

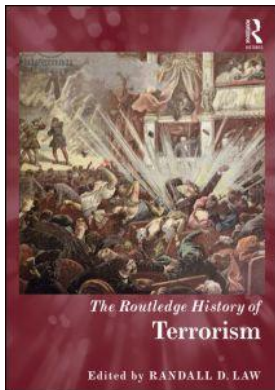
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Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



## **The Routledge History of Terrorism**

Randall D. Law

### **Media and Terrorism**

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315719061.ch28>

Robert A. Saunders

**Published online on: 02 Apr 2015**

**How to cite :-** Robert A. Saunders. 02 Apr 2015, *Media and Terrorism from: The Routledge History of Terrorism* Routledge

Accessed on: 19 Oct 2018

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315719061.ch28>

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## MEDIA AND TERRORISM

*Robert A. Saunders*

At its core, terrorism is political theater intended to convey a series of messages via symbolic acts of death and destruction. Prior to the advent of mass media (books, newspapers, radio, television, Internet, etc.), the effective reach of terrorists, whether state or non-state actors, remained comparatively weak, typically dependent on word of mouth, rumor, and intrigue. However, beginning with the introduction of the steam-powered rotary printing press in the mid-nineteenth century, the ability of political actors to inspire terror expanded exponentially. In our current era of globally linked networks of information and communications technologies (ICTs), terrorist organizations now enjoy the ability to broadcast their propaganda around the world at little to no cost, while also simultaneously benefiting from the deterritorialized nature of the Internet, which provides diverse mechanisms for recruitment, fund-raising, and surreptitious communication. Recognizing the historical import of such a transformation, this chapter presents a tripartite analysis of the relationship between media and terrorism, focusing on the “mediatization” of terrorism, or how the media coverage of terrorism facilitates and conditions human understanding and behavior.<sup>1</sup> Put more simply, this chapter investigates how the media make terrorism “real.” The initial section explores the role of mass media as a tool of terrorists for the purposes of publicity, intimidation, propaganda, recruitment, fund-raising, communication, and, most importantly, legitimacy. In the second section, the focus is on governmental responses to mediatized terror, including censorship, counter-messaging, and public diplomacy, as well as media-based manipulation of the terrorist threat for political purposes. The final section interrogates political violence (both historical and fictional acts of terror) as a source of entertainment and popular culture, examining the role of cultural producers in shaping attitudes towards terrorism and counter-terrorism; the role of popular media in predicting and even shaping terrorist plots is also discussed. This exploration of the actual and symbolic relationships between various forms of mass media and terrorism, and particularly how terrorism has been facilitated by the media as well as transformed by it over time, aims to provide both an explanation of and a rejoinder to former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher’s oft-echoed assertion that “publicity is the oxygen of terrorism.”

### **A brief history of media as a tool of terror and terrorism as a media obsession**

In a 1976 article in *Harper’s* magazine, the noted historian of political violence Walter Laqueur stated that “The media are the terrorist’s best friend. The terrorists’ act by itself is nothing. Publicity is all.”<sup>2</sup> Laqueur effectively applied the principle of the “the tree falling in

the forest” to the practice of terrorism, suggesting that without “the media” any act of political violence was worthless as no one would “hear” it, i.e., be influenced by it. Whether one dates the origins of terrorism to the Sicarii attacks on Roman officials, the Assassins’ reign of fear, or political violence during the French Revolution, publicity has been key to achieving the political aims of the perpetrators of such violence, whether through word of mouth, a hastily painted mural, or the most sophisticated form of digital media. In fact, many – if not most – definitions of terrorism implicitly or explicitly reflect the centrality of “messaging,” that is, the transmission of actionable information associated with the act of terror.<sup>3</sup> According to terrorism expert Alex P. Schmid, terrorism is symbolic violence “aimed at behavior modification by coercion. Propaganda aims at the same by persuasion. Terrorism can be seen as a combination of the two.”<sup>4</sup> Carlo Pisacane, who coined the phrase “propaganda by the deed,” was perhaps the first to make this link explicit (though the anarchist aristocrat Peter Kropotkin popularized the notion), stating: “Ideas spring from deeds and not the other way around.”<sup>5</sup> Pisacane, a supporter of social revolution as well as a unified Italy, influenced the generation of leftist revolutionaries who took acute advantage of burgeoning literacy, the ubiquity of newspapers, international telegraphy, and the power of the image to advance their causes. During the twentieth century, emergent media platforms from radio and television to the Internet would expand and amplify the ability of terrorist groups to “speak” to their various audiences, including but not limited to current and potential supporters, adversaries (the state), pro-state constituencies (society), “neutral” (often foreign) publics, other terrorist organizations, and the media.

In the pre-mass media era, terrorist “messaging” proved quite difficult, though not impossible. With abysmal levels of literacy and the high price of books, the printed word did not serve the terrorist well; instead, terror needed to be conveyed via speech acts. The Sicarii of Judea and Nizari Ismailis killed their foes in broad daylight, often in crowded places, to guarantee the reports of their acts traveled far and wide, whereas the Jacobins turned the public square into a murderous grotesquerie for all to witness the deadly fruits of counter-revolution. Whispers in the bazaar, bardic ditties about assassinations, and hanging corpses all served as pre-modern “technologies” of communication for non-state actors, spreading the discourse of fear ever outwards from the site of the attack. Conversely, as the state apparatus expanded, governments enjoyed an ever-increasing capacity to strike fear in the hearts of the citizenry through public executions, propaganda, and a visible police presence combined with the use of informers and undercover agents. The systemic and ideologically justified terror of the French Revolution exemplified this new shift; however, it was not until a half-century later that new technologies began to emerge that would literally “electrify” the message of terror.

The first generation of terrorists to yoke the power of new information and communications platforms included the Russian populists, Irish revolutionaries, and transnational anarchists of the latter half of the 1800s. From Chicago, Illinois, to St. Petersburg, Russia, radicals of every stripe quickly came to understand the powerful connection between bombs, blood, and newspaper headlines. While these terrorist groups tended to be quite small and had little recourse to the traditional channels of mass communication (political rallies, schools, churches, etc.), their actions commanded outsize attention in the burgeoning “free” press. From the mid-1800s to the end of the century, the number of newspapers worldwide increased ten-fold to well over 30,000, with over 2,000 daily newspapers with a total circulation of 15 million in the US alone; meanwhile, male literacy started to approach 100 percent in developed economies like England, France, and Germany (female literacy lagged

well into the twentieth century) and showed dramatic increases in developing countries like India and the Philippines.

The widespread availability of the daily newspaper combined with an increasingly literate middle and working class ushered in the first era of mediatized terror, and, with new processes that allowed for reprinting of illustrations (and later photographs), the imagery of certain terror attacks such as Auguste Vaillant's 1893 bombing of the French Chamber of Deputies or the 1894 explosion at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich Park were etched in the collective memory. Likewise, high-profile assassinations, including Narodnaia Volia's murder of Tsar Alexander II and Leon Czolgosz's shooting of US President William McKinley in 1901, became mainstays of international media reporting, encouraging even more acts of individuated terror across Europe and North America. Even in states like tsarist Russia, where the government maintained strict controls on journalism, news of terrorist attacks – both at home and abroad – garnered valuable publicity for these groups, allowing them to challenge the state on a symbolic level. As non-state actors, such groups lacked control over the messaging of their acts and were thus consigned to the structural limitations of Pisacane's dictum, i.e., the deed must speak for itself, although public trials afforded certain radicals a further opportunity to propagandize. However, the emergence of underground printing presses did allow for the widespread distribution of incendiary manifestos like Sergei Nechaev's *Catechism of a Revolutionary* (1869) and periodicals such as the *United Irishman* (1885–1910) and *Cronaca Sovversiva* (1903–18), which served as mechanisms for fund-raising and recruitment, as well as propaganda. Following the 1914 assassination of the heir apparent to the Habsburg throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, by a Serbian nationalist influenced by the terrorist propaganda of the day, Europe was engulfed by war and the forces of history pushed the threat of anti-state terrorism to the backburner.

In the last century of the millennium, emergent media platforms began to transform the relationship between terrorism and journalism. Unlike newspapers, nascent broadcast media tended to be either run by the state or dependent on it (directly in authoritarian countries or indirectly in more liberal states), thus putting in place new safeguards against the manipulation of the press by terrorist organizations which did not exist in print media. Reflecting the new regime of informational power, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes in Soviet Russia, fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany employed mass media technologies in their own campaigns of political terror, resituating the notion of terrorism within its Jacobin roots.<sup>6</sup> The loudspeaker, motion pictures, and radio endowed the modern state with untold capacities to demonize one's enemies, put fear in the hearts of the opposition, and indoctrinate the masses (a process that would be repeated throughout the twentieth century, with the tragic coda of the 1994 broadcasts of Radio Television Libres des Mille Collines which encouraged Rwandans to slaughter their compatriots by the thousands). However, the "statist" domination of mass media proved ephemeral. Shortwave radio – a relatively inexpensive and slippery medium of mass communication – soon punctured the state's monopoly. A particularly telling example occurred in 1940s Palestine, as British power was targeted by the Voice of the Haganah, an underground Tel Aviv radio station supporting attacks on the imperial power in advance of the establishment of Israel. As de-colonization moved apace, national liberation struggles invaded the airwaves with clandestine radio stations popping up in Malaya, Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, and elsewhere. Moreover, transnational broadcasting – particularly via the Voice of the Arabs, a pan-Arab radio channel based in Cairo, Egypt – allowed groups like the National Liberation Front (FLN) to broadcast anti-colonial propaganda and reach receptive audiences in Algeria during the long struggle

against French colonial rule. However, the genuine transformation of broadcast media into a tool of “international terrorism” came later with the rise of satellite television.

Once an experimental and geographically bound medium, by the 1970s television had emerged as the ultimate propaganda tool for terrorists, combining the power of visibility, immediacy, and – through satellite distribution – deterritorialization. Not coincidentally, the scale and scope of this “new breed of media-aware terrorists” who operated on “image and illusion” allowed for sub-state terrorism to become increasingly unmoored from individual states, effectively allowing it to “go global.”<sup>7</sup> In 1972, several highly publicized terrorist attacks demonstrated the dark side of Marshal McLuhan’s long-prophesied “global village,”<sup>8</sup> with the Black September attack on the Olympic village in Munich being the most (in) famous as an estimated audience of some 500 million people around the globe watched the tragedy unfold.<sup>9</sup> The world’s media outlets, which had covered the incident at the Olympic Games in excruciating detail, had no shortage of terrorist acts to publicize during the decade following Munich, which ultimately became a byword for mediatized terror. Recognizing the media allure of hijacking airliners, terrorist organizations made the practice an almost commonplace occurrence between 1968 and the early 1980s. Combining suspense, danger, and a guaranteed international component, the spate of “skyjacking” acts during this period relied on media coverage for purposes of political extortion, recognition, and legitimacy, while also demonstrating the increasing connections between entities as disparate as the Japanese Red Army, Carlos the Jackal, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.<sup>10</sup> Both the Munich massacre and the rise in airline and airport attacks during the 1970s demonstrated the centrality of global media coverage for certain types of terror organizations, specifically those seeking international attention.<sup>11</sup>

On the domestic level, groups like the Red Army Faction, the Red Brigades, and even Quebec separatists publicized their platforms and political demands through kidnapping and killing prominent state officials, typically in a prolonged and theatrical manner designed to reach large audiences and keep their organizations “in the news.” To a certain extent, these strategies reflected the intellectual direction of the Brazilian Marxist Carlos Marighella whose *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla* became required reading for a generation of revolutionaries, insurgents, and terrorists. In his text, Marighella instructs the reader to make “direct or indirect use of mass means of communication and news transmitted orally in order to demoralize the government”<sup>12</sup>; while this echoes the maxims of earlier theorists, the specificity reflects a novel understanding about the reach of “new media.” This period saw a purposefully exaggerated linkage between mass media and terrorism when the Symbionese Liberation Army kidnapped Patricia Hearst, scion of the media magnate William Randolph Hearst, and employed her as a mouthpiece for armed revolution, knowing the photogenic heiress would dramatically increase their public profile. Overall, this period represented a sea change in terrorist manipulation of the media wherein journalists could be relied on to cover political violence and the viewing public could be trusted to watch such coverage, thus guaranteeing an information channel for non-state actors who would otherwise be denied mass communication platforms. Scope also influenced this new dynamic as the ubiquity of satellite TV allowed any event anywhere to be beamed into the living room. In the words of Paul Wilkinson, the press and terrorist organizations became “locked in a relationship of considerable mutual benefit,” whereby the terrorists attempt to use the media to convey propaganda, mobilize support, and frustrate their enemies, while the media are bound to report acts of terror to attract viewers, satisfy the demands of the market, and provide better coverage than their rivals.<sup>13</sup> The ramifications of this symbiosis were not lost on Iranian

radicals who stormed the US embassy in Tehran in 1979 and held more than sixty Americans hostage for 444 days, an act which riveted American media outlets and even precipitated the (still-running) news program *Nightline*, which, during its days as “America Held Hostage,” reached approximately 12 million viewers per night.<sup>14</sup>

In the midst of the Iran hostage crisis, the American media mogul Ted Turner launched the Cable News Network (CNN), heralding the rise of global twenty-four-hour news networks, which today include the international English-language news channels BBC World (UK), Al Jazeera (Qatar), Euronews (France), DW-TV (Germany), and RT (Russia). As a result, terrorist attacks could now be covered around the clock rather simply accounting for a portion of the evening news broadcast. The demands of filling hourly segments with content also served the interests of terrorist organizations hungry for publicity. Consequently, the 1980s saw a steady shift towards calculated terrorist “media events,” prompting conservative commentator Charles Krauthammer to describe the actions of certain organizations as “pure media terrorism.”<sup>15</sup>

In this curious incarnation, terrorism became a form of political advertising. Barred from buying television time, the enterprising revolutionary decided to barter for it. Like the early commercial sponsors who produced their own television dramas in order to be able to show their ads, the media terrorists provided irresistible action – kidnapping and murder, live – in return for a chance to air their message.<sup>16</sup>

The 1985 hijacking of TWA Flight 847 and subsequent hostage-taking exemplified this trend. According to terrorism analyst Gabriel Weimann, “News organizations, and especially the US networks, gave the story impressive coverage, turning it into a dramatic, emotionally charged crisis that was rich in incident and interest.”<sup>17</sup> Media framing soon came to characterize the journalistic approach to terrorist events, including personalization of the victims and victimizers, spectacularization of events, use of symbolism, and articulation of values.<sup>18</sup> During the 1980s, coverage of other high-profile incidents, sometimes referred to as “spectaculars,” saw this approach honed. The hijacking of the Achille Lauro cruise ship in 1985 (which personalized the murder of the wheelchair-bound passenger Leon Klinghoffer) and the 1988 midair bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland (which was transformed into international geopolitical theater wherein democratic values and “justice” competed against tyranny and “evil”), were particularly emblematic of this trend. Terrorists soon took note of the efficacy of media-centric attacks, frequently contouring their operations for the television camera.

The end of the Cold War transformed the global terrorism milieu, as ideological as well as material support for left-wing terrorist organizations evaporated almost overnight. While nationalist groups such as the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), the Basque separatists Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, and the various affiliates of the Palestine Liberation Organization continued their campaigns of terror, a palpable shift towards religiously affiliated terrorism came to define media coverage in the 1990s. Certainly, radical Islamist terrorist organizations – the most prominent of these religiously motivated organizations – were, in fact, not new to the scene, having assassinated Anwar Sadat in 1981 and bombed the US embassy in Beirut in 1983; however, with the changing state of international geopolitics, their relative position dramatically rose in terms of news coverage after 1989. As a number of scholars have pointed out, injecting religiosity

into the mix triggered multiple shifts in terrorist practices.<sup>19</sup> Two of the most important were the introduction of suicide bombings, typically attributed to the Lebanese Shi'ite group Hizbullah,<sup>20</sup> and the tendency among religiously inspired groups to seek as many deaths as possible. The latter reflects an important shift in the mediated power of such attacks, given that the emphasis is now on sheer violence rather than an act's symbolic value. During the 1990s, Hamas and Islamic Jihad attacks on Jewish Israelis in shopping malls, restaurants, and public transportation certainly fit this mold, producing high numbers of casualties and graphic scenes of blood, body parts, and physical carnage that were transmitted to Israelis and the world via media outlets.<sup>21</sup> In the United States, the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center by followers of the blind sheik Umar 'Abd al-Rahman targeted a near-universally recognizable icon (and potent symbol of the power of the "West"), generating what some have called the age of "spectacular terrorism" in which a so-called "image-event" – inherently visual and infinitely replicable in nature – is created for the purpose of constant remembering and reinterpretation.<sup>22</sup> Although not an example of religiously motivated terror, Timothy McVeigh's bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City proved to be just as "spectacular" three years later. By targeting the federal facility at 9:00 a.m., McVeigh hoped to spill "as much blood as possible," while his timing ensured that television cameras would be able to cover the story throughout the day.<sup>23</sup> As Bruce Hoffman points out, international media coverage and the undeniable globality of terrorist attacks were factors as well, as McVeigh wanted to guarantee that his actions were not overshadowed by the (religiously inspired) Aum Shinrikyo's "dramatic and more exotic nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway" a month earlier.<sup>24</sup>

During the 1990s, transnational terrorist organizations developed highly sophisticated media strategies. Perhaps most illustrative of this phenomenon was the establishment of Al-Manar ("The Beacon"), a Hizbullah-owned and operated satellite television station in 1991 (today, the network has approximately 15 million daily viewers, as well as reaching a larger audience via its webcasts). However, less costly innovations also characterized the decade, including the employment of video recordings of "martyrs" (suicide bombers) for propaganda purposes, as well as the widespread use of computer diskettes, satellite telephones, fax machines, email, websites, and electronic bulletin boards for communication and intelligence exchange.<sup>25</sup> Hizbullah, in particular, proved to be a pioneer in the adoption of emerging media technologies, being one of the first groups on the Internet; however, other organizations were quick to follow, and the Web soon became a factor in terrorist activities from Ireland to Chechnya to Indonesia. According to Marc Sageman, Osama bin Laden's sojourn in Sudan and subsequent return to Afghanistan in 1996 coincided with a massive transformation of media, which bin Laden incorporated into his day-to-day practices, ultimately transforming the salafi-jihadi movement into a global force with al-Qaeda serving as its "base."<sup>26</sup> Using such tools, bin Laden and the Egyptian Ayman al-Zawahiri directed their affiliates to undertake the highly publicized bombings of two US embassies in East Africa (1998) and the naval warship USS Cole (2000), before undertaking the ultimate "spectacle": the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. According to one scholar: "The 9/11 terror spectacle was obviously constructed as a media event to circulate terror and to demonstrate to the world the vulnerability of the epicenter of global capitalism and American power."<sup>27</sup> The seminal event of the new millennium, 9/11 transformed geopolitics, international relations, and the global economy, while linking media coverage and acts of terror more closely together than at any time in the history of political violence,<sup>28</sup> a fact underscored by subsequent acts of

terrorism including the coordinated attacks on high-profile sites in Mumbai, India, in 2008, and the 2010 bombings of the Moscow Metro. (For more on al-Qaeda, 9/11, and the Global War on Terror, see Chapter 22 by Daveed Gartenstein-Ross in this volume.)

Following the October 2001 US invasion of Afghanistan, al-Qaeda's ability to operate was severely compromised; however, the physical limitations placed on the organization led to a greater reliance on new media, with al-Qaeda effectively becoming a virtual entity sustained by the Internet and satellite television. Bin Laden's organization, coordinating with "start-up" branches of like-minded jihadis in North Africa, Iraq, and elsewhere, developed a heavy presence in cyberspace during the decade following 9/11. Al-Qaeda deployed an online public relations campaign that advanced a coherent narrative through its *As-Sahab* ("The Cloud") propaganda arm, its *al-Hussam* ("The Sword") online magazine, and affiliations with the loosely connected network of friendly programmers known as al-Fajr Media Center.<sup>29</sup> As new platforms such as YouTube emerged, al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups were quick to take advantage of the Internet's ability to function as a single-source platform for all forms of broadcast media, allowing for the transmission of items as mundane as policy statements on climate change to videos showing the beheading of American Nicholas Berg in 2004. Freed from the shackles of the "old media" relationship, terrorists could now represent themselves without relying on journalistic intermediaries.<sup>30</sup> Security analyst and journalist Peter Bergen once noted that al-Qaeda's leadership argues that "90% of [the] battle is conducted in the media,"<sup>31</sup> thus requiring real-world attacks to take a back seat to "e-jihad."<sup>32</sup> For audiences without access to the Internet, the Arabic-language satellite network Al Jazeera served as a fairly reliable venue for distributing video and audio recordings (often in raw form) made by bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, particularly during the early years of the "War on Terror," thus earning the broadcaster a host of epithets including "jihad TV," "killers with cameras," and "the most powerful ally of terror in the world."<sup>33</sup> Following in al-Qaeda's wake, other violent organizations from the Earth Liberation Front to neo-Nazis have adapted to the Internet era, folding new media into their overall strategies for winning hearts and minds, as well as vilifying their enemies.

Looking beyond the realm of propaganda, the evolution of new media technologies and the expansion of cyberspace since the late 1990s have proved a boon to terrorist organizations. The decentralization, anonymity, and speed of the Internet allow terrorists to use cyberspace as a "safe haven" for the distribution of training manuals, as well as a realm for various forms of communication, logistical support, and coordination (even the deployment of videogames meant to "prime the pump" for future terrorists or suicide bombers); the Internet also functions as the primary tool for collecting intelligence on enemy activity, potential targets, etc.<sup>34</sup> The murkier corners of the Web allow for fund-raising and recruitment, as do mainstream social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter.<sup>35</sup> In an exceptional case, Palestinian militants even used an Internet chat room to lure an Israeli teenager to the West Bank where he was killed. More recently, the Taliban has used fake profiles of attractive women to obtain geo-tagged information from coalition soldiers in Afghanistan in order to help plan attacks.<sup>36</sup> Most disturbingly, cyberspace has become such a repository of propaganda and terrorist "know-how" that minuscule cells and "lone wolf" individuals are able to "self-radicalize" via the Web and learn what they need to know to commit major acts of terrorism, including the 7/7 attacks in London (2005) and Anders Breivik's terror spree in Norway (2011). The benefits of the Internet do come with a price, however, as counterterrorism operatives enjoy significant intelligence gathering capabilities over the Internet, allowing the US's National Security Agency, Britain's Security Service (MI5), and France's



General Directorate for External Security to ferret out terrorist cells in cyberspace. Given the increasingly networked nature of critical infrastructure (transportation, water supplies, etc.), there is the possibility that information and communications technologies may eventually be used to carry out terrorist attacks; however, such dangers remain the preserve of science fiction for the immediate time being.

### **Mediatization and state responses to terrorism**

As discussed in the previous section, terrorist organizations are ineluctably linked to media coverage and the use of ICTs to achieve their political goals; however, states – often the primary targets of terrorist activity – are also key players in the mediatization of terror. By choosing to engage in censorship, (dis)information campaigns, or to ignore the relationship between the press and terrorists, governmental actors shape the milieu in which political violence effects political outcomes; similarly, manipulation of the terror threat has also been a common ploy for governments to achieve discrete political gains (often ones with only minimal links to national security).

Historically, the political system of a given state tended to inform its response to the media coverage of terrorism. Censorship has often been the redoubt of autocratic regimes, with tsarist Russia and Ottoman Turkey representing examples of such an orientation. During the reign of Nicholas I (1825–55), which coincided with the dawn of mass media, Russia instituted a reign of “censorship terror” to provide “intellectual dams against destructive European ideas” against which future tsarist policies would be measured.<sup>37</sup> While future leaders would not be as restrictive, the Russian state possessed all the tools necessary to censor mass media (including plays, literature, the visual arts, and even popular ballads) with the aim of squashing revolutionary ideals. Heavy fines, arrests, destruction of presses, and a host of other mechanisms were at the disposal of the secret police whose job it was to ensure the state against “inimical interests.” In certain cases, even articles of “nihilist fashion” (seen as a form of visual media) were prohibited in an effort to forestall further terrorist acts.<sup>38</sup> Despite such measures, anti-state propaganda still managed to find its way to the public eye, particularly via publications that were smuggled in from abroad. Under Alexander II (1855–81), significant reforms were undertaken to lessen censorship, resulting in increasingly “lurid descriptions” of assassinations and acts of terrorism, which in turn led to increasingly effective propaganda of the deed on the part of Russian nihilists and leftists,<sup>39</sup> including multiple assassination attempts on the reforming tsar (one was ultimately successful). In the Ottoman Empire, the Sultan willfully ignored the dramatic political transformations occurring across the continent, expecting his subjects to do likewise. In fact, newspapers were forbidden to even mention the word assassination; accordingly, “Empress Elizabeth of Austria died of pneumonia, President Carnot of France of apoplexy, US President McKinley of anthrax, and the King and Queen of Serbia simultaneously of indigestion.”<sup>40</sup>

Liberal, democratic states were certainly not above employing censorship to undermine the propaganda value of terrorist acts; however, the laissez-faire structure of the press in countries like the United States and Britain often made for a difficult balancing act. Generally speaking, both Washington and London proved to be rather lax in policing terrorist propaganda as long as it targeted regimes overseas, thus providing safe havens for Fenian propagandists in America and a host of European radicals in England. As the US did not suffer from a sustained terrorist threat until the current century (other than the spate of violent radicalism in the 1880s–1910s), censorship related to the reporting of acts of terror

has not generally been an issue. Britain, however, responded to violence in Northern Ireland by instituting the 1988 Broadcasting Ban, which by most accounts represented an instance of direct censorship.<sup>41</sup> The measure prohibited televising or broadcasting the voices of representatives of organizations seen to be supporting terrorism. While a number of organizations were included under the ban, Sinn Féin – the political arm of the PIRA – was its main target. Interestingly, Russia used a similar ban to bar ABC News from the country in 2005 following its airing of a *Nightline* interview with the now-deceased Islamist terrorist Shamil Basayev on grounds the US network was “abetting the propaganda of terrorism.”<sup>42</sup> During its long war in Algeria (1954–62), France instituted pre- and post-publication censorship, shuttering presses and seizing newspapers and even books deemed to be supportive of FLN terrorism.<sup>43</sup> As the birthplace of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, intellectuals and eventually the masses rallied against such measures, ultimately forcing the government to abandon overt efforts at silencing discourse related to terrorism. As mentioned above, post-Soviet Russia has taken a hard stance on media reporting of terrorism, both by domestic and international media organizations. New laws enacted under Vladimir Putin allowed the government to shut down television and radio stations who contravened the edict on real-time reporting during the Nord-Ost hostage crisis in 2002 on grounds these media were “promoting terrorism”; subsequent attacks, like Beslan in 2004, received almost no live coverage as journalists feared government reprisals for doing their jobs.<sup>44</sup>

In lieu of outright censorship, many governments have engaged in systemic policies of disinformation (purposefully spreading false reports to influence public opinion) and misinformation (non-factual reporting) to counter terrorist propaganda. In cases where the press is government-controlled, such policies have been rather ineffective; however, in countries where the media are perceived to be free from state control, such policies have produced tangible results. When conducted in concert with strategic public diplomacy campaigns to mobilize popular opinion, state actors have been able to manipulate the “signal-to-noise” ratio so effectively that terrorist organizations’ ability to use the media is almost totally negated, as in the case of the PIRA and ETA which came to see media coverage as counter-productive.<sup>45</sup> In such cases, these organizations began to shun press coverage and eschewed standard post-attack propagandizing. Historically, advocates of the state have used a cooperative press to buttress their own positions and weaken those of their terrorist adversaries often through loaded language, e.g., the labeling of the Red Army Faction as the “Baader-Meinhof Gang” or Ilich Ramírez Sánchez as “The Jackal.”

Perhaps nothing better exemplifies this trend than the introduction of the catchphrase “War on Terror” by the Bush administration following the 9/11 attacks. By framing the government’s response to the attacks as the equivalent of a “world war” (and playing on deeply embedded strands of racism and xenophobia), the state was generally able to rely on the media to treat its actions accordingly, as well as portray criticisms of national policy as seditious, if not outright treasonous.<sup>46</sup> Consequently, mainstream mass media outlets tended to engage in significant levels of self-censorship and pro-government bandwagoning on issues related to terrorism. While many in America were genuinely “terrorized” by the original attack, daily media coverage of the Department of Homeland Security’s color-coded threat-level system and constant “terrorist threat” stories (often without any specific information) led to intense criticism of the press as a complicit partner in the US government’s manipulation of an exaggerated perception of danger to achieve its domestic and foreign

policy goals, most notably the decision to go to war with Iraq.<sup>47</sup> Around the globe, other states have massaged media coverage of anti-state activists in similar fashion. In the wake of 9/11, China's press, reflecting a shift in government policy, began branding Uighur separatists as "Islamic fundamentalists" and "violent jihadis," descriptors that went unchallenged in much of the international press.<sup>48</sup> Similar discursive manipulation occurred in Russia, Sri Lanka, and Syria. However, such media "management" has not always been successful. In 2004, Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar's government fell following an ill-conceived attempt to blame ETA terrorists for an Islamist bombing of the Madrid metro system. His personal assurances to the press of Basque responsibility for the attacks were eventually exposed as incontrovertible lies and the opposition won the election that followed.<sup>49</sup>

### Of mirrors and oracles: terror as entertainment

The "wild-eyed terrorist" is a perennial subject of fascination for authors and film makers, and through constant mass mediation forms a powerful myth in modern global culture.<sup>50</sup> During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scores of popular novels and even works of high literature dramatized the anarchist or nihilist terrorist, thus reflecting the public interest in the bloody paroxysms of the time, and providing what Lynn Patyk characterizes as "a symbolic intermediary between terrorism and its audiences."<sup>51</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Demons* (1872), the "best known 'terrorist' novel in world history,"<sup>52</sup> critiqued the "devilish" fundamentals of contemporary Russian radicals bent on the violent overthrow of the tsarist regime. In a case of art imitating life and vice versa, Joseph Conrad took inspiration from the failed Greenwich Park bomber Martial Bourdin for his novel *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale* (1907); the character of "The Professor," an anarchist bomber, would later serve as inspiration for Unabomber and former mathematics professor Theodore Kaczynski.<sup>53</sup> Frank Harris's *Bomb* (1908) similarly ripped its topic from the headlines, providing a fictional account of an escaped Haymarket Riot bomber who exacts a horrible revenge. Other fictional works of the period that both drew inspiration from terror attacks and contributed to the stereotype of the unstable and malevolent terrorist include Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Dynamiter* (1885), Henry James's *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), and Edward Douglas Fawcett's *Hartmann the Anarchist* (1892). Popular novels such as Frederick Forsyth's *The Day of the Jackal* (1971) and John le Carré's *The Little Drummer Girl* (1983) continued to play on fears of terrorism in the ensuing decades, but by the second half of the twentieth century the written word had taken a backseat to visual media.

The advent of the motion picture introduced a new medium that would eventually link the power of image and sound to the storyteller's vision. Laqueur dates the first "terrorist" film to 1917 with the premiere of Russian director Yakov Protazanov's *Andrey Kozhukov*.<sup>54</sup> The interwar period saw a number of important pictures on the topic of terrorism, including John Ford's 1935 adaptation of Liam O'Flaherty's novel *The Informer* (1925). In the wake of World War II, national liberation terrorism was prominently showcased in *Exodus* (1960) and *The Battle of Algiers* (1966). Based on the novel by Leon Uris, *Exodus* presents a fictional and highly positive vision of the Jewish underground fighting against the British in Palestine, personified by the handsome Ari Ben Canaan (Paul Newman). Positing Israeli identity as a correlate for "Americanness," director Otto Preminger scripted violent extremism as the "good fight" for North American audiences.<sup>55</sup> As relevant today as when it was filmed, Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* represents the most important film on the topic of terrorism. A stunning example of *cinéma vérité*, Pontecorvo reproduced actual FLN terror attacks in

Algiers on celluloid and even cast a local cell commander, Saadi Yacef, as himself in the film; according to film historian Peter Matthews, “The details are so explicit that *The Battle of Algiers* was adapted into a training manual by the Black Panthers and the IRA – even screened (for a more cautionary purpose, one assumes) at the Pentagon.”<sup>56</sup>

In the wake of the Munich massacre, popular culture began to reflect the growing obsession with international terrorism, and especially Arab terrorists. Based on Thomas Harris’s novel, the motion picture *Black Sunday* (1977) centered on a Palestinian terrorist plot to attack the Super Bowl with a blimp, eerily reminding viewers of the attack on a premier sporting event five years prior (nearly three decades later Steven Spielberg directed *Munich*, which dealt with the Olympic terrorist attack and the centrality of media coverage to the event). During the following decades, films such as *Back to the Future* (1985), *The Delta Force* (1986), *Navy SEALs* (1990), *True Lies* (1994), *Executive Decision* (1996), and *The Siege* (1998) presented a terrorist threat emanating from the Arab–Muslim world, retooling old prejudices and capitalizing on contemporary fears.<sup>57</sup> Arab terrorists were not the only organizations to be dramatized on the big screen, as films like *Year of the Gun* (1991) and *Patriot Games* (1992) explored themes in Italian and Irish terrorism, respectively. In an instance in which popular media actually triggered an act of terror, the liberal, Jewish radio host Alan Berg was gunned down by the right-wing terrorist group The Order in 1984; the events of this political murder were later fictionalized in *Talk Radio* (1988) and *Betrayed* (1988).

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the “War on Terror” naturally came to influence cultural production, with nearly every popular medium reflecting some aspect of the US and allied campaign to eradicate Islamist terror. Captain America took on terrorists on the pages of comic books, while Jack Bauer tortured them on the television show *24*; meanwhile, country music singers railed against Arab bombers and ventriloquist Jeff Dunham rode to fame on the back of his dummy Achmed the Dead Terrorist as the notoriously liberal director Oliver Stone sculpted a cinematic paean to the victims of 9/11 in his 2006 film *World Trade Center*.<sup>58</sup> Cultural producers who had once been criticized for “giving ideas” to terrorists (e.g., flying airplanes into buildings) were called upon by Washington to support the “global response” against jihadist “evil.”<sup>59</sup> While a few films such as *Syriana* (2005) and *Rendition* (2007) would question the role of US foreign policy in shaping the current terrorist threat, as well as post-9/11 policies intended to thwart political violence, most mainstream mass media throatily supported the governmental response to international terrorism.

Paul Wilkinson contends that “When one says ‘terrorism’ in a democratic society, one also says ‘media’” as the two concepts are inextricably bound together.<sup>60</sup> However, as we have seen above, even the most autocratic societies must also confront the undeniable realities of the terror–media nexus. Since the advent of genuinely “mass” media in the mid-nineteenth century, terrorists have increasingly modeled their propaganda, attacks, and targets with the media in mind. Not surprisingly, states have attempted to negate any benefits provided by the emerging media forms and new ICTs, while concurrently making use of their own power to influence the mediatization of terror and terrorist groups (for good or ill). Reflecting the intense interest of the public in issues related to political violence, cultural producers have incorporated contemporary and long past acts of terrorism into their own work, from novels to films to comedy skits. While the twenty-first century has witnessed a widening and deepening of the interconnectedness of terrorism and media (particularly through the continued rise of the Internet and other forms of new media), such trends serve only to remind us of how established the historical relationship between these two entities actually is.

Notes

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- 2 Walter Laqueur, "The Futility of Terrorism," *Harper's* 252 (1976): 104.
- 3 See, respectively, Randall D. Law, *Terrorism: A History* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009); Michael Burleigh, *Blood and Rage: A Cultural History of Terrorism* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009); and Barry Cooper, *New Political Religions, Or an Analysis of Modern Terrorism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005).
- 4 Alex P. Schmid, "Frameworks for Conceptualising Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 206.
- 5 Carlo Pisacane, "Political Testament," in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas, Volume One*, ed. Robert Graham (Montreal: Black Rose Books, [1857] 2004), 68. For more on "propaganda of the deed" and anarchist terrorism in Europe in the late nineteenth century, see Chapter 8 by Richard Bach Jensen in this volume.
- 6 See Chapter 7 by Martin A. Miller in this volume for more on the roots of state terror in Imperial Russia, as well as Chapter 11 by Paul M. Hagenloh on state terror in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.
- 7 Desmond Smith, "A New Brand of Terrorism," *Nation* 218, no. 13 (1974): 393.
- 8 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962).
- 9 Paul Wilkinson, "The Media and Terrorism: A Reassessment," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 9, no. 2 (1997): 52.
- 10 Adam Dolnik, *Understanding Terrorist Innovation* (London: Psychology Press, 2007), 32.
- 11 For more on the Munich attack, the development of international terrorism, and the manipulation of public opinion around the globe, see Chapter 25 by Geraint Hughes in this volume.
- 12 Carlos Marighella, *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla* (Washington, DC: Citizens Committee for a Free Cuba), n.p. For more on Marighella and the emergence of the urban guerrilla movement in Latin America, see Chapter 19 by Jennifer S. Holmes in this volume.
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- 14 Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interest in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 205.
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- 16 *Ibid.*, 12.
- 17 Gabriel Weimann, "Media Events: The Case of International Terrorism," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 31, no. 1 (1987): 24.
- 18 Pippa Norris, Montague Kern, and Marion Just, *Framing Terrorism: The News Media, the Government and the Public* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
- 19 See, for instance, Burleigh, *Blood and Rage*; Mia Bloom, *Dying To Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); and Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).
- 20 Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Random House, 2005). However, as Susanne Martin discusses in Chapter 26 in this volume, the Tamil Tigers were the most prolific employers of suicide terrorism until the early part of the twenty-first century.
- 21 For more on radical Islamist terrorism, see Chapters 17 and 18 by John Calvert and David Cook, respectively, in this volume.
- 22 Luke Howie, *Terror on the Screen: Witnesses and the Reanimation of 9/11 as Image-Event, Popular Culture and Pornography* (New York: New Academia Publishing, 2011).
- 23 Robert L. Snow, *Terrorists among Us: The Militia Threat* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002), 97.
- 24 Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 248.
- 25 See John Arquilla and David F. Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy* (Washington, DC: RAND Corporation, 2001).
- 26 Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).
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- 28 Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, *The Political Economy of Terrorism*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
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- 34 See David H. Gray, and Albon Head, "The Importance of the Internet to the Post-Modern Terrorist and Its Role as a Form of Safe Haven," *European Journal of Scientific Research* 25, no. 3 (2009): 396–404.
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- 40 Jason Goodwin, *Lords of the Horizons: A History of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Macmillan, 2003), 313.
- 41 See Kent Roach, *The 9/11 Effect: Comparative Counter-Terrorism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
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- 56 Peter Matthews, "The Battle of Algiers: Bombs and Boomerangs," *Current* (2004), [www.criterion.com/current/posts/342-the-battle-of-algiers-bombs-and-boomerangs](http://www.criterion.com/current/posts/342-the-battle-of-algiers-bombs-and-boomerangs) (accessed August 26, 2004). For more on the FLN's use of terrorism during the Algerian War of Independence, see Chapter 15 by Martin C. Thomas in this volume.
- 57 Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001).
- 58 See, respectively, the following: Jason Dittmer, "Captain America's Empire: Reflections on Identity, Popular Culture, and Post-9/11 Geopolitics," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95, no. 3 (2005): 626–43; Adam Green, "Normalizing Torture on '24,'" *New York Times*, May 22, 2005, [www.nytimes.com/2005/05/22/arts/television/22gree.html?pagewanted=all&r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/22/arts/television/22gree.html?pagewanted=all&r=0) (accessed March 28, 2012); Andrew Boulton, "The Popular Geopolitical Wor(l)ds of Post-9/11 Country Music," *Popular Music and Society* 31, no. 3 (2008): 373–87; Darren Purcell, Melissa Scott Brown, and Mahmut Gokmen, "Achmed the Dead Terrorist and Humor in Popular Geopolitics," *Geoforum* 75 (2010): 373–85; and Klaus Dodds, "Hollywood and the Popular Geopolitics of the War on Terror," *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 8 (2008): 1621–37.
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### Further reading

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