

MASS MEDIA

TERRORISM AS
A COMMUNICATION
PHENOMENON

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Some of the contemporary theories of the mass media and political communications¹ teach their audiences and mold public ideas about events or phenomena which political forces exploit for their own ends. The media do not merely cover events or describe phenomena—they cover them with “outgrowths” that disfigure them to the extent that the public gradually shifts from discussing the real phenomenon to its virtual likeness, which might well be a product of media skills. This explains why from time to time the public concentrates on phantoms at the expense of real and even urgent issues, which remain uncovered and therefore ignored.

¹ See, for example: A.V. Atanesian, *Aktualnye problemy sovremennykh politicheskikh i konfliktnykh kommunikatsiy*, Erevan State University Press, Erevan, 2008.

The agenda-setting theory postulates: “We judge as important what the *media* judge as important.”² Significantly, according to the agenda-setting theory the media determines not merely what the public would think but also the objects of its deliberations: “The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.”³ This is true when applied to the press; the electronic media—TV and the Internet—have gone even further. They not merely suggest what people should think about—they tell them what they should think, how to treat the events, and what terms should be applied.

² E. Griffin, *A First Look at Communication Theory*, McGraw-Hill, Inc., New York, 1996, p. 332.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

This creates a gap between the objective meanings of any social-political phenomenon and its subjective treatment in the media and public consciousness. The range of instruments the media use to manipulate public opinion and mobilize human resources in the interests of national and global poli-

cies are few: shifted accents, substitution of one phenomenon for another, overstatements, building up public tension to fix public attention on a certain side of the described phenomenon, emotional descriptions of the phenomenon, and overstating some of its sides at the expense of others.

“Terrorism” in the System of Media Communications

Recently “terrorism” has become the media’s most impressive pet term. The problem of terrorism treated as a priority is discussed on a par with other phenomena that, from the point of view of the media, deserve priority treatment. Terrorism along with conflicts, crises, wars, and mass actions with critical results invariably occupy the front pages of newspapers and open all the news programs. The contemporary media malaise, civic malaise, violence cultivation theories, and partly the agenda theory offer their explanations of this phenomenon.⁴

Today, when the uproar caused by another wave of terror has subsided and has been replaced, at least temporarily, with the uproar caused by the financial crisis, we can discuss terrorism as a communication phenomenon much more soberly and impartially. Both Western and Russian language academic writings are not alien to comparing real functional descriptions and media manipulations with reality.

It is fundamentally important to distinguish between the objective characteristics of terrorism identified while studying cases of terror and its subjective perception.⁵ At the level of subjective perceptions and assessments the real picture often becomes blurred; it is transformed into a system of emotional images and descriptions that are not necessarily true to reality.

D. Olshanskiy of Russia described the extent to which the public’s subjective assessments differ from the objective definition of the concept of *terrorism*: “In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist acts in New York, the Center for Strategic Analysis and Forecasting organized a poll among Muscovites. At first glance the question: What does the word terrorism mean? invited a simple answer. This impression proved false. Out of over 1,000 polled Muscovites 47 percent described terrorism as terrorist acts, that is, defined the word with the help of two others related to the first, which did not clarify its meaning; 38 percent offered their emotional assessments saying that it was ‘crime,’ ‘barbarity,’ ‘violence,’ etc; 12 percent had no answer or refused to discuss it; 2 percent were honest enough to admit that they did not know. A mere 1 percent tried, though far from unambiguously, to define terror as someone’s actions aimed at achieving certain aims.

“According to the Obschestvennoe mnenie Fund that organized a similar public opinion poll, people did not really know how to describe ‘international terrorists.’ Twenty-six percent spoke of them as ‘bandits, enemies of mankind, monsters’; 16 percent as ‘criminals of worldwide scale’; 6 percent as ‘fanatics’; 5 percent as ‘criminal groups, bands, mafia’; 5 percent as ‘contract killers’; 4 percent as ‘a group seeking world domination’; 3 percent as ‘aggressive Muslims’; 2 percent as ‘people with crippled psyches’; and 2 percent as ‘avengers.’”⁶

⁴ See, for example: A.V. Atanesian, op. cit., pp. 15-39.

⁵ See: P. Norris, M. Kern, M. Just, *Framing Terrorism: The News Media, the Government and the Public*, Rutledge, New York-London, 2003, p. 5.

⁶ D.V. Olshanskiy, *Psikhologiya terrora*, Akademicheskii Proekt, Moscow, 2002, pp. 11-12.

Similar polls in other countries might have produced a different picture. It is highly unlikely that in the Arabic countries terrorism would be associated with Islam. In the United States, however, post-9/11 assessments of terrorism were invariably associated in the media with Islam. Mustafa Al Sayyid has written in this connection that in the West the term *terrorism* is invariably defined and perceived as “Muslim terrorism” and as a phenomenon “stemming mainly from the Muslim countries.” Terrorists are those who are “not us” while “we are not terrorists.”⁷

The Russian media created a similar image of terrorism during the Chechen war even though everyone knows that terrorism in Russia is a weapon of local criminal communities and nationalists who terrorize people from other parts of Russia and foreigners. Xenophobia is one of the most detrimental effects of terrorism. “According to human rights activists the *anti-Chechen sentiments especially evident after the Nord-Ost act are gradually being replaced with dislike for ‘non-Russians.’*”⁸

H.A. Cooper points out that most discussions come up with a lopsided and highly biased picture of terrorism: what I do, even if others reject it, is not terrorism; if you do the same you are a terrorist. Therefore, writes H. Cooper, *terrorism* should be defined on the basis of what was done rather than on the basis of its perpetrators and its denouncers and concludes that its unbiased definition is hardly possible.⁹

V.A. Medvedev offered a similar opinion: “Blasting a train in Spain and coalition soldiers’ shooting at a crowd of Iraqis are both acts of terror; they intend intimidation and control over people established through the threat of sudden death. Strictly speaking, *terror and anti-terror* are absolutely identical. A fighter of a special unit armed with a radio-controlled mine or a ballistic missile to intimidate a political or religious leader his superiors find encumbering is identical to a suicide bomber where their motives and potential results are concerned. Both aim at mortal intimidation of their potential victims or, better still, at control over their behavior.”¹⁰ In fact, biased assessments of *terrorism* and acts of terror are inevitable.

Terrorism is not only what takes place but also what we say about it. *By making terror an object of wide discussions we turn it into a communication phenomenon which may independently affect our perception of it and our behavior. By discussing terrorism, demonstrating it on TV, and reporting about it in the press and on the Internet we go ahead with it by performing its intimidation function.*

Can the Media be Objective and Unbiased when Covering Terrorist Acts?

Subjective definitions of *terrorism* and related phenomena are inevitable; this is the level at which the events are reassessed by the media. They re-channel public sentiments and ensure a dialogue between society and the government on the urgent problems and decisions. Can the media be objective and unbiased when covering terrorist acts?

P. Norris, M. Kern, and M. Just have pointed out that media coverage of terrorism and terrorist acts is fraught with a dual danger. First, it is hard, or even impossible, to remain objective and unbiased when writing about terrorist acts. On the one hand, when covering terrorist acts on TV and pro-

⁷ M. Al Sayyid, “Mixed Message: The Arab and Muslim Response to ‘Terrorism,’” in: *The New Era of Terrorism. Selected Readings*, ed. by G. Martin, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks-London-New Delhi, 2004, pp. 64-71.

⁸ “Informatsionnye aspekty terroristicheskikh aktov,” in: *Psikhologiya i psikhopatologiya terrorizma*, ed. by M.M. Reshetnikov, The East European Institute of Psychoanalysis, St. Petersburg, 2004, p. 216.

⁹ See: H.A. Cooper, “Terrorism: The Problem of Definition Revisited,” in: *The New Era of Terrorism. Selected Readings*, pp. 55-63.

¹⁰ V.A. Medvedev, “Terror kak osnovanie kommunikativnoi kultury XXI veka: ot ponimaniia k interpretatsii,” in: *Psikhologiya i psikhopatologiya terrorizma*, p. 105.

viding details, journalists popularize terrorism as a behavior model, legitimize terror and, probably, encourage potential terrorists. On the other hand, they side with the official anti-terrorist policy and justify any, not always fully substantiated or adequate, countermeasures by the expediency of the counter-terrorist struggle. The authors have written, in particular, that in the post-9/11 era the American public, under media pressure, developed much greater concern about international terrorism than the phenomenon deserved. This called for several institutional and organizational reforms inside the country (a Department of Homeland Security was set up; the security regime in airports was tightened while secret services became much more active) and legal frameworks for unprecedented foreign policy decisions related to Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and North Korea.¹¹

We can say that a sharper media-induced public response to terrorism and terrorist activities allows political leaders to take extreme actions that would be impossible in different conditions. This leads to securitization of certain problems and tasks which are raised to the level of vitally important and related to the security of the state and society.¹² It is much easier to mobilize resources and public support for decisions of this kind; the “counter-terrorist struggle” may serve as an umbrella for unrelated decisions that could be presented to the public as “a terrorist issue.” The current broad discussion of the legitimacy of the American and allied military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan presented to the public as a counter-terrorist struggle was generated by making a poorly justified association between terrorism and the threat of terror emanating from Iraq and Afghanistan (and later Iran), as well as by doubts that tasks formulated in this way can be resolved.

There are a number of studies that prove beyond doubt that after 9/11 in particular any crisis can be used to take the media temporarily under total control (for an undetermined period of time). Amid conflicts and crises the government strives to control media coverage of everything related to the conflict, its causes and its course, crisis, terrorism, and the way society perceives it. The so-called theory of media liberalism which says that the media respond to social requirements and work under pressure from below is not applicable in crises. According to Sarah Oates, after 9/11 the American media concentrated on the president and Congress, the way the president and other officials responded to the terrorist acts, and their speeches and their arguments in favor of invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. In Russia, says the British author, coverage of the Chechen war and terrorist acts corresponded to “the Kremlin line.” For this reason Russia was seen as the most hazardous country for those foreign journalists who tended to disagree with the official information policy.¹³

Not infrequently politicians exploit terrorism as a communicative phenomenon during election campaigns: they move forward with novel suggestions and arguments in favor of the use of force to pose as strong and determined leaders capable of achieving much more than their predecessors. Vladimir Putin acquired wide popularity during the so-called Second Chechen War associated with terrible terrorist acts in several regions: on 27 December, 2002, the House of Government in Grozny was blasted; on 5 June, 2003, two Chechen women committed suicidal terrorist acts at a rock festival in Tushino (Moscow); on 6 February, 2004, there were several explosions in the Moscow underground; on 9 May, 2004, Chechen President Akhmad Kadyrov was killed in a terrorist act in Grozny, etc. Vladimir Putin acted as a strong and resolute politician whose rhetoric included the formula “flush the Chechen terrorists down the toilet.”

Sarah Oates testifies that her sociological studies in Russia confirmed that Russians confronted with the threat of Chechen terrorism were prepared to side with leaders capable of tough decisions; Stalin was frequently mentioned in this context. She further pointed out that the anti-terrorist rhetoric

¹¹ See: P. Norris, M. Kern, M. Just, op. cit., p. 4.

¹² For more about securitization see, for example: B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., London, 1998, p. 23.

¹³ See: S. Oates, *Through a Lens Darkly? Russian Television and Terrorism Coverage in Comparative Perspective*, paper prepared for The Mass Media in Post-Soviet Russia International Conference, University of Surrey, U.K., 2006, pp. 6-7.

of the political leaders of Russia, Britain, and United States gains momentum during election campaigns. During the 2004 presidential campaign in the United States, about 43 percent of the news releases dealt with election topics; and about 22 percent with terrorism. John Kerry and George W. Bush frequently referred to the anti-terrorist struggle as one of the arguments in favor of their election. John Kerry sounded quite determined: "Let me just make it clear—crystal clear—as Americans, we are absolutely united in our determination to hunt down and destroy Osama bin Laden and the terrorists. They are barbarians. And I will stop at absolutely nothing to hunt down, capture, or kill the terrorists wherever they are, whatever it takes" while his opponent was gathering points by indicating Kerry's weak points and accusing him of having no specific "war" plans.¹⁴

It should be said that control over the media during crises and conflicts is not limited to the legislative and executive levels—it is formed in a natural way through demand and supply in the media market. Being directly involved in all domestic and foreign policy crises, the government wields immeasurably more and much fresher information about the process, which allows it to portion information out to the media it controls. Society, which always wants to know more and learn everything promptly, turns to the media that possess information, that is, to those controlled by the government. In dramatic conditions, therefore, the media compete for the right to receive official information "first hand"; those who achieve this have the public's attention riveted on them. Others are doomed to copying their materials. In this way, the government, as the source of the most reliable information, can disseminate it in various forms, proportions, and interpretations, which gives it control over a large media sector and public opinion.

The Media Strategy and Techniques of Terrorism Coverage

It is interesting to find out the extent to which the media are guided by any particular strategy when covering conflicts, wars, terrorism, and deaths. Are there any special methods and so-called filters that reduce the dysfunctional and dangerous aspects of media presentation of terrorism and conflicts? What do the media use to mobilize the masses and obtain responses in the context of crises, wars, or terrorism? This is not a question of the skills needed to realize the principles of presentation of crisis-related materials—the question is: Are there principles binding for everyone engaged in covering conflicts, terrorist acts, deaths, murders, mass deprivations, and disasters?

Opinions differ about the extent to which journalists use professional skills when dealing with unconventional material related to conflicts, wars, and terror: some believe that the choice of methods is purely subjective and that there are no strategies related to the coverage of conflicts and terrorism in general. Their opponents argued that the media have relevant principles and methods.

Certain researchers have demonstrated that journalists are not inclined to stick to uniform and generally accepted principles of coverage; they do not always remain within the bounds of professionalism and ethics in the interests of higher ratings and a wider audience for their reports or merely because of professional inadequacy. When writing about the ways journalists use visual means when covering conflicts, crises, and acts of terror, Barbie Zelizer, professor of communication at the University of Pennsylvania, has pointed out: "Journalists practicing all types of journalism, not just war journalism, remain unclear about what to do with images. From their earliest uses, images have been looked at the fluff of news, material that is secondary and adjunct to the words at their side. Even today, in an age of still photos, television and cable images, and the interactive displays of the Internet, there

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

are no standards regarding how to use images in news: where to put an image, how to title an image, how to caption an image, and how to position an image alongside words all remain generally unarticulated in the journalistic community. This means that when difficult targets of news depiction present themselves to journalists, there is no clear way to discern what might be a workable, appropriate, or even relevant image.”¹⁵

An analysis of the ways conflicts, wars, and terrorism are covered by the media these days has revealed certain tactics and principles the journalist community applies more or less effectively, the results depending to a great extent on the audience. Any information about hostilities, a “just” war, justified/unjustified involvement of any of the sides in the conflict, the degree to which the threat of terrorism is real, and the gravity of the crimes committed varies in the system of dichotomous objects inevitably covered in such contexts. As a rule the following dichotomous objects are present in media coverage and public discussions:

- (1) one’s own participants—alien participants;
- (2) friends—foes;
- (3) our goals—their goals;
- (4) our methods—their methods;
- (5) our arguments—their arguments;
- (6) our victims—their victims;
- (7) civilians—the military;
- (8) class, race, gender, age of the criminals and their victims;
- (9) our heroes—their criminals.

When writing about the strategies used to present conflicts, wars, and terrorism, A.E. Jasperson and M.O. El-Kikhia point to so-called “media coverage” as one of the “agenda-setting” levels: “Media coverage is characterized by an active construction, selection and structuring of information to organize a particular reality in a meaningful manner for the public. Framing occurs when media make some aspects of a particular issue more salient in order to promote ‘a certain problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation’.”¹⁶

The authors discuss the process of media coverage of conflicts at the following levels:

1. **Media coverage of the political elite’s activity and public addresses** (those engaged in creating and resolving problems). Here the system of mirrored images comes into play: “ours” are presented as heroes while the “others” are described as the main culprits, terrorists, and aggressors. According to Jasperson and El-Kikhia, the Americans close ranks around the president when confronted with a crisis; this should not be ascribed solely to media efforts—this is part of the national psychology: “Where national leaders are united in agreement against a perceived external threat to the country, then we would expect that the news media’s coverage would generate and reinforce support for the administration and its security policies, providing positive frames of government. Generally, in times of international crisis, the American public supports its political leaders and military actions taken in these contexts. As Mueller¹⁷ argues, it is natural for the public to exhibit a ‘rally-round-the-flag’ response, unit-

¹⁵ B. Zelizer, “Death in Wartime: Photographs and the ‘Other War’ in Afghanistan,” *Press/Politics*, No. 10 (3), 2005, p. 27.

¹⁶ A.E. Jasperson, M.O. El-Kikhia, “CNN and al Jazeera’s Media Coverage of America’s War in Afghanistan,” in: *Framing Terrorism: The News Media, the Government and the Public*, Rutledge, New York-London, 2003, p. 114.

¹⁷ See: J. Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion*, John Wiley, New York, 1973.

ing behind the president. This support is seen in terms of public approval from political elites as well. According to Brody,¹⁸ since the White House controls information during an international crisis, members of the opposition party will suppress their disagreement with the president in public, thereby creating the appearance of an elite consensus.”¹⁹

2. **Media coverage of what the military (security structures) do.** Any crisis or conflict demands media coverage of the activities of the military (security structures) in the form of direct armed clashes, either mutual demonstration of power or terrorist activities and the way special services respond to them. It is natural for the media to present information and cover the events so as to belittle the losses of “ours” which are described as inevitable and which might have been more numerous had the power-wielding structures acted less professionally. The enemy is described as a skillful and dangerous adversary armed with the latest weapons and using the landscape (be it mountains or forests), the clan system and solidarity of the locals to perpetrate its crimes and avoid retribution (the reports from Afghanistan and Chechnia are the best confirmation of this). This creates the background against which all losses of “ours” look like a feat of arms and the smallest of victories, as unrivalled heroism. The same goes for the media strategies of the terrorists who pass themselves for heroes standing opposed to a professional army, a nation, a country or mankind.
3. **Media modeling of the humanitarian situation.** The media shaped public opinion in connection of a conflict, war or terrorism by demonstrating “the other side of war,” namely, the plight of the civilians, starvation, crowds of refugees, epidemics, sufferings of the victims of terrorist acts and deaths. Both sides can exploit these arguments, this is a double-edged weapon yet the media should use humanitarian issues to call society to humanity.

There are purely technical problems that might emerge in crisis situations, military actions and terrorist acts. Should unidentified remains of the victims of military actions (terrorist acts) be presented to the public or should the press wait till they are identified?

The problem is: unidentified remains might belong to “ours” or to the “enemy”; they can be used to tip the balance in any of the two sides. If interpreted as “ours” they might produce a dual effect—either the public regards itself as a victim or it becomes ignited with the desire to revenge itself. If unidentified remains of the victims in a conflict (terrorist act) are interpreted as belonging to the “enemy” (terrorist) an ambiguous effect is likewise possible. More likely than not the audience will respond to the picture of a dead enemy (terrorist) with the feeling that justice has triumphed and retribution been achieved. It becomes convinced that the authorities can stop criminal activities and that its country was on the side of justice.

On the other hand, not all members of the audience need the sight of dead bodies to know that terrorists are criminals and that they should be fought. Terrorists on the TV screens are not always needed.

According to the Russian Information Agency Rosbalt, “the way the audience perceives events depends to a great extent on the methods the media employ. After the Dubrovka events,²⁰ the press long savored the picture of a dead female terrorist which repeatedly appeared on the TV screens: ‘A young girl, suicide terrorist, remained sitting on a red seat her head on the backrest. Her face with a dried trickle of blood is finally uncovered’ (*Komsomolskaia Pravda*, 28.10.2002). This was accompanied by a large color photo with the comment: ‘This suicide terrorist remained sitting in the second

¹⁸ See: R. Brody, C. Shapiro, “Policy Failure and Policy Support: The Iran-Contra Affair and Public Assessment of President Reagan,” *Political Behavior*, No. 11, 1989, pp. 353-369.

¹⁹ A.E. Jaspersen, M.O. El-Kikhia, op. cit., pp. 116-117.

²⁰ On 23 October, 2002, Movsar Baraev and his group, which partly consisted of girl suicide bombers, took over 900 hostages, the audience in the Theater Center on Dubrovka.

circle, fourth row.’ The picture reappeared in two more issues of the same newspaper. This was done to intimidate the enemies and warn them about inevitable retribution. At the same time it was used as a tag or a stamp that makes it easier to grasp the meaning of what happened by driving away all doubts about the images and arguments.”²¹ Barbie Zelizer offers no less convincing information: after 9/11 American readers actively protested against the photographs of Osama bin Laden that appeared in *The Boston Globe*, *Newsweek*, and *Time* with letters protesting: “We don’t need to look at that evil face, big and bold on the cover of your magazine.”²²

When analyzing the efficiency of pictures (visual images) related to the coverage of conflicts and wars, the author answers several questions. Visual images have the following functions:

- (1) they create the effect of a real presence at the site of the event;
- (2) they capture public attention and polarize the audience;
- (3) they create the conviction that justice reigns and the decisions were wise and well substantiated;
- (4) seeing is believing.²³

Normally, readers/viewers trust pictures more than censored reports; pictures are taken as a piece of reality, a window looking into the world, a mirror of events.

There are certain rules related to the media’s use of visual images of hostilities and terrorist acts. Barbie Zelizer has pointed out that the media of the fighting country avoid pictures of dead civilian victims of one’s own missiles but indulge in visual images when it comes to justifying one’s own actions. “Ours” are usually presented as heroes while the “others” are demonized. The same author has noted that war-related stories avoid mentioning the blunders of one’s own or allied governments; the media likewise avoid pictures of the enemy’s suffering and deaths to avoid accusations of aggressiveness on the part of one’s own side.

The media prefer to present hostilities, terrorist acts, and death in an indirect way to avoid shocking the audience but to make it aware of the full scale of the tragedy in order to achieve a certain response. Live coverage of hostilities is not needed—everything can be told in many different ways: a dusty road with personnel carriers taking armed men to the place of action. This informs the audience that very soon they will be engaged in fighting and that some of them will return home in body bags while others will be honored as heroes.

Not infrequently journalists turn to the innocent victims of wars and terrorist acts: homeless and starving refugees. A picture showing a dirty homeless child against the background of a devastated area is an eloquent sign of a war in which the child has lost his family and many people have been left homeless.

In fact journalists are fond of telling sentimental stories about an “unknown hero” drawn into the conflict purely by chance; he coped with the situation and demonstrated his humanness, patriotism, and heroism.²⁴

The media offered a wide coverage of those trapped in the 9/11 aircrafts: some of them tried to stop the terrorists, others reached their relatives on cell phones. There was any number of stories about the heroic firemen who arrived at the burning Twin Towers and were buried under the rubble. Historical and action films abound in similar stories; documentaries and news reports about wars, terrorist acts and conflicts present the military, sailors, the police/militia, firemen and “common guys” as real heroes.

²¹ “Informatsionnye aspekty terroristicheskikh aktov,” p. 206.

²² B. Zelizer, op. cit., p. 30.

²³ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

²⁴ Ibidem.

It should be said that these subjects are dedicated mostly to heroic men-antiterrorist fighters and male terrorists (the media coverage suggests that the leadership of international terrorist structures is entirely male). Women appear in media-coverage mostly as terrorists and victims of terror rather than antiterrorist fighters. The face of the dead female suicide bomber became a symbol of media coverage. Experts from the Rosbalt Information Agency have pointed out: "The media covers female involvement in terrorist activities by comparing it to male terrorism, a sort of norm of the 'terrorist world.' Female terrorists are described as irrational, fanatical, and overly aggressive. The national press concentrated on the driving motives of female terrorism; some of them tend to overstate the 'black widows' determination to take revenge for their husbands or other male relatives. 'They have nothing to lose—they are even ready to sacrifice their own lives' (*Nezavisimaia gazeta*, No. 135, 2003). On 29 October, 2002, *Komsomolskaia pravda* wrote that they 'are avenging their brothers or husbands.' The same issue of *Nezavisimaia gazeta* wrote that some of the women involved in terrorist acts had been blackmailed: 'Recruiters force others to become suicide bombers by threatening their relatives.' There are other versions: drugs are one of the most frequent explanations. 'The terrorists were humiliated, raped, and forced to take drugs or psychotropic substances. Death was seen as an escape from this sort of brainwashing' (*Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 8 July, 2003). On 8 July, 2003 *Komsomolskaia pravda* agreed: 'It was drugged women who were involved in the terrorist acts.' The RF Public Prosecutor Office insisted: 'The suicide bombers are drugged with opiates regularly added to their food and juice.' The press remains convinced that women are driven into terrorism contrary to their wishes and doubt their ability to make independent decisions."²⁵

It should be said that demonstration of violence, death, and terrorist acts as proof of coverage reliability and the unprecedented nature of the event as one of the methods of media coverage does not always achieve the desired aim. This fully applies to cases when such acts are shown indirectly (refugees, homeless and destitute people instead of scenes of actual fighting). There is a widespread opinion in the expert community that terrorists profit from this coverage because the media help them spread fear, horror, and the feeling of vulnerability.

Paul Wilkinson of Britain has the following to say on this score: "For the mass media organizations the coverage of terrorism, especially prolonged incidents such as hijacking and hostage situations, provides an endless source of sensational and visually compelling news stories capable of boosting audience/readership figures... However, once terrorist violence is under way the relationship between the terrorists and the mass media tends inevitably to become symbiotic. In sociology the term symbiosis is taken to mean relations of mutual dependence between different groups within a community when the groups are unlike each other and their relations are complementary. It would be foolish to deny that modern media technology, communication satellites and the rapid spread of television have had a marked effect in increasing the publicity potential of terrorism... And for as long as terrorists commit acts of violence the mass media will continue to scramble to cover them in order to satisfy the desire of their audiences for dramatic stories in which there is inevitably huge public curiosity about both the victimizers and their victims."²⁶

This suggests that in a crisis not only authorities but also terrorists try to control the media to achieve the desired results through media coverage and information about their goals. The same author has written further: "The most frequent terrorist techniques for influencing the mass media and reaching a wider public is the creation of terrorist events and armed propaganda with the object of seducing or trapping the mass media into giving the terrorists huge publicity and portraying them as such a powerful force that it would be folly to resist them... In using TV, radio and the print media the terrorists generally have four main objectives:

²⁵ "Informatsionnye aspekty terroristicheskikh aktov," pp. 206-207.

²⁶ P. Wilkinson, "The Media and Terrorism: A Reassessment," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1997, pp. 5-6.

- 1) To convey the propaganda of the deed and to create extreme fear among their target groups;
- 2) To mobilize wider support for their cause among the general population, and international opinion by emphasizing such themes as righteousness of their cause and the inevitability of their victory;
- 3) To frustrate and disrupt the response of the government and security forces, for example by suggesting that all their practical antiterrorist measures are inherently tyrannical and counterproductive; and
- 4) To mobilize, incite and boost their constituency of actual and potential supporters and in so doing to increase recruitment, raise more funds and inspire further attacks.”²⁷

This shows that the number of victims of terror is not limited to those directly involved in terrorist acts but also spreads to those affected by media coverage. The dangers of terrorism as a communication phenomenon are not limited to actual violence and any specific temporal and spatial bounds. More likely than not its psychological effects are much graver and more lasting. The Rosbalt Information Agency offered the following information: “According to sociologists, the psychological response of the audience to cruel pictures about terrorist acts is very acute. A month after the Nord-Ost terrorist act and the related TV coverage, the Obshchestvennoe mnenie Fund discovered that 68 percent of the country’s population was convinced that their city or town would be the next target. An amazing result since the poll covered 40 types of settlements—from the village of Shamysheika in the Penza Region to St. Petersburg. Over 70 percent were as appalled as if this had happened to their own relatives, colleagues, or children. More than that: the poll of over 300 Muscovites with no relatives or friends caught in the Nord-Ost tragedy conducted by the department of clinical psychology of the RAMS Medical Center revealed that 24 percent of them demonstrated the symptoms of post-traumatic syndrome similar to that which normally develops in participants in hostilities and terror victims. *These 24 percent can be regarded as indirect victims of the terrorist act.*”²⁸

This means that the problem of media coverage of conflicts, wars, and terrorist acts remains as urgent as ever.

²⁷ P. Wilkinson, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

²⁸ “Informatsionnye aspekty terroristicheskikh aktov,” p. 213.