

The Media and Terrorism: A Reassessment

PAUL WILKINSON

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The author begins by challenging Michel Wieviorka's dismissal of the claim that there is a symbiotic relationship between terrorism and the media. Terrorists' manipulation and exploitation of the media is shown to play a crucial part in their propaganda war. The article concludes by arguing that voluntary self-restraint and self-regulation by the media are the best policy options for a democratic society in regard to the media's response to terrorism, but that the mass media need to work harder at devising measures of self-restraint that are both appropriate and effective.

It is first necessary to define the terms used in the title of this article. Media is a generic term meaning all the methods or channels of information and entertainment. The mass media are taken to encompass newspapers, radio and television, but other important forms of communications include books, films, music, theatre and the visual arts. The late twentieth century has seen the globalisation of the mass media culture, but we should not overlook the fact that throughout history informal methods of communication such as the gossip of the taverns, streets and marketplaces have been the standard local media for transmitting information, and these informal channels coexist with all the latest multimedia technology in contemporary societies.

The term terrorism as used in this article denotes a particular type of violence. It is not employed as a synonym for politically motivated violence in general. It has five distinguishing characteristics:¹

- 1) it is premeditated and designed to create a climate of extreme fear;
- 2) it is directed at a wider target than the immediate victims;
- 3) it inherently involves attacks on random or symbolic targets, including civilians;
- 4) it is considered by the society in which it occurs as 'extra-normal', that is in the literal sense that it violates the norms regulating disputes, Protest and dissent; and
- 5) it is used primarily, though not exclusively, to influence the political behaviour of governments, communities or specific social groups.

The weapon of terror is used extensively by both sub-state and state actors in the international system, and has, since the 1980s, been

increasingly used by groups with a religious motivation and as a method of intimidating the authorities or rival gangs, by those involved in international organised crime, such as drug cartels and the Mafia.2.

In the process of attempting to spread terror among a wider target group some channel or medium of transmitting information, however informal and localised, will inevitably be involved. The Assassin Sect.3. of Shia Islam, which attempted to sow terror in the Muslim world in the Middle Ages, relied upon word of mouth in the mosques and market places to relay news of their attacks; similar methods of transmitting fear were used by the Russian and Balkan terrorists of the nineteenth century.4. These and many other historical examples provide abundant evidence to disprove the theory that the development of modern mass media is the prime underlying cause of terrorism. The political weapon of terror, it was believed, would serve their cause, not TV producers and journalists. It would be foolish to deny that many modern terrorists and certain sections of the mass media can appear to become locked in a relationship of considerable mutual benefit. The former want to appear on prime time TV to obtain not only massive, possibly world-wide, publicity but also the aura of legitimisation that such media attention gains for them in the eyes of their own followers and sympathisers. For the mass media organisations the coverage of terrorism, especially prolonged incidents such as hijackings and hostage situations, provides an endless source of sensational and visually compelling news stories capable of boosting audience/readership figures.5

Common to all acts of terrorism is the threat or use of murder, injury or destruction to coerce the government or other target groups into conceding the terrorists' demands. It is because the terrorists seek to demonstrate the credibility of their threats by spectacular acts of destruction or atrocity that the media reporting of these acts is often held in some sense to have 'caused' the terrorism. In reality it is well beyond the powers even of the modern mass media to create a terrorist movement or a terrorist state. In order to understand how groups espousing terrorism originate one needs to examine their motivations, aims, ideologies or religious beliefs and strategies. However, once terrorist violence is under way the relationship between the terrorists and the mass media tends inevitably to become symbiotic. In sociology the term symbiosis is taken to mean relations of mutual dependence between different groups within a community when the groups are unlike each other and their relations are complementary. It would be foolish to deny that modern media technology, communications satellites and the rapid spread of television have had a marked effect in increasing the publicity potential of terrorism. A dramatic illustration was the seizure and massacre of Israeli athletes by Black September terrorists at the Munich Olympics. It is estimated that these events were relayed to a world wide TV audience of over 500 million.6. For as long as the mass media exist, terrorists will hunger

for what former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, called 'the oxygen of publicity'. And for as long as terrorists commit acts of violence the mass media will continue to scramble to cover them in order to satisfy the desire of their audiences for dramatic stories in which there is inevitably huge public curiosity about both the victimisers and their victims. Even those terrorist incidents where the perpetrators fail to claim responsibility and their identity is unknown or in serious doubt, as in the case of the bombing of the American base at Dhahran in June 1996, the international media coverage given will still be enormous.

The French sociologist Michel Wieviorka, in *The Making of Terrorism* (1993), attempts to dismiss the claim that terrorism and the media are in a symbiotic relationship. He argues that there are four distinct relationships between the terrorists and the media. The first of these is described as one of pure indifference, when 'the terrorists neither seek to frighten a given population group beyond their intended victims nor to realise a propaganda coup through their acts'.⁷ This category is totally unreal because even for the purpose of creating terror in an intended set of victims the perpetrator relies on some channel or medium of communication to relay the threat. If there is no aim to instil terror then the violence is not of a terroristic nature.

According to Wieviorka, the 'second relational mode is that of relative indifference In which perpetrators of violence remain indifferent about making the headlines not out of disinterest with regard to the most powerful media, but because there already exist channels of communication through which to discuss and explain their positions.'⁸ The kind of channels which he lists which 'already exist' are a legal and relatively free press, radio transmitters and centres for free expression such as universities, churches and mosques. But what are these channels that 'already exist' if not alternative media? One might also add the internet, now widely used by terrorist groups. Wieviorka's second category turns out to be a non-category.

Wieviorka's third relational mode, the media-oriented strategy, is self-explanatory. He intends this category to cover terrorist efforts to provoke the media into action, and 'a calculated manipulation of what they know of media operations'.⁹ Wieviorka appears to think that this is the only case in which the terrorists are 'engaged in an instrumental relationship with the media'.¹⁰ Yet in reality it is intrinsic to the very activity of terrorisation that some form of media, however crude, is utilised as an instrument to disseminate the messages of threat and intimidation.

This applies equally to Wieviorka's fourth relational mode which he terms a *total break* ¹¹ which I think is more accurately described as coercion of the media. Wieviorka is referring to cases where the terrorists come to view the media organisations, editors, journalists and broadcasters as enemies to be punished and destroyed. Those

working in the media have often been the targets of terrorist violence in areas of severe conflict such as Italy and Turkey in the 1970s and Lebanon in the 1970s and 1980s. Some journalists and editors have been attacked for in some way offending terrorist movement. Others have been threatened and attacked in an attempt, to prevent them from exposing some detail of terrorist activity which wish to suppress. But such attacks on sections of the media do not signify that relationship to the media has suddenly become irrelevant or non-instrumental. The terrorists, however hostile they become towards the major mass media organisations, still depend on the mass media's coverage of their attacks to terrorise their particular media enemies into silence and to coerce the rest of the media into submission, or at least into passive neutrality. Moreover, terrorist groups engaged in attacking the established mass media seldom, if ever, regard such activity as an alternative to using their own organs or propaganda, such as communiques, broadsheets, pamphlets and magazines. The terrorists' own organs of propaganda generally have very limited circulation, but they do serve vital functions of maintaining ideological militancy among members and sympathisers and spreading their ideas to other potentially sympathetic groups. It would be foolish to underestimate their importance as channels of propaganda, as a means of inspiring fervour and as a means of explaining fresh policies or tactics adopted by the leadership to the rank and file. It is significant that when terrorist leaders set up support infrastructures for terrorism overseas, the production of magazines, newspapers and other channels of propaganda generally becomes a key part of their activity.

In dealing with the relationship between terrorism and the mass media, the most useful approach is to attempt to understand the terrorist view of the problem of communications. ¹² It cannot be denied that although terrorism has proved remarkably ineffective as the major weapon for toppling governments and capturing political power, it has been a remarkably successful means of publicising a political cause and relaying the terrorist threat to a wider audience, particularly in the open and pluralistic countries of the West. When one says 'terrorism' in a democratic society, one says 'media'. For terrorism by its very nature is a psychological weapon which depends upon communicating a threat to the wider society. This, in essence, is why terrorism and the media enjoy a symbiotic relationship. The free media clearly do not represent terrorist values. Generally they tend to reflect the underlying values of the democratic society. But the media in an open society are in a fiercely competitive market for their audiences, constantly under pressure to be first with the news and to provide more information, excitement and entertainment than their rivals. Hence they are almost bound to respond to terrorist propaganda of the deed because it is dramatic bad news. Thus, as explained earlier, the media are in a kind of symbiotic relationship with terrorism. This does not, of course, mean that the mass media are controlled by the

terrorists. It does mean that they are continually attempting to manipulate and exploit the free media for their own ends. It also means that responsible media professionals and the public need to be constantly on their guard against terrorist attempts to manipulate them.

Terrorists view the mass media in a free society in entirely cynical and opportunistic terms. They have nothing but contempt for the values and attitudes of the democratic mass media. For example, they view the media's expressed concern for the protecting human life as mere hypocrisy and sentimentality. However, many terrorist leaders are well aware that their cause can be damaged by unfavourable publicity. Hence the more established and sophisticated terrorist movements and their political 'Front' organisations, such as Sinn Fein and Herri Batasuna, invest considerable time and effort in waging propaganda warfare directed both at domestic and international audiences.

In this propaganda war, 13. the terrorists constantly emphasise the absolute justice or righteousness of their cause. Usually, this claim of justice is founded on a secular ideology. However, today we should note the significance of the resurgence of religious justifications for terrorism. Beliefs like those of the pro-Iranian fundamentalist terrorists - that acts of violence are ordained by God and that martyrdom in the course of the struggle against the infidel leads to Paradise - present a very potent threat to opponents. Whether based on secular ideology or religious faith, however, this belief in the absolute justice of the cause characterises the propaganda of all terrorist organisations.

These beliefs carry some important corollaries. First, the terrorists can and do claim that because their violence is in a just cause they are freedom fighters or soldiers of liberation fighting a just war, 14 and they passionately deny that their acts can be described as crimes or murders. Second, because of their belief in their own righteousness, the terrorists can portray their opponents not as simply misguided but as totally evil, as corrupt oppressors beyond redemption. Because their enemies are corrupt beyond redemption, the terrorists have the duty to kill them and indeed anyone who resists or obstructs the just war of the terrorists.

Third, because the terrorist organisation believes it is waging a Manichaeic struggle with the forces of oppression or reaction, it cannot tolerate neutrals - you must be either with us or against us. If you are with us, join our cause and fight against the enemy. If you are not actively with us, we will assume you are a traitor, and therefore we are entitled to kill you.

Three other key propaganda themes vividly illustrate the potency of the terrorists' use of the claim of total righteousness as a psychological weapon.

For example, it is used to undermine all claims to legitimacy on the part of the incumbents: 'Our enemies, by denying the justice of our cause and by acting against us, have forfeited all rights to obedience and respect. It is no longer they who are legitimate and whose authority and word you should believe, but we the terrorist organisation.' The righteousness theme is also deployed in order to push the blame for all the violence onto the terrorists' opponents. The movement started the violence: 'Our violence was simply a totally justified reaction to the violence imposed on us by our enemies; hence, all the blame for the sufferings caused to the people should be placed on our opponents. The masses should recognise this and throw in their lot with our movement, which will inevitably triumph in the end.' All these themes can be recognised in the propaganda of numerous contemporary terrorist organisations. We should never underestimate their skill in disseminating these illusions among the public and among politicians and other influential groups. At its most subtle and effective, this form of propaganda campaign may more than compensate for the military weaknesses and security failures of a terrorist organisation. If governments, faced with these more sophisticated challenges, do not succeed in dealing effectively with the terrorists' political and psychological subversion, they may indeed be on the slide to disaster.

The most frequent terrorist technique for influencing the mass media and reaching a wider public is the creation of terrorist events and armed propaganda with the object of seducing or trapping the mass media into giving the terrorists huge publicity and portraying them as such a powerful force that it would be folly to resist them.¹⁵

To summarise briefly on the symbiotic nature of the relationship between terrorists and the media, the recent history of terrorism in many democratic countries vividly demonstrates that terrorists do thrive on the oxygen of publicity, and it is foolish to deny this. This does not mean that the established democratic media share the values of the terrorists. It does demonstrate, however, that the free media in an open society are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation by ruthless terrorist organisations. In using TV, radio and the print media the terrorists generally have four main objectives:

- 1) To convey the propaganda of the deed and to create extreme fear among their target group/S;
- 2) To mobilise wider support for their cause among the general population, and international opinion by emphasising such themes as righteousness of their cause and the inevitability of their victory;
- 3) To frustrate and disrupt the response of the government and security forces, for example by suggesting that all their practical anti-terrorist measures are inherently tyrannical and counterproductive; and

4) To mobilise, incite and boost their constituency of actual and potential supporters and in so doing to increase recruitment, raise more funds and inspire further attacks.

In a valuable empirical study 16. of the mass media's coverage of the hijacking to Beirut of TWA Flight 847 while en route from Cairo to Rome, Alex P. Schmid demonstrates convincingly how the terrorists were able to use this 'pseudo-event' to obtain vast publicity. For example, Schmid observes that NBC devoted no less than two thirds of their total newstime to the crisis over the fate of the American hostages taken to Beirut throughout the 17 days of the hijacking. Significantly the hostages received roughly ten times the attention given to the terrorists in the overall news coverage. As Schmid wryly observes, 'The exposure increased the price of the 39 US hostages and made their potential sacrifice extremely costly for the American and Israeli governments'.17. Schmid also points out that opinion polls showed an overwhelming majority of the American public (89 per cent) applauded the media's coverage, and this finding reflects this, regarding public perceptions of the media's role in previous terrorist spectacles.

In their intense competition for audience share all the major US TV networks gave huge exposure to the hostages, thus ensuring that huge numbers of Americans would completely identify with the hostages. This inevitably greatly increased the pressure on the US government, and indirectly on the Israeli government, to do any deal that would secure the release of the hostages. The Shi'ite Islamic Jihad hijackers had originally demanded the release of 776 Shi'ites held in Israel. In the event they secured the release of no less than 756 imprisoned Shi'ites in return for the release of the 39 hostages. As Alex Schmid rightly concludes:

The media's profuse exposure of the hostage families and their grief thereby played into the hands of the terrorists. The outcome - successful for the hostages and the terrorists - undermined the American administration's declaratory policy of 'No bargaining, no concessions' and probably increased the likelihood of imitation by other terrorists.18.

Moreover, we would be deceiving ourselves if we believed that this dangerous media hype of terrorist 'spectaculars' was simply the result of Media organisations' unintended mistakes. The major US networks all compete fiercely for an increased market share of the audience and for the higher advertising revenue they can gain through exploiting the public's

insatiable interest in the coverage of major terrorist 'pseudo-events'. For example, in the first three weeks of the Teheran hostage crisis in 1979P.all the major US TV networks achieved an 18 per cent increase in audience rating. According to Hamid Mowlana, the networks were able to secure, 1979, an annual revenue increase of \$30 million for

each percentage point of audience rating increase.¹⁹ On the other hand it may well be the case that the owners and chief executives of the media organisations are unaware of the wider political implications of their frenetic pursuit of ratings. In the case of the Teheran hostage situation, the TV networks' constant and disproportionate emphasis on the fate of the hostages and their portrayal of an Administration apparently powerless to obtain their release helped to undermine Carter and to pave the way for the election of Ronald Reagan.

The cases of the TWA Flight 847 hijacking and the Teheran hostage crisis certainly bring home the power of the mass media. There is no evidence to suggest that the western-dominated mass media organisations share the political aims of the terrorist organisations, but sophisticated media-wise terrorists can certainly exploit and manipulate the power of the mass media for their own malevolent purposes.

So far we have been examining the complex relationship between the terrorists and the media without taking proper account of other key players such as the law enforcement agencies and the government of the day. It is important to emphasise that the objectives and concerns of the law enforcement agencies in terrorist situations are not only at variance with the aims of the media: they are intrinsically in conflict with them.²⁰ The mass media aim to 'scoop' their rivals with news stories that will grip and sustain the public's attention and hence increase their ratings and revenue. The police, on the other hand, are first and foremost concerned with the protection of life, the enforcement of the law and apprehending those guilty of committing crimes and bringing them to justice before courts of law. There have been many notorious examples where the efforts of the police have been directly threatened by the behaviour of sections of the media. For example, during the Iranian Embassy siege at Princes Gate, London, in 1980, the Metropolitan Police were particularly concerned to ensure total secrecy and surprise for the hostage rescue by the SAS. However, one ITN film crew defied police instructions and succeeded in filming the rescuers as they were abseiling down the walls of the Embassy. If those pictures had been shown live on TV they could have jeopardised the entire hostage rescue.

Another striking example of media irresponsibility occurred during the hijacking of a Kuwaiti airliner by Hizballah terrorists in 1988. While the airliner was on the ground at Larnaca, Cyprus, there might have been an opportunity to mount a hostage rescue operation by an elite commando group. A major obstacle to such an operation was the unrelenting intrusiveness of the international media surrounding the aircraft with infrared equipment, so that even during the hours of darkness it would have been impossible for a rescue operation to have been launched without its presence being given away by the media.

A different kind of media irresponsibility led to a British court abandoning a trial in January 1997 of five IRA terrorists and an armed robber in connection with the escape from a top security prison at Whitemoor. The specific reason given by the trial judge was that the London Evening Standard newspaper had published material that prevented the men from having a fair trial. This kind of problem is less likely to occur in Scotland, where the *sub judice* rule has traditionally been rigorously enforced by the courts and adhered to by the media.

In an open society with free media it is impossible to guarantee that police anti-terrorist operations will be safeguarded against being compromised or disrupted by irresponsible media activity. However, a great deal can be achieved by ensuring that expert press liaison and news management are an intrinsic part of the police response to any terrorist campaign, and the contingency planning and crisis management processes. Indeed, in a democratic society a sound and effective public information policy, harnessing the great power of the mass media in so far as this is possible, is a vital element in a successful strategy against terrorism.

This power of the media and the political leadership to mobilise democratic public opinion, so contemptuously ignored by the terrorist movements, reveals a crucial flaw in terrorist strategy. The terrorist assumes that the target group he seeks to coerce will always fall victim to intimidation if his threatened or actual violence is sufficiently severe. He believes in the ultimate inevitability of a collapse of will on the part of his adversary. Even on the face of it this is a somewhat naive assumption. Why should people subjected to threats behave with such docility and weakness? Not only do terrorists frequently score an 'own goal', they also often succeed in hardening society's resistance towards them, and in provoking tougher, more effective counter-measures of a kind which may decimate or permanently debilitate their revolutionary movement.

There are a number of other important ways in which responsible media in a democracy serve to frustrate the aims of terrorists. Terrorists like to Present themselves as noble Robin Hoods, champions of the oppressed and downtrodden. By showing the savage cruelty of terrorists' violence and the way in which they violate the rights of the innocent, the media can help to shatter this myth. It is quite easy to show, by plain photographic evidence, how terrorists have failed to observe any laws or rules of war, how they have murdered women and children, the old and the sick, without compunction. For in terrorist practice no one is innocent, no one can be neutral, for all are potentially expendable for the transcendental ends of terrorist cause.

What else can the media do in a positive way to aid in the struggle against terrorism? There are numerous practical forms of help they can provide. Responsible and accurate reporting of incidents can

create heightened vigilance among the public to observe, for example, unusual packages, suspicious persons or behaviour. At the practical level the media can carry warnings to the public from the police, and instructions as to how they should react to an emergency. Frequently media with international coverage can provide valuable data and leads concerning foreign movements, links between personalities and different terrorist personalities and different terrorist organisations, new types of weaponry and possible future threats, such as the planning of an international terrorist 'spectacular', or warning signs of a new threat.

Finally, the media also provide an indispensable forum for informed discussion concerning the social and political implications of terrorism and the development of adequate policies and counter-measures. And media which place a high value on democratic freedoms will, rightly and necessarily, continually remind the authorities of their broader responsibilities to ensure that the response to terrorism is consistent with the rule of law, respect for basic rights and the demands of social justice.

In sum, it can be argued that these contributions by the media to the war against terrorism are so valuable that they outweigh the disadvantages and risks and the undoubted damage caused by a small minority of irresponsible journalists and broadcasters. The positive work of the media has been either gravely underestimated or ignored. It is always fair game, especially for politicians, to attack the media. A more considered assessment suggests that the media in western liberal states are a weapon that can be used as a major tool in the defeat of terrorism. The media need not become the instrument of the terrorist.

We have briefly examined the perspective of the law enforcement authorities on media coverage of terrorism. We have also noted that although the mass media in an open society are highly vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation by terrorists, they can also make an invaluable contribution to the defeat of terrorism. What are the major policy options for a democratic society in regard to the media's response to terrorism?

First, there is the policy of *laissez faire*. This assumes that no specific steps should be taken as regards media coverage of terrorism, however serious the violence or threat of violence may be. The dangers of approach are fairly obvious: sophisticated and media-wise terrorists, organisations will exploit the enormous power of the media to enhance their ability to create a climate of fear and disruption, to amplify their propaganda of the deed to publicise their cause or to force concessions of ransoms out of the government or out of companies or wealthy individuals. At best the *laissez-faire* approach is likely to encourage attacks which endanger life and limb and place property at risk. At the most severe end of the spectrum of violence,

the tame acquiescence of the mass media as an ally of a terrorist Campaign may help to induce a situation of incipient or actual civil war with a concomitant threat to the stability and survival of the democracy in question.

A second policy option on media response to terrorism is some form of media censorship or statutory regulation. In view of the great power wielded by the media, for good or ill, it is hardly surprising to find that, when faced with severe terrorist campaigns, several democratic countries have sought to deny the terrorist direct access to the important platform of the broadcast media. This was clearly the prime concern underlying former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's demand that the terrorists should be starved of the oxygen of publicity, and the British government's ban, since rescinded, on broadcasting the voices of terrorist spokespersons.

The closest parallel to the media ban on the use of IRA/Sinn Fein voices in interviews with Ulster terrorists is the Irish Republic's ban, under Section 31 of their 1960 Broadcasting Authority Act, on the carrying of interviews with PIRA, Sinn Fein and other terrorist spokespersons. Sinn Fein protested that it was a legal political party in the Republic of Ireland and therefore had the legal right to broadcasting time. However, the Minister who imposed the ban, Conor Cruise O'Brien, said that Sinn Fein was not a legitimate political party but rather a 'public relations agency for a murder gang'.²¹ Predictably, a similar debate surrounded the British ban on Sinn Fein voices.

Students of Irish politics have argued that their media ban (rescinded during the PIRA's cease-fire) did actually damage Sinn Fein's efforts to build electoral support and sympathy in the Republic by denying it the aura of legitimacy accorded by TV appearances. The angry protests of Sinn Fein in response to the British ban on the voices of their spokespersons suggests that Sinn Fein leaders were also convinced that the ban damaged them. However, in due course the British TV news programmes became so skilled at providing actors' voices to accompany film footage of Sinn Fein leaders that it really turned the voice ban into farce.

In the wake of the Dunblane and Tasmania massacres in 1996 there was a revival of interest in proposals to curb film and television violence. In July 1996 the Australian government announced new censorship guidelines for films and videos and a requirement that all new television sets be fitted with V-chip, an electronic locking device that allows parents to block reception of programmes coded as violent or offensive. It is noteworthy that Australia is the only country so far to have introduced these measures, the most reaching effort to curb film and television violence, even though its government admits that: 'No one pretends that you can demonstrate a line connection between electronic violence and real-life violence'. It is also interesting to note

that measures of this kind have not been proposed or adopted by states experiencing high levels of politically motivated violence. At the more draconian end of the spectrum of democratic states' efforts to starve terrorists of publicity, the Spanish government introduced a law in 1984 that makes it a criminal offence to support or praise 'the activities typical of a terrorist organisation ... Or the deeds or commemorative dates of their members by publishing or broadcasting via the mass media, articles expressing opinion, news reports, graphical illustrations, communiques, and in general by any other forms of dissemination'. Spanish judges were at one stage even empowered to close down radio stations as an exceptional precautionary measure.

In 1976 the Federal Republic of Germany brought in the Anti-Constitutional Advocacy Act, making an offence of publicity advocating and/or encouraging others to commit an offence against the stability of the Federal Republic.

In general, however, even those democratic states most plagued by terrorism have been reluctant to take the route of comprehensive censorship of the media's coverage of terrorism. It is widely recognised that it is important to avoid the mass media being hijacked and manipulated by terrorists, but if the freedom of the media is sacrificed in the name of combating terrorism one has allowed small groups of terrorists to destroy one of the key foundations of a democratic society. Censorship, in whatever guise, plays into the hands of enemies of democracy. It is also an insult to the intelligence of the general public, and would totally undermine confidence in the veracity of the media if censorship was to be introduced. We should try to uphold the vital principle of free speech so eloquently championed by Thomas Jefferson two centuries ago:

that truth is great and will prevail if left to herself; that she is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict unless disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate.

However, in any free and responsible society no freedom of expression is totally unlimited. Most of us believe, for example, that pornography should be banned from TV and radio. Most decent citizens would also be horrified if the mass media began to provide a platform for race hate propaganda, or for drug-pushers or rapists to come on the screen to boast their crimes and to incite others to commit crimes.

The third option on media policy on terrorism coverage, and the approach most favoured by the more responsible mass media organisations, is voluntary self-restraint to try to avoid the dangers of manipulation and exploitation by terrorist groups. Many major media organisations have adopted guidelines for their staff with the aim of helping to prevent the more obvious pitfalls. For example, CBS News'

guidelines commit the organisation to 'thoughtful, conscientious care and restraint' in its coverage of terrorism, avoiding giving 'an excessive platform for the terrorist/kidnapper..' '.. no live coverage of the terrorist/kidnapper' (though live on-the-spot reporting by CBS News reporters is not limited thereby), avoiding interference with the authorities' communications (e.g. telephone lines), using expert advisers in hostage situations to help avoid questions or reports that 'might tend to exacerbate the situation', obeying 'all police instructions' (but reporting to their superiors any instructions that seem to be intended to massage or suppress the news) and attempting to achieve such overall balance as to length' that 'the (terrorist) story does not unduly crowd out other important news of the hour/day'.

The above guidelines are for the most part entirely laudable, and, if properly and consistently implemented, they would help to avoid the worst excesses of media coverage of terrorism. However, one needs to bear in mind that many of those who work in mass media organisations appear blissfully unaware of any guidelines on terrorism news coverage. There is very little evidence of necessary briefing and training of editors and journalists in this sensitive area, and no evidence of any serious effort by media organisations to enforce their own guidelines.²² It is governments, frustration over the apparent inadequacy of media self-restraints that leads some to advocate some form of statutory regulation. If the mass media genuinely wish to exercise due care and responsibility in covering the exceedingly sensitive subject of terrorism, in situations where lives may well be at grave risk, they will need to work harder at devising measures of self-restraint that are both appropriate and effective.²³

NOTES

1. For a useful discussion of the conceptual literature see Alex P. Schmid and Albert J. Jongman, *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories and Literature* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing 1988) pp. 1-32.
2. Trends in international terrorism around the world are reviewed in the RAND and RAND-St Andrews chronologies published by RAND Corporation, Santa Monica and, since 1995, in the academic journal *Terrorism and Political Violence* (TPV) (7/4, 8/3). See also the US State Department annual publication.
3. This sect is the subject of a classic study; Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in 4. Islam* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1967).
4. Russian and Balkan terrorist movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are described in Walter Laqueur, *Terrorism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1977).

5. The relationship between the mass media and coverage of terrorism is analysed in Alex Schmid and Janny de Graaf, *Violence as Communication: Insurgent Terrorism and the Western News Media* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage 1982), Richard Clutterbuck, *The Media and Political Violence* (London: Macmillan 1981) and Abraham Miller (ed.), *Terror, the Media and the Law* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Transaction 1982).

6. On the Munich Olympics massacre see Schmid and de Graaf, *Violence as Communication* (note 5) pp.3

7. Michel Wieviorka, *The Making of Terrorism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1988) P.43.

8. Ibid., p.43.

9. Ibid., p.44.

10. Ibid., p.44.

11. Ibid., pp.44-5.

12. This is a point made very powerfully in Alex P. Schmid, 'Terrorism and the Media: The Ethics of Publicity', *TPV* 1/4 (Oct. 1989) pp.539-65.

13. On the terrorists' use of propaganda war see Maurice Tugwell, 'Politics and Propaganda of the Provisional IRA, in Paul Wilkinson (ed.), *British Perspectives on Terrorism* (London: George Allen and Unwin 1981) pp. 13-40, and Maurice Tugwell, 'Revolutionary Propaganda and Possible Counter-Measures', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, King's College, University of London, 1978.

14. In this connection the author has observed in a recent article in Martin Warner and Roget Crisp (eds), *Terrorism Protest and Power* (London: Elgar 1990) p. 52: 'Terrorists are fond of using romantic euphemisms; they claim to be revolutionary heroes yet they commit cowardly acts, and lack the heroic qualities of humanity and magnanimity. They profess to be revolutionary soldiers yet they attack only by stealth, murder and maim the innocent, and disdain all conventions of war. They claim to bring liberation when in reality they generally seek power for themselves.'

15. On terrorists' manufacture of media events see the useful discussion in Schmid and de Grant *Violence as Communication* (note 5) pp.9-56.

16. See Schmid, 'Terrorism and the Media' (note 12) pp.539-65.

17. Ibid., p.549.

18. Ibid., p.555.

19. Hamid Mowlana, 'The Role of the Media in the US-Iranian Conflict', in Andrew Arno and Wimal Dissanake (eds), *The News Media in National International Conflict* (Boulder, CO: Westview 1984).

20. On this point, see the particularly useful discussion in Clutterbuck, *The Media and Political Violence* (note 5).

21. Statement by Dr O'Brien reported in *The Times*, 20 Oct. 1976.

22. Evidence for this assessment can be found in Tim Gallimore's valuable paper, 'Media Compliance with Voluntary Press Guidelines For Covering Terrorism', presented at the Terrorism and the News Media Research Project conference, 'Communication in Terrorist Events: Functions, Themes and Consequences', 1988. For a thoughtful discussion of SOM of the problems involved, see Ronald D. Crelinsten, 'Terrorism and the Media: Problems, Solutions and Counterproblems', in David Charters (ed.), *Democratic Responses to International Terrorism* (New York: Transnational Publisher 1991) pp.267-308

23. Baroness Thatcher, the former British Prime Minister, made a powerful point in an interview published in *The Times*, 30 March 1988: 'The news media should consider whether those who, like terrorists, use freedom to destroy freedom, should have so much publicity for their work.'