

News media, political extremism and terrorism: an uncomfortable relationship

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Reporting political extremism & terrorism: the debate

- News media: the terrorists' best friends
or
- News media under pressure: efforts by all sides to manipulate the media (*governments obviously far more successful than political extremists*)

and in the “battle for hearts and minds”:

- News media's possible contribution to democratisation and social cohesion (*democratisation in post-authoritarian states usually provides for new conflicts*)

Context [political, economic, social]

- News media in post-conflict states & “weak states” (*often used as “terrorist safe havens”*)
- News media in “countries undergoing transition” (*political extremism /battle of ideas/violence*)
- News media in “established democracies” (*security concerns lead to attempts to stifle public debate and limit individual liberties and freedom of the press*)
- World-wide operating news media (*Virtual space where the battle of ideas takes place : BBC World TV, Al-Jazeera, CNN + “external broadcasters”: BBC World radio, VOA, RFE/RL, Radio Vatican, etc.*)
- New communication platforms (*the internet, mobile phones & other communication devices, etc.*)

News media & democracy

- News media are both agent & indicator of democratisation:
 - Media inform, educate, entertain (*adequate policy, regulation, independence to enable this role*)
 - Media and communication industry as part of a free market economy (*important contribution to economic growth and social prosperity*)
 - European “dual” model for the broadcasting sector: public service broadcasters & regulated commercial broadcasters (*vital for democracy!*)

Reporting political extremism, terrorism in open societies

- The Thatcher assumption: news media “provide oxygen” to terrorism, therefore public authorities are obliged to prevent this
- § 19 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (similarly § 10 European Convention of Human Rights) which guarantees freedom “to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” (*any restrictions of this fundamental human right must be based on law and subject to review by independent courts*)
 - Media’s best contribution to transformation of conflicts and social cohesion is to provide representation to all parties in the conflict because *ensorship, in whatever guise, plays into the hands of the enemies of democracy*
 - Media’s best contribution to “battle of ideas” is to continue reporting without taking orders from the authorities and to oppose human rights violations by the public authorities and security forces and thus *defend and strengthen democracy*

Internet & other new communication platforms

- U.S. Department of State (Country Reports on Terrorism, 30 April 2007): *Global communications... based on electronic infrastructure (internet, global news media) further allow terrorists to carry out activities, particularly the dissemination of propaganda and misinformation, without the need for a physical safe haven. These “virtual” havens are highly mobile, difficult to track and difficult to control, and are not based in any particular state*
- EU Directive on Transfrontier TV contains clear provisions about obligations of the countries of origin to prevent hate-speech and other forms of abuse (*national courts – ECHR*)
- Internet – how to regulate it? First steps by the EU, but already pro-active policy by U.S. and restrictive by some other governments (*importance of case-law*)