

Mass Media as a Vital Element of Modern Terrorism

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Abstract: The article explains the reasons why terrorists want to get coverage by mass media. Historical retrospective of the factors which increase terrorists' interest in informational follow-up is given. The author analyses the characteristics of terrorism and its transformation in the end of XX century and arrives at the conclusion that the boundary between classical and modern terrorism lies at the connection point between 70s and 80s. It was the time when media industry started to flourish and enabled terrorists to receive high social outcry, to influence power structures through manipulation by public opinion. The conclusion is made that the role of mass media in achieving the goals of modern terrorism is of high priority.

Key words: Mass Media • Terrorism Communication Strategy • Terrorist Objectives • Modern Terrorism
Classical Terrorism.

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism belongs to the group of the most dangerous and hardly predictable phenomena of the modern world. On the boundary of XX-XI centuries world community faced serious increase in terrorist threat. Its ideology started to manifest itself especially clearly and the actions acquired extremely severe and sophisticated forms.

The terrorism theme in mass media always attracted maximum attention of the public because this phenomenon potentially threatens life of every citizen regardless of his status, religion, nationality etc. Therefore mass media play important part in formation of knowledge about this phenomenon and interpretation of connected with it events. They are able to be both powerful tool of resistance to terrorism and be open platform to present terrorists' ideology.

Modern terrorism in order to achieve its aims needs communication follow-up. Research made by G. Weinmann [1] and R. Dowling [2] proves that terrorists carefully choose the place of terrorist act, taking into consideration the needs of mass media in space and expressive surroundings to take impressive pictures and TV reportings. While preparing for terrorist acts the terrorists pay attention to the time of issuing of the key national newspapers and news programs to get maximum public outcry in shortest time. Terrorism expert J. Bell characterized deliberate efforts of terrorists in using mass

media by the following well-aimed phrase: "Abdul, do not shoot! We are not in prime-time!" [3].

Many experts characterize interaction of mass media with terrorism as the relations of best friends. For example, M. Camphuijsen and E. Vissers mention a symbiotic relationship between terrorists and the media [4]. S. Lumbaca and M. Gray believe that the media and the resulting coverage serve as an enabler for acts of terrorism [5]. Former Prime-minister of Great Britain M. Thatcher is famous for its statement about mass media as "oxygen providers without which terrorists would not survive" [6]. In case of depriving the terrorist of the access to mass media the experts predict essential reduction of the attacks from their side and their destructive influence on society.

Methods: In order to fulfill purposes of this study we needed, first of all, the method of analysis and synthesis, historical and comparative method. Historical method is used for studying factors which facilitate increased interest of terrorists in informational follow-up. Comparative method was of help to find out principal differences between classical and modern terrorism which allowed to see cardinal transformation taking place in forms, methods and aims of terrorism of XXI century. Analysis and synthesis method and the methods of deduction and induction were necessary for detailed examination of scientific works in this sphere, systematization of knowledge and giving author's interpretation of this problem.

Increased Interest of Terrorist in Mass Media Coverage:

History and Reasons: Mass media very recently turned into integral element of communicative political activity of terrorism. A. Schmid explains the birth of unusual relations between them by development of new ways of communication, in particular, by the invention of telegraph [7]. In his opinion terrorism and mass media always were developing in parallel. If the news about terrorist act could reach the audience only in some days or even weeks in XIX century, in the end of XX century the time for transmitting the message was measured in minutes - which facilitated terrorists' activity.

B. Hoffman ties-up appearance of above mentioned interest of terrorists in mass media to 2 key technological events - opportunity to use electricity in typography business and regular satellite TV-broadcasting [8]. The first information revolution in 1870s allowed to simplify and improve typography process, reduce costs on the printing and, what is of most importance, it allowed mass media to spread its messages with such speed that was never possible before. This is the point from which interaction of mass media and terrorism began. For example, in Tsarist Russia the revolutionary organization "The People's Will" which used strategy of "propaganda by acts" killing high rank officers used mass media to spread its views into broad circles of population.

The second information breakthrough at the end of 60s - beginning 70s of XX century is connected not only with appearance of satellite television but also with the invention of video-recording and compact portable equipment which allowed to transmit information directly from the place of events in online mode and cover huge territories. One of the first terrorist acts which produced public outcry was seizure and killing of Israel sports team at Olympic Games in Munich in 1972. Unbelievable coverage and instant speed of transmission demonstrated efficiency of mass media as the channel for conveying information about terrorist and their political goals.

Besides that it was found that virtual reality has more powerful impact on audience than the fact of terrorist act itself.

This tragedy influenced both the thematic contents of the news and the scheme of organization of terrorist acts - since then the terrorists began to take into consideration elements of sensation and drama. In D. Rapoport's opinion mass media proved that "they are needed by terrorism in the same degree as weapons" [9]. B. Hoffman points out to the appearance of 24-hour news channels such as CNN and BBC, Fox news etc. as well [8].

It seems to us appropriate to add one more significant event which marked new stage of technological development in mass media, namely, world-wide spreading of Internet at the threshold of XX-XIX centuries. As it was fairly noted by G. Weimann "the Internet is an ideal arena for activity by terrorist organizations" because it is characterized by easy access, anonymity of communication, quick exchange of information [10].

Indeed, at the present time many big terrorist groups have their own sites in Internet using them as powerful disinformation and propaganda tool. In a case of seizure of hostages the terrorists elaborate communicative strategy in detail, creating maximum informational reasons for steady appearance in mass media of new messages about the terrorist act. As a rule this is achieved by deliberate vague demands from terrorist, constant change of their statements, invitation of famous people, politics, journalists to the negotiations in order to provide steady interest of the audience and constant stress.

Classical and Modern Terrorism: Differences and the Role of Mass Media:

Today the role of mass media in terrorism strategy has significantly increased in comparison with the beginning of XX century which is connected with deep transformation of its forms, aims and ways of struggle. M. Wieviorka believes (and we share his opinion) that the boundary between classical and modern terrorism lies in 70-80s of XX century [11]. This period is characterized by 2nd revolutionary breakthrough in development of mass media and the terrorist acts became more frequent, often with taking hostages and explosions in public places which resulted in adoption of a number of international conventions aimed to struggle with terrorism.

One of the specific features of modern terrorism is the orientation to different categories of objects of violence. If at the threshold of XIX-XX terrorist acts were aimed to the representatives of specific social groups at power who were able to fulfill terrorists' demands, today violence is applied in regard to random people. Human lives become symbolic targets as a tool of enforcement of terrorists' political agenda.

It is necessary to emphasize that in this case violence is applied in regard to one group of persons and psychological pressure is made on the other group. L. Trubitsyna points out that experience of extreme situation, covered in detail in mass media can result in mass injury of the population [12]. In the state of strong emotional stress a man often is not able to assess real danger and the severity of situation emphasizing their

subjective perception. Passivity of audience at the moment of injuring event very often leads to more serious consequences.

Destructive impact of mass media first of all is connected with the way and tone of interpretation of dramatic events. Mass media often use techniques of worsening the consequences of injury, making the feeling of helplessness overwhelming.

Moreover, the final result which is needed by terrorists is achieved through the actions of third party - governmental bodies. Thus, the terrorists need as minimum 3 parties to realize their goals - direct victims, population and power structures, which is possible by performing terrorist act, coverage of it in mass media and pressure on the government. In this line mass media play leading part acting as an intermediary which conveys the message from terrorists. If this logic is broken terrorist act will be isolated from society and will be a tragedy for few people.

Dangerous trend is turning of civil persons from object into subject of attack. Irresponsible coverage of terrorism by mass media can provoke unpredictable destructive behavioral reaction with the representatives of some social circles, especially psychologically non-balanced persons, for example, young men.

On the one hand outcry in mass media can facilitate spreading of ideas and goals of terrorists, appearance of new followers, who are sympathizing the terrorists or wishing to reproduce such situation. In G. Pocheptsov's opinion, singular violent acts of terrorists can be a trigger of new terrorist acts [13]. The illustration of his point of view is as follows: terrorist 1 - event 1 - news 1 - terrorist 2 - event 2 - news 2 etc.

On the other hand, materials in mass media about unpunished terrorist and humiliation of the nation can make the victims to revenge, they stimulate aggressive-extremist actions, increase in occurrence of mob law, punishment in regard to those nationalities with which terrorism is associated. Terrorist acts performed by civil population, often in regard to innocent people, in response to terrorist act fulfilled by real terrorist are similar to the terrorism strategy. "Blood for blood" principle deteriorates the foundations and stability in society and makes settlement of the situation by state bodies improbable.

The next characteristic of modern terrorism is abrupt increase in quantity of victims while performing terrorist act. If during last 3 decades of XX century the famous phrase of B. Jenkins "terrorists want to be seen by many people, not to kill many people" [14] was almost true-to-life, in XXI century it has become obvious that

terrorism is aiming to make its methods more cruel and needs as many victims as possible. Modern terrorism excludes the idea of "neutral people" which is very often becomes main propaganda slogan of terrorist - to kill everybody who does not participate in their struggle.

Aspiration of terrorists to perform acts resulting in death of as many people as possible must be also explained by reduction of reaction of population to almost every day repeating terrorist acts. At present time degree of efficiency of terrorist activity depends not on quantity of terrorist acts fulfilled for short period but on number of killed people. With increasing number of people killed in crashes and by criminals the focus of the audience can be achieved only on terrorist acts in which many people are killed. Therefore we can forecast further escalation of terrorism manifestations with the use of more dramatic violent actions in order to put the theme of terrorism on the 1st place in agenda.

The key difference between classical terrorism and modern terrorism is also in the intentions of doers. Terrorist act is usually based on several interrelated reasons. Among the most common in scientists' opinion there are political, religious and ideological aims. But this typology does not correspond to true intentions of terrorists - they can use ethnic, confessional, world-outlook and any other kind of conflicts only with purpose to give grounds of their activity. Overestimation of the significance of auxiliary tasks, as a rule, based on the ideas of justice and struggle for freedom and not mentioning of other, not so good, aims is a specific characteristic of modern terrorism.

In this connection we must point out to underestimation of personal motives in terrorists' actions. A. Rastorguev remarks: "all terrorist acts of recent time had distinct economic underlying reason" [15]. At present time terrorism became very profitable and economically beneficial business. It can control oil prices, influence stock-exchange, make tourist agencies and airline companies go bankrupt. J. Baudrillard remarks: "suicidal (classical) terrorism was the terrorism of the poor; this (modern terrorism) is the terrorism of the rich" [16]. It is necessary to underline that operative coverage of terrorist acts in mass media will make the deliberate speculations easier.

In order to understand true intentions of terrorism it would be appropriate to introduce additional classification, dividing the aims of terrorists into openly declared (explicit) and non-declared (implicit). The second ones with no doubt play much greater part in establishing close relationship between terrorism and mass media. Misunderstanding of distinct differences between

declared aims, their ideological grounds and personal motives of terrorists by society will facilitate the propaganda of speculative statements, false threats and various mystifications.

Hidden (implicit) motives are, first of all, deliberate creation, spread and keeping of permanent state of fear, making people feel insecure on the chosen territory. In A. Merari's opinion terrorists have no other obvious reason for killing innocent people than to provocation of panic [17]. Therefore modern terrorism, first of all, is aimed to society which is its main victim.

CONCLUSION

True reasons of modern terrorism are simultaneous achievement of a set of goals of total destabilization of situation in all spheres of state activity on national, regional and international level. The role of mass media in realization of this global plan is of high priority. Mass media fulfill the following tasks in the strategy of terrorism:

Firstly, terrorists need world community's support which is possible only by mass media's favorable coverage of their goals, not actions. Focus on reasons declared by terrorists which, as terrorists say, made them to apply extreme measures makes people sympathize with them. As a result, disapproval of terrorism becomes not so important.

Secondly, terrorists want the mass media to create legendary image of all-mightiness, impunity and invincibility in order to paralyze opponent's resistance and to make him think that any anti-terrorist measures from his side are tyrannical and non-productive.

Thirdly, terrorists want to increase population's disapproval of government's and law-enforcement agencies actions. Under the pressure of public opinion the government can act without thinking, make mistakes or not-doing what must be done (but may look unpopular) which can result in elimination of democratic institutions and make functioning of state bodies more difficult.

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