusion and trepidation caused by terrorist attacks to produce the kind of dramatic news that draws the attention of its viewers and readers.

Prof. Taha Najem

Professor of Media at Naif Arab University for Security Sciences

As for the extremists, they precisely calculate the scope, location, and timing of their attacks to generate ample media attention—or in other words, to generate advertisements for their messages on a global scale. The broader and more prolonged the media coverage of terrorism turns out to be, the greater the terrorists' feelings of accomplishment, influence, and power. As Bruce Hoffman, the Director of the Center for Security Studies at Georgetown University said, "Only by spreading the terror and outrage to a much larger audience can the terrorists gain the maximum leverage potential."

Michael Stolz, one of the leading specialists in this field, is interested in interpreting vision theory in articles dealing with terrorism, its manifestations, types, and practices in countries within Asia, Latin America and Africa. Stolz

pointed out that most literature divided terrorism into two groups: first, state terrorism and second, the terror of groups and individuals. It also focused on one of the most effective ways to counter terrorism, specifically, through historical and national analysis of terrorist incidents, in order to detect the scope of the organization and their objectives within targeted communities. Along within taking into consideration, avoiding problems of oversimplification and generalization of terrorism.

The relationship of coexistence between the media and terrorism can be explained through understanding that the media sees horrific incidents as news scoops, which in turn proves the credibility of these means. Media is seen as a reliable source of information, thus creates a kind of marketing and publicity, which coincides with the vision of perpetrators of terrorism. These terrorists consider the media as the largest investment to their legitimacy within a social entity, thus creating an illegitimate space within the legitimate entity. Evidence to this claim, is that the primary objectives of terrorist attacks are often embodied in gaining publicity. In some cases, publicity is the only objective in order to create terrorist propaganda rather than resolving specific political demands.

Researchers have validated, that media coverage is crucial for the success of terrorist attacks. It has reached the point that the quality of media coverage of terrorism incidents is not essential to terrorist groups, as much as the scope of coverage and its intensity. This means that although the tactical objectives of terrorists attacks fail, the success is in achieving their propaganda objectives. However, sometimes this interpretation may be one-dimensional because we cannot separate the type of media coverage from the reaction of

the public, nor should it be assumed that all terrorists seek publicity in the first place at the expense of their other tactical or political objectives. In addition, the symbiotic relationship between the media and terrorism cannot be accommodated in the presence of the state.

The media sometimes unintentionally promotes terrorist operations and gives them undeserved media coverage under the objectives of media efforts and work, which seeks to achieve fame, power, money and ideological influence.

This so called game of common interests between terrorists and the media is beneficial to both parties; both benefit from terrorist attacks, terrorists gain publicity, the media benefits financially because reports published in this field results in mass interest, and thus the value and opportunity of this coverage increases. Some politicians have demanded the deprivation of terrorists from receiving free access to media outlets and coverage for their terrorist attacks. Media coverage of terrorist operations or interviews with perpetrators is considered to be rewarding for them, there is a criminal element that allows them to address the public audience about the motivations that led them to these attacks. This could in turn create a kind of understanding for these reasons and motivations behind these criminal acts. Many people involved in terrorism, were often influenced by satellite channels and websites to join organizations that incite bombings and suicide operations.

Michael Jetter, a professor at the School of Economics and Finance at the University in Medellin, Colombia, has analyzed more than 60,000 terrorist attacks between 1970 and 2012, as reported in the New York Times. Jeter noted that "during recent years, the world has witnessed terrifying formidable

increase in the number of terrorist attacks". The Global Terrorism Database listed 1,395 attacks in 1998, a figure that has steadily risen since then, reaching a record high of 8,441 in 2012.

"Terrorist organizations receive extensive media attention," Jetter said. Terrorism is everywhere on TV stations, newspapers and the radio. We also know that terrorists need media coverage to spread their message, create fear and recruit followers. According to Jetter, one additional New York Times article about an attack in a particular country increased the number of ensuing attacks in the same country by 11% to 15%. The findings raise the question of whether limiting the reporting of acts of terrorism would result in a decline in attacks. Jetter pointed out that 42 people die every day from terrorist attacks, compared with 7,123 children who die from hunger-related causes.

And he suggested "that we may need to rethink the sensationalist coverage of terrorism and stop providing terrorists a free media platform". He added that, "Media coverage of other events that are causing more harm in the world should not be neglected at the expense of media marathons discussing the cruelties of terrorists."

It could be argued that researchers must devote time to studying the delicate relationship between the media and terrorism in order to achieve a better understanding of the relationship between the two entities. Including the understanding that terrorists are seeking to reach the greatest number of people in order to influence them. The work of mass of media broadcasts affects millions, if not billions, of people who otherwise would have known nothing about the incident.

Terrorists know, that the use of media allows them achieve more of their objectives, due to the important fact that the media can influence the public and the decision makers. In addition, Terrorist groups need to put pressure on governments and incite fear among the public.

Without the attention of the media, the terrorists are unable to achieve any of the following four objectives:

1. Recognition of the group name or ideology.
2. Ability to communicate with supporters.
3. Communicate with members of the local government.
4. Depict itself as a legitimate political alternative to the current governments.

Based on the above, this article goes a step further and claims that without the media's continued attention to terrorist operations, the public will recognize the limited activities of terrorist groups, which will in turn change their tactics to focus on legitimate political engagement or allow for the slow disintegration of these groups.

References:

The Media and Terrorism: A Reassessment   1- PAUL WILKINSON,

Terrorism and Political ViolencePUBLISHED BY, LONDON, Vol.9, No.2 Summer 2011, pp.51-64

2- Javier Delgado Rivera, The Symbiotic Relationship between Western Media and Terrorism, May 24, 2016

https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/ethics_online/0117

3- Michael Jetter ,Terrorism and the Media, IZA DP No. 8497,

September 2014, http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/downloads/Codebook. pdf. 8

4- Hayel W. Da'jah, Media and Terrorism, paper presented to the Conference of Al-Hussein Bin Talal University on international terrorism in the digital age, Jordan, 1012/7/2008, http://t1t.net/book/save.php?action=save&id=180