The Media-Government Communication During and after Terrorist Acts

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Abstract: In the article the question of coordinated counterterrorism activities between state bodies and Mass Media is considered. On the one hand, the interrelation and cooperation between the two actors in combating terrorism is crucial. On the other hand, there are some problems and difficulties, preventing the effective counterterrorism response. One of the reasons on the appearing problems is that Mass Media tends to cover the events and terrorists’ activities maximally freely, while state bodies try to limit the information flows concerning terrorism. Lack of trust between state bodies and Media may bring to the situation supportive for the terrorists. The article offers recommendations to neutralize the destructive factors in communicating these actors.

Key words: Terrorism • Mass Media • Government • Media-Government Communication • Cooperation • Governmental Anti-terrorism Strategy

INTRODUCTION

Communication between the agencies of the state authority and the media bulks large in counterterrorism strategy. The state comes as an influential participant, which is able to regulate the interaction of terrorists with members of the media. In turn, the positioning of the media in the system of “terrorists – state” can play a decisive role in the perception of occurring events by members of the society. State authorities and the media have a number of identical characteristics, which contribute to unite in the fight against terrorism. Both are considered to be important political subjects. They have powerful resources to have an influence and they are designed to protect the interests of the society. They, of course, must put up a united front on the side of the anti-terrorist movement, because terrorism challenges the power structures and mass media.

Research activities in this field are situated on the several levels. Some scientists are concentrated on the study of communication goals of modern terrorism. According to Nitcavic, R.G. and R.E. Dowling, government spokespersons often express concern that live television coverage of terrorism, especially interviews with hostages and their families, effectively rules out any violent governmental response that might result in the death of hostages [1]. Others focus on the coverage of the topic of terrorism in the media and on its impact on society, considering that the informational support is the determinant components of terror acts [2-4]. Van der Vat D. [5], R.D. Crelinsten [6], J.D. Williams [7] share the view that terrorism is a form of communication in the society.

Also the research exposed the extent of the impact of information about terrorism in the media on political decision-making by the state. M.H. Crenshaw says that the terrorists’ objective is to influence political behavior [8]. A. Peresin discovered that publicity to terrorist actions, kidnappings in the first place, greatly increases the public pressure on government representatives to give in to terrorists’ requests [9].

The aim of this study is to analyze the media-government communication during and after terrorist acts, as well as the identification of problems and their causes in the interaction of these actors. As R. Perl believes, the freedom of the media is an essential component of any governmental long-term anti-terrorism strategy [10]. In reality, however, we should admit the existence of mutual dislike and distrust between them, which prevent
effective line of communication in the terms of terrorism activation. Generally, the next major terrorist attack raises new wave of discussions about the working methods of the authorities with journalists in extraordinary circumstances, which inevitably ends up with calls from some political figures and law machinery agents, to introduce censorship on the theme of terrorism. However, any attempts to limit the independence of the media are confronted by a negative reaction from journalists.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study is composed of three sections. The first section analyzes reasons for the existence of communication conflict between media and public authorities in the terms of counterterrorist hit.

The second section of the study offers recommendations to public agents that are responsible for conducting counterterrorist operations, communication with journalists, also it explains the needs of the media and their specifics of the functioning in the context of terrorism.

The concluding section of the study gives recommendations to media representatives covering the topic of terrorism and cooperation with the authorities to conduct an effective communications strategy against terrorism.

**The Problems of Communication Between the Media and the State During the Terrorist Act and its Motives:**

The core of the controversy between the authorities and the media tends to favor a way to organize communication between them during a state of emergency. In conditions of terrorist attack public authorities are primarily oriented to unidirectional communication with the journalists, seeking to turn the media into the object of management.

The imposition of the rules and requirements by the authorities causes dissatisfaction among the representatives of mass media who advocate for equal interaction, based on the coordination relationships. In addition to the different views on the role of mass media, the opinions of the authorities and journalists diverge in the field of formulation and implementation of top-priority tasks in the situation of a terrorist attack. One of the main tasks is first of all to deny terrorists access to the media, often at the expense of restricting the freedom of speech, and secondly to inform the society about the tragedy. It must be emphasized that the goal of the media and of the terrorists are practically identical on this characteristic, differing only at the level of the motives and the expected result that, however, does not impede terrorist plans to impose a specific agenda.

The desire of journalists to cover an extraordinary event in full scale comes into conflict with the goals of the authorities and requires from the latter the development of a balanced approach, aimed at minimizing methods of contact terrorists with mass media.

A similar situation is also seen in the field of quantitative and qualitative components in the issue of terrorism in the media materials. Authorities urge journalists to balance when submitting information and caution against assisting terrorists unintentionally.

Bodies of government often evaluate the activities of the media in the anti-terrorist campaign from the negative side. The main claims towards journalists are imposed by the authorities, and they are the following [11]:

- Mass media transmit the information that can be used by terrorists in their own interests. For example, messages sent by media allows them to be aware of the government’s and society’s reaction, analyze the impact of terrorist acts, to manipulate public opinion by means of alternating periods of calm, and small acts of sabotage, also by a number of major terrorist attacks etc.
- Mass media often turn from a bystander into an active, even an interested participant in the events, whose intervention could provoke the terrorists to become aggressive and endanger the lives of the hostages.
- Detailed coverage of the terrorist attack greatly complicates the work of the governmental special services and jeopardizes the effective implementation of countermeasures.

In its turn, media defend the right of the public to receive comprehensive and reliable information about the tragic events. In their opinion, the authorities use the argument of the destructive role of the media as a self-justification after each tragic completion of confrontation with terrorists. Journalists put forward counter-accusations against the authorities. At the same time most of the comments are related to the problem of interaction between representatives of security agencies and mass media. Mostly journalists note that the authorities [12]:

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Report incomplete, contradictory or false information;  
Strongly prevent the work of the media, which is manifested in the refusal on providing required information, withdrawal of materials, detention and prosecution of journalists;  
Prefer to keep journalists at arm's length from the immediate scene of the events, but at the same time they want the media to provide information from its own sources;  
Expect from journalists sufficient knowledge about specific features of law enforcement agencies functioning and tolerant attitude in case of restriction of mass media access to certain information. At the same time the authorities don't seek to penetrate into an essence of journalists' work.

According to B. Nakos, media and authorities are equally interested in an exclusion of terrorism from the life of society as well as in suppression of terrorists’ attempts to manipulate mass media [14]. On the other hand, mass media appear between the devil and the deep sea. They don't want the right for freedom of speech to be limited by both terrorists and the state, which takes similar steps under the excuse of the fight against terrorism. Heads of law enforcement agencies, power structures and public officials are responsible for conducting counterterrorism operations (CTO), and should be required to know the methods of effective communication with journalists in times of crisis. This circumstance is particularly important because the situation in areas of CTO is highly dynamic and requires a fast response from the employees of the operative headquarters.

It is necessary to remember that the media cannot wait long for official information at the time of committing a terrorist act. They are in the conditions of a stiff competition and seek to the first report of the extraordinary news and its details. Moreover, the worse things are the more speed mode journalists' work has.

If the official information is delayed, limited or run low, the mechanism of an author's conjecturing of a situation is automatically started. In this case, the media is beginning to use any messages, acquired at the scene that leads to growth of hypotheses, assumptions, allegations, inventing details. As a consequence a dangerous phenomenon known as “parallel history” arises which is significantly different from the real state of affairs; it is based on a personal, emotional perception of the tragedy by journalists. For this purpose at the initial stage of interaction with journalists authorities should show understanding of the main requirement of mass media in obtaining constantly updated information. The authorities have to be ready to provide in due time the last data on the current situation and to be able to provide questions for journalists with the aim of adequate reaction. In the communication process the ruling structures should talk with journalists in terms “news” without overloading the performance by excess words and turns.

The media often accuse the authorities in a hostile, irritable reaction and in dry, semi-official manner of presenting the facts that, in general, creates a negative impression and gives the idea that the representatives of the authorities are more concerned about personal career than the fate of the hostages [15]. To avoid the formation

Recommendations to Public Authorities: In this regard authorities should reconsider the principles of work with mass media. It is necessary to realize that, despite a number of contradictions in their relationship, mass media potentially have more general common ground with the power, than with terrorists.
of adverse image of the authorities we consider the most important to take into account the emotional component of the performances, pay attention not only to facts and figures, but also to the personal attitude of the speaker to the tragic event.

**Recommendations to Journalists:** Taking into account that the reporters have to participate directly in the coverage of the counter-terrorist operations, it also seems appropriate to prepare them for this work. Journalists should realize their important role in communication activities, terrorism and perceive each new attack as a personal challenge to the media. In a situation of terrorist activity mass media should take into account the needs of government, which, first of all, the need in the public understanding of their actions, exactly the reasons for the refusal to make concessions to terrorists and the need to take unpopular decisions. The authorities want journalists support and promote the policy of the government, but not the terrorists’ agenda. They are also interested in the media loyal attitude towards the activity of law enforcement agencies.

During the antiterrorist operation the authorities want to control the access to external information to prevent data leaks about the plans and actions of the special services. Moreover, the expediency of information management justifies concerns about security of hostages first of all, negotiators and members of special forces, who may run the risk because of unplanned, provocative report in the mass media. In this connection, journalists should listen to the instructions of the law enforcement bodies, who recommend refusing publishing the information about national, confessional and social characteristics of hostages, because terrorists may use this information in pursuing their goals. It is undesirable to provide details about tactics and actions of special services after the resolution of the crisis. According to P. Wilkinson, the media can provide an indispensable forum for informed discussion concerning the social and political implications of terrorism and the development of adequate policies and counter-measures [16].

**CONCLUSION**

Thus, effective action against terrorism requires from the government, legislators and journalists to develop a coherent policy, a clear definition of reciprocal rights and duties so as to inflict large-scale strike on the terrorist front. It is also necessary to conduct various seminars and trainings for the journalistic corps and the operational headquarters. The media must understand the anti-terrorist policy of the government which is aimed at the service to the state and society.

In turn, authorities should take into account the peculiarities of media functioning in the period of crisis. Only in case of the conscious involvement, mass media are able to combine their natural desire to satisfy the interests of the audience in obtaining the information and social responsibility for their safety and protection from acts of terrorism.

**REFERENCES**


