

## The Mediatization of Violence: A Model for Utilizing Public Discourse and Networking to Counter Global Terrorism

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### Abstract

This paper analyzes ways in which the media, particularly television coverage, has enhanced global terrorism. It argues that terrorists must have some kind of publicity in order to gain attention, inspire fear and respect, and secure favorable understanding of their cause. The paper attempts to show how a tripartite relationship of the media, governments and terrorists is responsible for the growing global interest in terrorism. Analyzing selected literature on media role in promoting the argument about terrorism, the paper explains ways in which the broadcast and online media serve a dual role: (1) as the propaganda machine for terrorists and, (2) as an advocate for governments to enhance information sharing on terrorism and suppress the terrorist culture in different regions. It describes various terrorist groups, setting the context for understanding how the media has fostered the proliferation of terrorist cells. The last section offers long term suggestions to end terrorist activity around the world and how governments and communities can limit terrorist destruction of the global society.

**Keywords:** Violence; Mediatization; Public discourse; Global terrorism; Networking; Media

### Background

One cannot discuss terrorism without associating it with countries and the media, particularly television and newspapers. In fact, in recent years, stories about terrorism are not only part of international news coverage but the nature of their coverage is designed to instill fear and bring a sense of urgency among governments and citizens. As part of their reporting plan, television networks have made ISIS, Boko Haram and Al Qaeda household names, even among children.

Terrorist attacks in Asia, the United States, Europe, Africa or the Middle East can be said to be largely exploited by the media for the benefit of their operational efficiency, information gathering, recruitment, fund raising, and propaganda schemes [1,2]. Other scholars contend that technologies have improved the capability of groups and cells in the areas of proselytize coordination, security, mobility and lethality [3]. In short, information technology has strengthened the coordination among terrorist groups and increased their engagement with the media to transmit their message to the world public.

Television networks compete in their coverage of 'breaking news' about attacks, as reporters with the help of rolling cameras present grueling images of people maimed and communities bombed, instigating a sense of threat in viewers. In the same vein, the terrorists can be said to be perpetrating violence as a way of communicating a political message to a larger audience [1]. By sharing pre-recorded tapes to the media networks or putting out press releases claiming responsibility for massive bombings of civilians, the terrorist group leaders use the media as a forum to promote their political agenda. A shift in their social media strategy since the heyday of al-Qaeda's operations in Iraq and Afghanistan in the 1990s to the operations of ISIS networks in European, Asian, Middle Eastern and African cities and communities between 2012 and 2016 suggests that the media has become a vehicle for transmitting terrorists' social, political and cultural agenda.

From late 2004 through early 2008, Al Qaeda produced numerous low-quality, amateurish videos featuring battle triumphs both in

Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as pronouncements from Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri exhorting young Muslims to jihad. The videos presumably produced on inexpensive video cameras and then uploaded to the internet from cafés in Pakistan and elsewhere were nonetheless a powerful reminder to the West that Al-Qaeda's agenda to defeat the "far enemy" remained operational [4]. Years of painful and expensive US and allied operations may have silenced Al-Qaeda's core, but then, rising from another quarter, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula metastasized in Yemen, dragging Western focus away from Afghanistan and Iraq [4]. Boko Haram operating in Nigeria, Chad and Northern Cameroon and other terrorist groups in Libya, Mali, and Mumbai are a cold reminder that the movement is not only directed at the "far enemy" (the US and the West); it is a global phenomenon without a specific goal. The recent bombings in upscale neighborhoods in the US and hotels in Burkina Faso and Mali where security cameras are common reflect the fact that terrorists have different agendas, the most conspicuous one being to bring the world's attention to their existence.

In the preceding section, terrorism will be described in terms of the role played by television, newspaper and social media tools such as Facebook, websites and other online interest group platforms. To determine media role in prioritizing the subject of terrorism in its international coverage, it is necessary to first review operational meanings of terrorism.

### Interpretations of terrorism

Three new trends appear to be emerging which impact on the relationship between the media, the terrorist, and government--

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anonymous terrorism; more violent terrorist incidents; and terrorist attacks on media personnel and institutions [5]. Terrorism can also be defined based on the social orientation of the group. Alex Schmid et al. [6] compiled a key study using 109 different definitions of terrorism and came up with a list of possible definitions. The media presents its own view that is different from that of the policy maker, public or media researcher. To understand these divergent views to terrorism, a definition of the term is required.

'Terrorism' is synonymous with 'publicity' and 'public fear' in recent times in that it encompasses the use of violence acts to frighten the people to try to achieve a political goal. The notion of terrorism presented by television networks differs from that of lawmakers and the general public where terrorist activities have taken place. Images of real-time terrorist acts splashed across television screens and graphic videos of beheadings filmed by Islamic State and released on the internet suggest that the communication and information sharing of knowledge on violence can trigger more attacks. In fact, there is now evidence that media coverage of terrorist attacks is linked to greater attacks. Michael Jetter [7], a professor at the School of Economics and Finance at Universidad EAFIT in Medellin, Colombia, in a study on media and terrorist attacks worldwide has found that media attention to any terror attack is predictive of the likelihood of another strike in the affected country. Jetter compared headline-grabbing terrorist attacks with those that occurred during a bigger story, such as a natural disaster, and found a clear link between the number of articles devoted to the initial terrorist incident and the number of follow-up attacks over the next few weeks. In his analysis of 60,000 terrorist attacks between 1970 and 2012, Michael Jetter in an interview in the Guardian Newspaper has noted an exponential increase in the number of terrorist attacks. And the total number of casualties from terrorist attacks in the past 15 years has soared from 3,387 to 15,396. This increase in the number of deaths is a result of terrorist organizations receiving extensive media attention, as Jetter [7] revealed<sup>1</sup>. In fact, suicide missions receive significantly more media coverage, which could explain their increased popularity among terrorist groups. More complex attack modes such as skyjackings display longer cycles than simpler modes like threats and hoaxes or bombings [8]. More significantly, both attack modes get the greatest attention of media networks around the world than suicide missions in that they are more unpredictable, and require extensive and time consuming journalistic investigation.

Another interpretation of terrorism comes from the political sphere. Donald Trump, with a background in business, not politics or diplomacy, promised to place a ban on all Muslims entering the United States, accusing the religious group of promoting terrorist acts against American citizens<sup>2</sup>. Throughout the American Presidential elections campaign in 2015 and 2016, candidates and pundits on American television news networks shared their philosophy on how to prevent ISIS from infiltrating the United States. During televised debates and one-on-one interviews, they presented terrorism as the foremost problem facing America, and rolled out their plans to end terrorism<sup>3</sup>. The candidate's message may have boded well with voters because he became the Republican nominee, representing the Republican Party

<sup>1</sup>The interview was republished on Yahoo News. <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/aug/01/media-coverage-terrorism-further-violence>. Retrieved May 10, 2016.

<sup>2</sup>Throughout his campaign for Presidency of the United States Broadcast by CNN, Fox News, Businessman Donald Trump repeatedly cited Muslims as being responsible for terrorist acts against Americans, thereby promoting a sense of fear and uncertainty in the cities, suburban and rural communities?

<sup>3</sup>Frequent broadcasts on CNN, Fox News and Evening News from the major networks (CBS, NBC and ABC) have a segment on candidates expressing their position on the subject.

and its ideology during the 2016 Presidential campaign. According to all major news networks in the US and abroad and statements issued by the Republican Chairman, Mr. Donald Trump may have defeated other candidates with his message on the banning of Muslims into the US. Coupled with this notion is the perception that many Muslims are dangerous people, prone to destroying Christianity-the majority of believers who live in the US and the rest of the West. A Pew Global Attitudes Project survey of more than 90,000 people in 50 nations, including many Arab countries, published online November 10, 2005, reveals that Muslims still have a negative view of Americans and the U.S. continues to face enormous challenges regarding its public image in Arab and Muslim countries [9]. Kohut reports that Anti-Americanism in the region is driven largely by aversion to U.S. policies, such as the war in Iraq, the war on terrorism, and U.S. support for Israel, and the general perception that the U.S. has failed to consider the interests of countries in the region when it acts in the international arena. Similarly, the public's concerns in the US about terrorism have surged, and positive ratings of the government's handling of terrorism have plummeted following the terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, California. The Pew Research Center states that attitudes to terrorism and security, as well as perceptions of whether Islam is more likely than other religions to encourage violence have indeed not changed. In a survey of 1,500 adults in three American communities of the US Government's handling of terrorism since the infamous September 11 attack, conducted December 8-13 2015, the Center has found that since the start of 2015, the share of Americans who say the government is doing well in reducing the threat of terrorism has fallen by 26 percentage points – from 72% to 46% – and now stands at its lowest point in the post-9/11 era<sup>4</sup>. However, it is not clear whether public perceptions are based solely on television news coverage of terrorism and other factors such as new legislation to combat terrorism or pre-existing stereotypes of Muslims.

### Terrorism, governments and the media

Terrorists, governments, and the general public have different perspectives of the function, roles and responsibilities of the media. As stated earlier, terrorist need publicity in order to promote their cause, and since the media tends to report all sides of a story, they expect segments of the public to have a favorable understanding of their message. Simply put, terrorists see the media as their ally. Raphael F. Perl, of the Defense Division of the Congressional Research Service in the US has successfully argued that terrorists sympathetic personnel in press positions--particularly in wire services--and in some instances may even seek to control smaller news organizations through funding and seek to court, or place, sympathetic personnel in press positions--particularly in wire services--and in some instances may even seek to control smaller news organizations through funding<sup>5</sup>. For governments the media defend national interests when covering terrorist events; it should serve as the eye of the government and defend public programs designed to counter terrorist plots and actions. Members of the public maintain differing and often opposing perspectives of the media depending on their level of education and political views. Peel has pointed that such perceptions drive respective behaviors during terrorist incidents--often resulting in tactical and strategic gains, or losses, to the terrorist operation and the overall terrorist cause. The challenge to the governmental and press community is to understand the dynamics of terrorist enterprise and to develop policy options to

<sup>4</sup><http://www.people-press.org/2015> This article was accessed May 17, 2016

<sup>5</sup>A position paper posted at <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/state/crs-terror-media.htm>

serve government, media and societal interests<sup>6</sup>.

To find the right policies that can serve government, media and community interests, we need to assess the impact of terrorism on nations through the media lens.

### Mediatized terrorism and its impact on global communities

The impact of terrorism has been magnified through media ability to disseminate news of such attacks instantaneously throughout the world [10,11]. Krueger et al. [12] emphasize that “the intention of terrorists (is) to cause fear and terror among a target audience rather than the harm caused to the immediate victims.” For their part, some scholars focus on how governments, security forces, and terrorist groups seek to manipulate the news, including the legal, formal and informal government censorship [13]. Brian Monahan [11] demonstrates how the 9/11 attack has been transformed into a morality tale centered on patriotism, victimization, and heroes. For Brian Monahan [11], coverage of the terrorist acts in American cities since September 11 has been transformed into a morality tale centered on patriotism, victimization and heroes. To prove this, Monahan states that the media have taken part in converting the “ideology of September 11,” into “a morality tale about patriotism, loss, victimhood and heroes” (p. 172). This argument makes sense in that American communities hold mediatized events in commemoration of those killed during the attack and their families on the anniversary of the attack affectionately known in the US as 9/11.

Reporting terrorism equally curbs press freedom not only in countries with fragile political systems but in those seeking to maintain a strong man image among their allies and enemies.

Media representation of the terrorist attack by Islamic extremists in several American cities on September 11, 2001 that killed more than 3,500 people and destroyed infrastructures, supposedly in retaliation of the war in Iraq, has raised serious concerns about the state of the hitherto secure nation, the US. Currently, 29% of Americans cite terrorism (18%) or national security (8%) as the most important problem facing the country. Eighty-three percent (83%) now regard ISIS as a major threat to the well-being of the U.S., up from 67% in August 2014, according to the Pew Research Center, which focuses on the US politics and policy<sup>7</sup>. The incident did not only create fear and insecurity among the citizens; it enhanced the American belief in hope and solidarity.

One can understand the mindset of the American people to utilize a tragic day in its modern political history to remember people killed on American soil through an act of terror, for the American spirit is built on turning the negative into a positive experience. However, this notion does not apply in the context of Nigeria, Somalia, Chad, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries where terrorist acts are common and media coverage tends to damage community spirit. Simply put, the television and newspaper articles in those countries focus on the number of weekly and monthly attacks and less on the efforts being made by civic groups to combat terrorism. One is more likely to see images of destroyed structures and deserted areas on international television than those of authorities discussing plans to address terrorism.

### Convergence of terrorism and low income countries

<sup>6</sup><http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/state/crs-terror-media.htm>

<sup>7</sup><http://www.people-press.org/2015/12/15/views-of-governments-handling-of-terrorism-fall-to-post-911-low/>

While the news media has focused on ISIS bombing in selective European and American cities, terrorist groups have been spreading their influence in low income countries. There are social and economic reasons for the spread. Socially, ISIS through recordings that it prepares and disseminates on the internet explains that its acts aim to bring global attention to Islam and that it is raging Jihad-a war against opponents of Islam. Whether there is enough or insufficient evidence to support this claim, it is understood that ISIS has been recruiting young people from Algeria to Pakistan, while Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb region, and other terrorist groups stationed in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan have not only influenced local extremist organizations such as Boko Haram, al-Mulathamun Brigade, Ansari, and Ansar al-Shari ‘a in Benghazi, they have also spread into smaller communities due to brainwashing. Peter Bergen [14], CNN’s national security analyst, a vice president at New America Foundation and professor at Arizona State University, has stated that three other groups -al-Mujahidin in the Arabian Peninsula, al-Mujahidin in Libya and al-Mujahidin in Yemen - also recorded statements of allegiance to ISIS, which ISIS broadcast online. ISIS now controls the eastern Libyan city of Derna, not far from the Egyptian border. ISIS expansion of its geographical reach in those Islamic regions has been enhanced by schools where young people are indoctrinated to destroy the human species with the promise that their acts of violence are an honor to their Maker-Allah. Recorded audio and video messages disseminated online that show leaders and young people in Islamic countries have been copiously received by young Muslims who have not been adequately exposed to other religious teachings.

ISIS is said to be winning the war on terror because it has substantial funding partners and resources at its disposal. Bergen [15] has remarked that partnering with ISIS makes sense from an economic perspective for many of these organizations, especially the smaller militant groups. The militant groups rely on resources from the main ones in order to survive and recruit sympathizers.

### Marketing and Networking

It has been reported that ISIS has been spreading its message online mainly by posting photos and statements to highlight its military strength and territorial advances. According to a web-based data mining software, a large number of pro-Isis tweets originated in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Gulf countries (BBC Date). Faisal Irshaid, a BBC Journalist in the Middle East has found that Isis provides extensive details of its operations, including the number of bombings, suicide missions and assassinations it has carried out, and of checkpoints and towns it controls in its Twitter feed. But the most poignant reasons that terrorism has spread in low income countries are the following:

- (1) Many recruits are disillusioned and they come from poor backgrounds and are less educated or unemployed.
- (2) Girls are targeted and recruited as bombers because Islamic families still consider them less valuable than men, and ISIS offers their families a fee in exchange for the girls.
- (3) The military in low income countries are not as equipped as the terrorist groups that easily infiltrate their territory.
- (4) There is a lack of prevention programs in some countries, and resources in low income countries to fight terrorism.

### Media role in spreading terrorism

Terrorists use different types of media to generate publicity and draw attention to their cause, particularly among Islamic extremists.

They are known to exploit television, radio or the internet because they realize that these instruments are valuable resources in instilling fear within a community or winning the hearts and minds of the populace [15]. It has been revealed that videos produced by terrorist groups, especially ISIS, are highly doctored and rife with special effects. A radical US based political organization called Counterpunch has reported that ISIS has its own 24-hour TV channel, and a merchandise that it is marketing as a corporation or even government does. In an article posted on May 8, 2015, Ben Norton [16] explains how the media has helped ISIS to spread its propaganda. He argues that the media created a paranoia among Americans by basing its allegations most often simply on what ISIS itself says. This is evidenced in a CNN poll conducted in September 2015 in which ninety percent of Americans indicated that they believed that ISIS poses a threat to the US. However, he adds the media failed to emphasize that many of the foiled "ISIS-linked" terrorist plots in the West often involve undercover police informants and/or provocateurs. That presupposes not just media bias but a deliberate attempt to induce fear among people in a particular community and provoke the government to take action to protect its citizens from harm.

Terrorist propaganda is spreading not only through electronic sources; downloadable print materials produced by Islamic extremists have played a role as well. Leftist terrorist groups, such as al Qaeda in Iraq and leading thinkers in the "global jihadist movement," have authored books as well. *Announcement to the People of the Birth of the Islamic State, authored by Uthman bin Abd al-Rahman al-Tamimi* is a book that provides justification for al Qaeda's establishment of the Islamic state of Iraq [17]. By making the books available for downloading, the authors aim to reach as many readers as possible.

### Impact of terrorism on democratization

It is understood around the world that terrorists' main goal is to prevent the transition from an authoritarian democracy or semi-democracy to an authoritarian political system in which the gun is the law. Clearly, this ideology negates the norm that countries around the world have been striving to address for decades and centuries. In fact, citizens and leaders of various countries with the help of foreign powers, especially countries with strong military programs and political institutions have been working on democratizing their nations, encouraged by the notion that an environment in which people are free to channel their own thoughts and expectations through individuals they elect is more conducive to live in than one in which they are totally controlled.

In fact, convincing evidence has been produced that points to the fact that democratic regimes rarely go to war with one another and democracies are less susceptible to waging civil wars and internal armed conflicts than nondemocratic regimes [18]. It is also known that global interests would be advanced if there was more democracy in the world [19]. Also democracies share norms that preclude wars among themselves. Put differently, liberal ideologies do not provide justification for wars between liberal democracies [20]. Those arguments are predicated on the stance that peace promoted internationally benefits the world in the long run. Strikingly, various acts of violence befitting the pragmatic definition of terrorism occur in democratic environments as well.

Democracies face major dilemmas when acts of violence fall under the rubric of terrorism. Although recent focus on international terrorism has an unprecedented impact on national-level policy,

with implications for both mature and emergent democracies<sup>8</sup>, the problem of how terrorism can be addressed without undermining the foundations of a democratization process has social scientists scrambling to find a suitable answer. It is not easy to eliminate terrorism without compromising democracy. In fact, the key challenge to democratic governments when faced with terrorism is defending the security of their citizens while upholding their rights. The test of a strong democracy is when its government creates challenging policies that protect citizen rights while ensuring their security. However, in a democratic country anti-terrorism laws often challenge the rights and freedoms of the citizens against some measures that are necessary for a positive outcome. Legislation could ironically have a greater negative impact on the citizens than the terrorist networks. Let's take the case of the Israeli government that enacted the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (PTO) in 1948 following terrorist attacks. In an important paper on the impact of terrorism on democracy in Israel, Eunice Buhler [21] has found that the PTO legislation enacted by Israel not only strikes a balance between liberal civil liberties and protection against the constant threat of terrorist attacks, but it also adds to the quality of Israel's democracy by providing confidence and reducing fear in society (p. 63).

### The Economic Value of Terrorism

There is an uneven cost of managing terrorism, with fragile states having to pull resources from other critical areas of national security to address emergencies involving terrorists within their countries and on their borders. For example, the infiltration of a Nigeria based Islamic group known as Boko Haram into Niger, Chad and Cameroon borders since the start of 2016 forced the countries' leaders to dispatch more military forces to protect their borders. Broadcast and online media reports in those countries revealed that many soldiers were killed trying to free men, women and children captured by the terrorists. Images of school girls in the custody of the terrorists are often broadcast on CNN and other international media outlets, giving the free world a chilling reminder of the devastating effects of terrorist acts on society and the cost of securing their safety. Also of great concern is the cost of relocating the soldiers to the troubled region and rehabilitating the released prisoners in those low income countries.

### Financial investments

It is, however, a travesty to compare that situation to one in US airports and seaports where only knowledge of a terrorist plot has local officials mobilizing their military and police departments and instantly recruiting thousands of security personnel to protect people and infrastructures. This imbalance in access to resources is only one of the major difficulties in combatting transnational terrorism. Put simply, many Western countries that were formerly complacent about worldwide terrorism have increased spending significantly after the terrorist attacks on US cities on September 11, 2001. Europe, Australia and the US, in particular, have an approved budget to combat the social disease. The US, for instance, has reportedly spent approximately \$16 billion on counter terrorism efforts, about twice the budget it had for the same purpose in 2001. The Wall Street Journal reported that in April 2015, France dedicated 7,000 soldiers to counter terrorist attacks and raised counter-terrorism spending by 3.8 billion Euros (\$4.2 billion) for the next four years. French President Francois Hollande reportedly pledged to safeguard 31.4 Euros in 2016 alone<sup>9</sup>. But spending on

<sup>8</sup>Democracy and Terrorism: The Impact of the Anti, written by Judith Large. Posted at [http://www.idea.int/publications/dchs/upload/dchs\\_vol2\\_sec4\\_2.pdf](http://www.idea.int/publications/dchs/upload/dchs_vol2_sec4_2.pdf)

<sup>9</sup>In the article appropriately titled "France to Increase Military Spending to Counter terrorism published April 29, 2015 in The Wall Street Journal . It was posted on Yahoo News by [www.wsj.com](http://www.wsj.com), retrieved June 6, 2015

terrorism has not increased exponentially among countries considered to be at the front end of the war against global violence despite the steady rise in terrorist acts. Imagine that the global military spending for the US and its allies- Japan, South Korea, Israel and Saudi Arabia peaked to 75% in 1995 from 62% in 1990 and dropped back to 60% in 2015 according to the International Monetary Fund. The (US-based) Council on Foreign Relations alludes to the negative trend since 2005 by revealing that there has been an 8% decline in global spending since 2005. However, Kristina Zucchi, a freelance financial writer who has worked as an equity analyst for buy-side investment companies and other private equity sectors, has recently observed that the United States still leads the global terrorism fight as judged by its total military spending, while China, Russia, the United Kingdom and Japan remain among the top five military spending nations<sup>10</sup>. The financial investments are not enough to counter terrorism if we consider the fact that terrorist networks have only increased and spread into rich and poor countries and that they continue to utilize creative methods to finance their activities.

In the early 1990s, terrorists raised money by selling illicit drugs and counterfeit t-shirts on New York City's Broadway, financing the bombing of the World Trade Center [22]. They have continued to transfer money using money changers, couriers, laundering, delivering it in person to their partners, or through formal banking systems such as the Lebanese Canadian Bank, Al-Madina Bank and United Credit Bank. Even respected global monetary networks such as the Wall Street Exchange Center, United Arab Emirates and Traveler's Express including Western Union and Money Gram are implicated in the transfer of funds for terrorist activities around the world. The physical location of the terrorist group determines the level of its convenience to move money and implement its activities. Freeman et al. [23] have observed that the group easily moves cash into or out of tribal areas, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan, and refrain from using formal banks. This makes sense, given that it would be easier for investigators to track a bank transaction particularly in rural areas where there is a limited amount of banking compared to urban areas. With gold in high demand in Asia and the Middle East because of dowry and festivities related to it, terrorist groups have been increasingly successful in generating revenue to finance terrorist activities. Freeman et al. [23] summarize it like this:

"Al-Qaeda's alleged trade in West African conflict diamonds was more convenient than using cash or gold to move funds. West Africa is geographically distant from South Asia, but diamonds are easy to hide, and therefore much more convenient than cash. Gold is less convenient because of its weight and bulk, but given the importance of gold for dowries in both South Asia and the Middle East, and the number of large gold souks throughout the region, large shipments of gold in the form of high-end jewelry will not attract much notice. The convenience of a particular method will clearly depend on geographic and topographic features like an uncontrolled border as well as demographic cultural, ethnic, linguistic factors [23]". Surely, the high level of creativity in financing terrorism makes it difficult for the US and its democratic allies to effectively combat terrorism.

### The difficulty in combatting global terrorism

Since the terrorist attacks on 9/11, the fight to end such attacks has become a key issue in discussions among country leaders. It was

<sup>10</sup>Zucchi's important article on the amount of money countries spend on terrorism was published March 24, 2016 at Investopedia, an online site devoted to educating the public on investments. The site was purchased by Forbes in 2010 for \$42 million.

a key topic at the United Nations General Assembly in 2015. At the plenary broadcast around the world, the US and Israel accused some Arab countries of sponsoring terrorism, making it difficult for accusers and accused to discuss strategies for eliminating terrorism. Further, diplomatic arrangements have failed to produce positive results.

Political action groups and media pundits have claimed that some rich countries are arming violent terrorists in the Middle East as part of their geopolitical strategy to overthrow heads of state they do not like. The crises in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Iraq and Syria that led to the overthrow of the countries' leaders were said to include the arming of local and regional groups that engaged the countries' military. According to the Center for Research on Globalization, the CIA warned the US President that "funding extremists rebels doesn't work" and that French terrorists who murdered the cartoonists in Paris apparently had just returned from waging war against the Syrian government, where they may directly have obtained US weapons and training" [24].

Terrorists take advantage of the loopholes in national privacy laws. For example, in the US it is illegal to tap private telephones and other hand held information equipment. A warrant is required to search people's homes even if such persons have prepared bombs and other tools to commit terrorist acts in the privacy of their homes. On March 22, 2016, Belgium terrorists completed plans that culminated in the bombing of the Brussels airport. Media reports showed that the police could not intervene overnight when the terrorist were plotting because of a clause in the privacy law. According to a document produced by the Belgian Privacy Commission titled Protection of Personal Data , "it is prohibited to collect, register or ask to disclose sensitive data related to race, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade-union membership, health, sex life, prosecutions or criminal or administrative convictions. Anyone doing so is punishable with a 550 to 550,000 euro fine and, in case of recidivism, with a three-month to two year imprisonment" [25].

Some countries have less stringent immigration policies, particularly in the obtaining of visa, residency, or citizenship status. An immigrant in the US on a permanent residency status or holder of the 'green card' can apply for citizenship after at least three years while his/her background is verified to make sure there is no criminal record. In France French citizenship can be claimed before a magistrate if one of the parents of a child is aged at least 13 and a resident in France. In the latter case, the law may be perpetrating violence in that the parent's criminal background is not necessarily screened. That weakness in the legal system allows persons with radical views to live on French soil and use French documents to travel abroad at will. No doubt, hundreds of the Jihadists trained in terrorists fields abroad are said to be French citizens, as Al Jazeera, CNN International, Reuters and BBC have reported since the London bombings on July 7, 2005.

European media often publish conflicting reports about the proliferation of terrorism in Europe. When the Paris café was bombed November 13, 2015, Germany's Bild am Sonntag (the widely distributed Sunday) newspaper raised questions over the security of Europe's borders while the front page of the Daily Telegraph of the United Kingdom focused on how two men reportedly entered Europe with false passports, posing as refugees. Reporting on the attack the Bild quoted German intelligence sources as saying that two suspected terrorists posing as Syrian refugees seeking asylum were allowed onto European soil by Greek officials and were supposed to take part in the Paris attacks. Justin Huggler, filing his story from Berlin, February 14, 2016, stated that Austrian authorities declined to comment on the new

claims<sup>11</sup>. The inconsistency in the coverage of the terrorist incident and the lack of commitment by authorities to share intelligence make it difficult for public officials in the European Union to have reliable data to combat terrorism.

Allies and countries affected by terrorist acts are not sharing information on potential terrorists and related behavior, allowing terrorists to cross borders, recruit vulnerable people and commit terrorist acts. The US Senate has made this claim. In a report published at Breit Bart, an online source, December 12, 2015, Texas Representative, Will Hurd is quoted as saying that America's European allies are not providing the American government the information it needs to keep terrorists off American shores. Following that comment, the House of Representatives passed legislation tightening up the Visa Waiver program known to allow citizens of specific countries to travel to the United States for tourism, business, or while in transit for up to 90 days without having to obtain a visa. The visa, however, allows citizens of friendly countries to enter the US and stay for three months. The problem with this allocation is that some citizens from friendly countries are capable of carrying out terrorist acts.

European countries where terrorist attacks have been common in the last five years do not normally share data on suspected terrorists partly because of language problems. For example, the police and custom officers do not understand the language or cannot communicate with their counterparts in another country, which makes tracking the movements of suspected terrorists a challenge. In addition to not sharing information, the European Union has few internal border checkpoints, making it easier for terrorists to cross borders without being detected [26]<sup>12</sup>. Potential terrorists can easily drive from France to Germany to Belgium without regular border or immigration control, and fly to the US or other countries.

### Challenges in controlling information technology to combat terrorism

Given that information can be easily transmitted to large numbers of people to influence their thinking and actions, terrorists have successfully used handheld devices to reach their fellow members, recruit and train terrorists on ways of carrying out successful acts. Given that prepaid phones and sim cards can be purchased without identifying oneself, and messages transmitted via computers can be encrypted, intelligence units in most affected countries have not been able to track the operations of some terrorists. The latter have become more skilled, concealing their URLs making tracking the origin of the message more difficult. Some governments have implemented a law wherein vendors document the identity of the sim card purchaser. For example, in Germany and South Africa sim cards are sold to persons who can show proof of residency, and a government issued identification, such as driver's license or passport, is required. That measure can limit chances for terrorists to have a sim card; however, it is not possible to control their access to a phone.

### The complex relationship between facebook and global privacy

Following the release of Facebook and Twitter products to the public, millions of users have taken to the lavish use of such systems, to share personal as well as professional data. Unedited and encrypted data have been transferred to interest groups across national borders,

forcing national governments to review national communication laws. Any national supervisory authority has the obligation to ensure privacy protection for its citizens. For countries like Belgium where the Facebook Group has an actual establishment, the need to oversee privacy protection for its citizens cannot be undermined. According to the Commission for the Protection of Privacy, there is a total misunderstanding between Facebook and the Belgian Government wherein Facebook was violating Belgian Law by tracking non users on its site. Facebook argued that because its headquarter was in Ireland, not Belgium, it only needed to comply with Irish law<sup>13</sup>. Facebook has refused to recognize neither the application of Belgian legislation nor the Belgian Privacy Commission, arguing that to apply the law and ensure competent jurisdiction over the tracking of traffic and activity on Facebook accounts is illegal [26a]. With the "tracking trough social plug-ins" in force, Facebook as well as internet users are impacted both in Belgium and Europe, which has had citizens complaining publicly and advocating for greater privacy. For its part, the Brussels Court has not issued a ruling on Facebook's policies regarding users, which could give terrorist networks access to the information sharing medium and gives them the freedom to target certain groups, facilities, institutions, and individuals [26b].

The MIT Technology Review's report [27] that Facebook has the ability to collect market-related information, such as tracking activity on the Internet by using an addictive invention called the "Like" button that allows people to indicate with a click that they are interested in a brand, product, or piece of digital content. This makes us wonder why makers of the medium have not invented a mechanism to track terrorist activity. Simonite [27] foresees that Facebook might sell insights to data mined from its storehouse. With more than one billion users today in different countries, national security is bound to be breached, particularly for those countries without the tools to control or protect information flow.

### Conclusion

Terrorism has reshaped the public's agenda, both at home and abroad and the media has a double standard when it comes to reporting terrorism. Perceived as the main informant on terrorist activities, the media has in a subliminal way projected terrorist episodes against Americans and some Western communities as the product of a religious sect—ISIS and Al Qaeda, whereas poverty, dependency, youth unemployment, illiteracy, segregated educational methods, local customs, and other socio-economic problems that have not been successfully managed by world governing bodies such as FIFA and the United Nations for many decades are greatly responsible for the spread of terrorism globally. However, the media, policymakers and citizens in affected countries have a common interest in ensuring that terrorist groups do not manipulate the media into promoting their agenda and violent activities. They also want to become efficient watchdogs against terrorism and expect the media and policymakers to play a key role in bringing a rapid end to terrorism. Hence, effective communication between government and the media, particularly information sharing is critical.

The rapid spread of terrorism into wealthy and poor countries, into urban as well as rural communities, and into secured environments as well as expensive infrastructures has certainly brought more attention among world leaders and big companies. Terrorism has also led to a bigger investment in national security, especially among wealthy countries with relatively advanced democratic systems such as the US,

<sup>13</sup>Referenced in the Global Freedom of Expression, Columbia university. More at [www.Globalfreedomofexpression.columbia.edu](http://www.Globalfreedomofexpression.columbia.edu)

<sup>11</sup>The article titled "Isil suspects 'missed' Paris terror attacks after their false passports were spotted by border police, published by the Telegraph at [www.telegraph.co.uk/worldnews/islamic-state](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/worldnews/islamic-state)

<sup>12</sup>[www.breitbart.com](http://www.breitbart.com). Retrieved May 13, 2016.

Germany, Britain, France, and Spain that have much to lose if attacked. There the budget to combat terrorism has increased dramatically; in the case of the US more money has been spent over the last 15 years on reducing internal and external terrorism than on education and other sectors. Meanwhile smaller countries are at greater risk of defending themselves because they have limited financial and technical resources. Most of their borders are not secured, which makes it easier for terrorists to enter into their space with little resistance.

### Toward a global policy against information sharing on terrorism

This author posits that global terrorism can be eradicated mainly through information sharing among the intelligence centers around the world and between the media and the governments. This includes direct access to databases on existing and potential terrorists by all approved intelligence officers, constant training of trained personnel on terrorism, and prompt reporting of alleged terrorist plots. The fight to end terrorism must not be left in the hands of the world governing bodies such as FIFA or the United Nations as member states have no legitimate mechanism for monitoring or evaluating their work. Moreover, the United Nations' plan to end terrorism is vague and difficult to implement. Based on its counter-terrorism plan posted on the UN website, the world governing body for peace seeks to:

- Address conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism,
- Prevent and combat terrorism,
- Build states' capacity and strengthen the role of the United Nations, and
- Ensure human rights and the rule of law.

Those pillars presented as priorities require the full support and commitment of all member states. Full support includes design, adoption and implementation of policies to be respected by all member states including those described as 'rogue states'. The cooperation of all member states is required in providing funding to counter and eliminate terrorism. The UN plan does not explain how it intends to monitor prevention of terrorism or sustain the capacity of states to combat terrorism. If rich countries reject the proposal to fund some member states it considers its enemies or disagree on the amount it would be impossible to successfully combat terrorism. Moreover, since its formation in 1945, UN capacity building programs have not brought any long term results, even for its socio-economic initiatives in many countries. We can only expect the status quo when it comes to preventing or countering terrorism.

Further, to build state capacities, member states have to be united. They have to agree on a common *modus operandi*. But diplomacy between Western countries and some Asian countries on this question have not been successful. Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia are considered harbingers of terrorist groups by the US and several Western countries, which creates tension and makes it difficult for both parties to come up with a common plan to ensure that human rights and the rule of law are respected.

Terrorism must not be countered mainly through the use of military action by coalition forces. The constant spread of terrorism from the Middle East to other regions, despite intense media coverage shows that media reporting of terrorism has not helped in curbing the global nightmare. Also, televised speeches given by European and American leaders have had no effect on the terrorist cells mainly because the terrorists believe they would be martyrs if killed in

combat. Hence, a combination of approaches is needed to suppress the proliferation of terrorism around the world. Arguably, one condition is that all countries should have a database where all passengers heading to another country must be fingerprinted and have their names entered in the worldwide database, ensuring that authorities in all entry points can detect documented terrorists.

Other conditions are that

1. Documented terrorists should be extradited to the country where they committed the crime.
2. Information on terrorist groups and their movements should be shared instantaneously.
3. All countries should have a common policy for searching the homes of suspected terrorists<sup>12</sup>.
4. Intelligence sources should recruit computer hackers to track the operations of terrorist groups.

Lastly, reporters on assignment and other informants should have a secured mechanism for sharing 'secret' information with government intelligence sources. It is not advisable for current or former government employees to speak to the press about counter terrorism techniques if governments want to expedite the process of ending global terrorism.

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