



## MEDIA AND TERRORISM: RELATIONSHIP AND THE DEFINED ROLE

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**A**s a matter of fact, we are glaringly facing difficulty defining the theoretical, methodological and value-driven framework that controls media activity, especially daily news follow-up and coverage of the activities of local and international terrorist groups. Still, there are methodological questions and methodological issues that are difficult to address accurately, given the nature of the job that the mass media should perform in the community service, and the nature of legislation, laws, and established media work ethics.

What is the relationship between the media and terrorism? Why do terrorists always use the media to reach public opinion? How should the media address this multi-pronged issue? Is it through publishing or blackout? These questions reveal a difficult and complicated ethical problem. If a terrorist act has not received the attention of various media outlets, and has not been posted, released or published, then that means that such incidents go unnoticed, hence, will not have any impact on public opinion or decision makers. It can be argued then that the fate of terrorism without the media fades away and becomes on the wane.

On the flip side, terrorist acts are the only method for terrorists to arouse the interest of public opinion and decision-makers, shining the spotlight on their issues and demands. The bottom line here is that the media in the modern time in general and in democratic societies in particular cannot stop publishing news of terrorist acts, given the media role in community in keeping the public updated with and informed of all events and facts locally and internationally. Again, democratic states cannot interfere in media affairs and pressure them into refraining from following terrorist acts and publishing their news, in accordance with the principle of freedom of the press.

"Through such media follow-up and coverage, terrorist organizations come into direct contact with the public, present their issues, visions, ideologies and solutions.

Hence, among millions of followers, you may find those who sympathize or agree with terrorist organizations. Thus, the human tone is set for terrorist groups by media follow-up, recognizing them as active members of the political system with their issues to be addressed, while adopting solutions and views that are not in harmony with those official approaches put forward by the government institutions", explains Mohammed Qirat at Al-Bayan Electronic Newspaper.

"Terrorism takes advantage of the media to drum up enthusiasm for its ideology and support through constantly seeking out media propaganda and turning the spotlight on its presence and purpose. Psychologists contend that terrorists may be reluctant to carry out their operations if they recognize that such operations will not be in line with the media propaganda that would reveal the losses they have inflicted on their enemies, considering that psychological warfare works only if some people evince interest in it. Margaret Thatcher, former British Prime Minister, described such free propaganda as life oxygen for terrorism, which it cannot do without, because following a terrorist incident and broadcasting it through media bring strategic and tactical gains for those involved in terrorism", explains Hael Dejah at Al-Etihad Newspaper.

The media has a defined role in covering and reporting incidents; the more neutral and objective media coverage is, the more successful and more influential it becomes. However, it should make an effective contribution to addressing violence and terrorism. Some believe that terrorism makes the act, while propaganda is the marketing ploy and gimmick of terrorism. This is so especially in the Arab world, as a number of media outlets address the issue of terrorism subjectively, so it becomes a marketing tool for terrorists, and propaganda of their actions in many instances!

### **Media Role in Education**

The media plays a national role in forming public opinion, presenting political, economic and social issues of concern to citizens, while enhancing their knowledge and cognitive abilities and skills in all fields, as well as the traditional role of the media in disseminating and publishing news across the world. As such, the media plays a positive role and work in the interest of promoting education among the public, while enhancing the community abilities and skills to think, analyze, and relate the associated incidents and observations with the mental image drawn by the media.

Likewise, the media has a special role towards terrorism, by conducting awareness campaigns that inform public opinion of the harm and damage inflicted by terrorism and the danger brought about by its impact on society. Among the most important roles the media should do towards terrorism include the following:

1. To constantly conduct public awareness campaigns;

2. To attract and host experts and scientists to analyze and expose terrorist ideas, after publishing news of terrorist acts;
3. To produce awareness-raising programs, films and dramas about terrorist ideology;
4. To attract repentant and returning members of terrorist groups to reveal to public opinion the reality and ideology of terrorist groups;
5. To withhold publishing certain news and acts carried out by terrorists, because this would help in marketing their extremist ideology;
6. To create a unified media honor code in which all media operate in such a fashion as to regulate an optimal method that should be followed with various news and reports, and all that is related to terrorist groups.

### Media and Terrorism Growth

No one denies the importance and danger of the media; media has become a critical factor affecting the lives of individuals and peoples, shaping their attitudes, ideas and beliefs. On the flip side, we cannot turn a blind eye to the impact of the media on misleading the security services, by publishing news of terrorist acts that contribute to achieving the goals of terrorists who believe that the publication of the news of their terrorist acts in the media is an important indicator to measure their success. It should be also noted that some terrorists consider the terrorist act unaccompanied by media coverage to be a desultory action.

Terrorists usually perpetrate their crimes to achieve major goals, the most important of which is to attract public attention, attain recognition and legitimize their actions. The media often contributes to achieving these goals, through media coverage and meticulous attention in order to secure a major scoop, excellence and exclusiveness in providing information about terrorist crimes, analyzing, interpreting and assessing their results.

When following and covering terrorist incidents or acts, it is also noted that the media dramatize, exaggerate and play actions up, giving a great indication to the masses and public opinion of the strength and success of terrorist groups in their actions! Thus, terrorist groups achieve their most important goals: to reach and influence local or international public opinion. Publicity *per se* reinforces the sense of victory among the terrorists.

Finally, we note that the media coverage to terrorist acts endangers the lives of many media people. For instance, they may be held hostage by terrorist groups, bargaining with them for millions of dollars as they are being held to ransom, which is used to carry out other new operations. Terrorist groups may kill journalists, as they

did in Iraq, Chechnya, Russia, Algeria, Colombia, Mexico and Syria. Reports indicate that a large number of journalists were killed by terrorist groups, despite the United Nations efforts to provide the necessary protection for the lives of journalists, whether when providing media coverage of wars or kidnapping journalists by terrorist groups.