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THE USE OF THE MEDIA AS A TERRORIST WEAPON

ABSTRACT: The use of violence to advance a political agenda is the hallmark of terrorism. Violence is not an end in itself, but a means to achieve specific political objectives. According to the military wisdom of Sun Tzu, the supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting. Apart from knives, guns, fire and explosives, and improvised weapons, terrorists can minimize actual fighting and the resort to violence by using the media as a terrorist weapon. Remarkable media success has been achieved by terrorists, who have become as adept and proficient at using the media as a terrorist weapon as they have at using the AK-47. Terrorist use of the media as a weapon is reviewed in this paper.

The introductory section of this paper reviews the basic features of media coverage associated with terrorist violence. The constant striving for media attention serves to explain much of terrorist targeting in the western alliance. The media influence on terrorist targeting is thus an important topic for review. A psychological perspective is offered next, including a discussion of the link between narcissism and aggression. This linkage is one explanation for the widespread use of media as a terrorist weapon. This section is followed by a conclusion, which stresses the need for enhanced media skills in countering the terrorist narrative used in recruitment.

KEYWORDS: media, psychology, terrorism, violence

INTRODUCTION

The international media responds to all notable events, including terrorism, that help fill the continuous 24-hour news cycle. The relationship between the media and terrorism is not one way. In fact, there is a deeply symbiotic relationship between terrorism and the media: terrorists depend on the media in crucial ways, and the choice of terrorist attacks is strongly influenced by the consequent media coverage. But also, the media are ever hungry for news stories of global interest, such as terrorist attacks. This symbiosis has important implications for terrorism risk assessment.

Risk analysts seek to define a utility function to quantify the reward associated with any risky human endeavour. Utility is a value assigned to an outcome, which may be based on a range of possible metrics. For terrorists engaged in political violence, inflicting wanton harm and economic damage on their adversaries may be rewarded by the satisfaction of revenge and fulfilment of their own sense of justice. A terrorist attack may also be substantially rewarded by the political impact achieved. Rather like television programme ratings, media coverage is a key measure of this political impact. Such coverage serves as free propaganda and recruitment advertising for the terrorist cause.

Political activists may not receive media attention, nor have their ideas publicized, without terrorist action. As the writer Don DeLillo observed¹, ‘*Terrorism is the language of being noticed*’. If a peaceful protest goes unnoticed, ordinary law-abiding citizens may feel obliged to resort to political violence. Unabomber Ted Kaczynski, a highly intelligent mathematician with a Harvard education,² wanted his thoughts published in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Before this happened in September 1995, he racked up 13 counts of murder and bombing. Hardly anybody would have noticed, let alone read Anders Breivik’s 1,500-page manifesto published online, entitled ‘2083: A European Declaration of Independence’. Part of the tract³ details the author’s personal reflections prior to his vehicle bombing of government buildings in Oslo, and the mass killing of 69 at an island summer camp on 22 July 2011. Eight died in the vehicle blast, but the tragic loss of so many promising young lives at the summer camp inevitably became the prime focus of Norwegian public grief and international media coverage.

Terrorists like Kaczynski and Breivik can be brought to justice. But even when terrorists are convicted and jailed, they can continue to attract media attention to their political agenda. Over the course of the years 1980 and 1981, Irish republican prisoners in the Maze Prison outside of Belfast, Northern Ireland, launched two hunger strikes⁴ for what they regarded as restoration of their status as political prisoners rather than criminals. However, major news outlets such as the *Irish Times* and the *New York Times* refrained from presenting the strikers’ demands for political status as legitimate. But in terms of public impact, hunger striking may have conveyed as strong a political message as any written demand for political status.

The hunger strikes confronted the British government with a public relations crisis. There were disturbing news stories of the hunger strikers withering away, thus allowing the group to gain sympathy and recruitment. The media’s role in the hunger strike was important in influencing public opinion. The most celebrated hunger striker was Bobby Sands, who died a martyr to the republican cause on 5 May 1981, after 66 days on hunger strike. Over a hundred thousand attended his funeral, the largest in Belfast, and there was global news coverage of the funeral.

Acutely aware of the strategic consequences of terrorist publicity, it was the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, who insisted in July 1985 that: ‘*We must try to find ways to starve the terrorist and the hijacker of the oxygen of publicity on which they depend*’⁵. At that time, publicity outlets were limited to newspapers, print journals, radio and television. Three decades later, a terrorist statement can be disseminated around the world via social media, and a terrorist video uploaded instantly on YouTube. This new technology has transformed the balance of media power between the opposing forces of terrorism and counter-terrorism. Terrorists can now self-publicize their own political agenda. There is some censorship of

¹ Juergensmeyer, M. *Terror in the mind of God: Global Rise of Religious Violence*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. 139.

² Chase, A. “Harvard and the making of the Unabomber”. *The Atlantic*, June 2000. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2000/06/harvard-and-the-making-of-the-unabomber/378239/>, Accessed on 5 May 2018

³ Breivik, A. “2083: a European declaration of independence.” *De Laude Novae Militiae*, 2011. https://archive.org/stream/2083_A_European_Declaration_of_Independence/2083_A_European_Declaration_of_Independence_djvu.txt, Accessed on 16 May 2018.

⁴ Scull, M. “Timeline of 1981 hunger strike”. *Irish Times*, 1 March, 2016. <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/timeline-of-1981-hunger-strike-1.2555682>, Accessed on 5 May 2018.

⁵ Edgerton, G. “Quelling the ‘Oxygen of Publicity’: British broadcasting and the troubles during the Thatcher years.” *J. Pop. Culture* 30/1. 1996. 115–132.

websites that espouse and incite political violence, but such websites may pop up and close down quite regularly.

In his book on religious terrorism, Mark Juergensmeyer⁶ reflected, '*Terrorism without its horrified witnesses would be as pointless as a play without an audience.*' Attraction of a large audience requires publicity. Even comparatively modest terrorist organizations have established professional media departments to manage their publicity. For example, Al Shabab's media department focuses on attracting regional foreign fighters to Somalia from around East Africa, particularly Swahili-speakers, as well as establishing ties with local militant groups⁷. They have featured prominently in the group's propaganda films, including a 2010 recruitment film subtitled in Swahili, Arabic, and English. In West Africa, Boko Haram have created their own audio and video contents⁸ and distributed them discreetly to journalists on CDs and memory sticks. This is their most potent propaganda tool, with videos including brutal executions and images of the schoolgirls kidnapped in 2014.

Just as with Hollywood action movies, terrorist videos must have dynamic visual action contents: shootings, fires and explosions. Most terrorist attacks deliver this kind of visual action, which can be filmed and put to good propaganda effect. Rural attacks in the middle of nowhere would be lowly ranked in attack priority compared with attacks in crowded urban places.

Furthermore, there are many possible types of terrorist attack modes that are not particularly visual, and would not lend themselves so well to video. Radiological dispersal devices, i.e. dirty bombs, are in this category. The small amount of radioactive material released would lead to low levels of contamination. This would lead to formidable decontamination problems, but the radioactivity would be unlikely to cause any serious health problems or fatalities. Substantial resources would be required to acquire enough quantity of radioactive material, and there is a high interdiction risk associated with its procurement. On 29 June 2007, there was an attempted car bomb attack on the Tiger Tiger nightclub in Haymarket, central London⁹. One of the terrorists was a hospital doctor, with access to radiological equipment. Although the police had dirty bomb concerns, it turned out that the bombers' focus was on causing a massive propane fire and explosion that might have killed large numbers in the night club.

More than contaminating or vandalizing property, killing people generates newspaper headlines, in accord with the classic editorial adage for selling newspapers: if it bleeds, it leads. On 2 November 2011, the Paris office of the satirical magazine, Charlie Hebdo, was petrol-bombed by a Molotov cocktail at 1 am, the day after Charlie Hebdo had named the Prophet Mohammed as its editor-in-chief for the week's issue. There was only modest international publicity for this terrorist attack that caused some property damage and publication disruption, but no personal harm to anybody. However, a few years later, on 7 January 2015, the editorial committee of Charlie Hebdo was assassinated in their Paris office by the Kouachi brothers, armed with AK-47s. A million people, including many government leaders from

⁶ Juergensmeyer. *Terror in the mind of God...* 139.

⁷ Hodge, N. "How Somalia's al-Shabab militants hone their image." BBC News. 6 June 2014. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-27633367/>, Accessed on 9 November 2017.

⁸ Abubakar, A. T. "The media, politics and Boko blitz". *Journal of African Media Studies* 4/1. 2012. 97–110. doi: 10.1386/jams.4.1.97_7, 2012.

⁹ Croft, S. *Securitizing Islam: identity and the search for security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 222.

across the world, thronged La Place de la République in Paris the following weekend, in solidarity against this terrorist outrage. ‘Je Suis Charlie’ was tweeted all over the world¹⁰. 24-hour cable news was dominated by these killings, which were perceived as an attack on French liberty itself. A lesson to be learned by terrorist organizations and terrorism risk analysts is that high-profile assassinations leverage the highest media exposure for a given outlay of terrorist resources. This lesson helps explain the terrorist logic of the lone-wolf.

With the massive media attention gained, the benefit-cost ratio for terrorist killings is high. The media outrage against the mass murder of civilians far exceeds the media coverage of infrastructure damage. On 10 October 2015, two bombs were detonated outside Ankara railway station, in Turkey, killing as many as 103 civilians¹¹. Counterfactually, the bombs might instead have been detonated on the tracks at night, with few people around. This would have shut down the station, and disrupted the busy railway line to Istanbul. But rail damage can be repaired; lives lost cannot.

Under some circumstances, bombing can be the attack mode of choice if killing civilians is perceived as having too many negative moral repercussions. The IRA had serious qualms about killing civilians because this alienated their key nationalist Irish Catholic constituency. Instead, the IRA provided coded bomb warnings, many of which were disruptive hoaxes, and mastered the development of the fertiliser vehicle bomb to cause massive property loss. Except for such close community support circumstances, the media terrorist payoff for murder and executions far exceeds that of large scale criminal vandalism.

Executions can be by shooting, burning, crucifixion, decapitation etc.. The more gruesome and barbaric the killings, the bigger and brasher are the headlines. So it was that a UK morning newspaper front page¹² following the brutal killing of fusilier Lee Rigby outside Woolwich barracks on 22 May 2013 had the shocking banner headline ‘Beheaded’. The UK media regulator highlighted concerns over a regional news bulletin showing a graphic mobile phone sequence of one of the murderers with a machete and bloodied hands. This was repeated on a loop without audio and without being preceded by a specific warning. Like horror movies, this video nasty was compulsive viewing. Another vile offence against human sensibility that could not be kept off the front pages in February 2016 was the detonation by a 4 year-old small boy of a car bomb killing 4 alleged spies against ISIS¹³. Dressed in a military outfit, he might otherwise have been playing with toy pistols. This episode provides graphic support for the criticism that ISIS uses children like firewood.

In the asymmetric war with nation states, the power of a terrorist group, such as Islamic State, can be projected worldwide by ruthless graphic acts of violence committed against even a modest number of individuals. Disseminated rapidly and amplified globally over the broadcast and social media, such attacks demonstrate a degree of offensive capability

¹⁰ Bilevsky, D. and Baume M. de la. "Terrorists strike Charlie Hebdo newspaper in Paris, leaving 12 dead". *The New York Times*, 10 Jan 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/08/world/europe/charlie-hebdo-paris-shooting.html>, Accessed on 7 May 2018.

¹¹ Letsch, C. and Khomami N. "Turkey terror attack: mourning after scores killed in Ankara blasts". *The Guardian*, 11 October 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/10/turkey-suicide-bomb-killed-in-ankara> Accessed on 7 May 2018.

¹² "Beheaded: Jihad attack in broad daylight". *Daily News*, 23 May 2013. 1.

¹³ Dearden, L. "ISIS propaganda video shows British four-year-old Isa Dare 'blowing up car' with prisoners inside Syria". *The Independent*, 11 February 2016. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-execution-video-shows-british-four-year-old-isa-dare-blowing-up-car-with-prisoners-inside-a6866626.html>, Accessed on 7 May 2018.

that both shocks and terrifies the general population, whilst encouraging its own body of supporters and aspiring recruits. Terrorist organizations are generally keen to claim credit for successful attacks, including those perpetrated by non-members and others peripheral to the organization, who were just inspired to commit their brutal crimes, but had no direct contact with any members.

The senseless slaughter of pedestrians by truck ramming would be sure to make headline news. On 14 July 2016, a 19 ton refrigerated truck ploughed into the crowd on the Promenade des Anglais in Nice, killing 86¹⁴. If the truck had been allowed to carry on its rampage for a few hundred metres further, the casualty rate/metre would have been much higher in the most crowded part of the beach zone, close to the site of the Bastille Day fireworks display.

The media had an indirect unwitting role in instigating this bizarre mode of terrorist attack. In December 2015, a car driver apparently under the influence of drink lost control, left the road and hit a restaurant terrace in Nice. This accident was reported in the local Nice *Matin* newspaper. The driver of the truck on 14 July 2016, Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel, originally from Tunisia, had kept on his cell phone a photo of this six month old Nice *Matin* story. What happened by chance can also be copied by those with malicious intent.

A spiral of copycat terrorist attacks can be generated by a whirlwind of media publicity. A few months after the Nice truck ramming, another Tunisian, 24 year-old Anis Amri, killed 12 people and injured 48 others when he rammed a 40 ton truck into a Christmas market in the German capital on 19 December 2016¹⁵. The truck was fortunately halted by the modern automatic braking system, bringing it to a standstill after about 80 metres. Christmas markets have been targeted by terrorists before: they are open crowded public spaces linked to the religion of the Crusaders. Calls were made afterwards for Christmas markets to be given barrier protection. This would only have deflected an attack to a mass transit or other crowded public space.

Since the Christmas market attack, there have been other vehicle ramming attacks in London (see below), Stockholm (7 April), Barcelona (17 August) and New York (31 October). Sayfullo Saipov¹⁶, an Uzbek like Rakhmat Akilov who perpetrated the ramming attack in Stockholm, told police interrogators that he had chosen Halloween because the Manhattan streets would have been more crowded. With terrorists copying the actions of their compatriots, the terrorist vehicle ramming spiral is still in the early stages of unwinding. Whereas the novelty of vehicle ramming will wear off, the fear of such attacks, and the appalling consequences for pedestrians, will ensure the media publicity which terrorists crave.

¹⁴ Leclerc, G. "Lahouaiej-Bouhlel, maître dans l'art de la dissimulation". *Nice Matin*. 23 July 2016. <http://www.nicematin.com/justice/lahouaiej-bouhlel-maitre-dans-l-art-de-la-dissimulation-66680>, Accessed on 7 May 2018.

¹⁵ Munoz, C. and Waters, A. "At least 12 dead, 48 injured in terror attack on Berlin Christmas market". *Washington Post*, 19 December 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/at-least-9-dead-as-truck-rams-crowd-in-christmas-market/2016/12/19/a01c4968-c629-11e6-acda-59924caa2450_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.10c9301d6a61, Accessed on 7 May 2018.

¹⁶ Kilgannon, C. and Goldstein, J. "Sayfullo Saipov, the suspect in the New York terror attack, and his past". *The New York Times*, 31 October 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/31/nyregion/sayfullo-saipov-manhattan-truck-attack.html>, Accessed on 7 May 2018.

MEDIA INFLUENCE ON TERRORIST TARGETING

What counts as a successful terrorist operation in a target-rich society has its own geographical political context. In territories, such as Pakistan, where terrorist attack frequency is expressed in events per day, an attack would gain little media attention unless it generated a sufficiently large number of fatalities. In countries of the western alliance, the extent of national surveillance and the diligence of counter-terrorism forces shorten the terrorist attack horizon, and make it difficult for terrorists to execute ambitious plots. Accordingly, in these countries, the attack threshold for gaining media attention is much lower.

Within the western alliance, the utility of a terrorist attack will depend significantly on the media coverage. Crucially, a carefully planned attack with a moderate amount of logistical resources can saturate headline news for days. The Charlie Hebdo committee assassination on 7 January 2015, an attack using simple off-the-shelf military weapons (namely a couple of AK-47s), created an international media storm¹⁷. Terrorists advertise and promote themselves effectively through their deeds. Indeed, ever since the French anarchist revolutionaries of the nineteenth century, actual terrorist attacks have been referred to as propaganda by the deed.

The maximum expected utility can be achieved by attacks on comparatively soft but high-profile targets. The paramount example is the Charlie Hebdo office in Paris, which was protected only by a single security guard, and had open street access. By contrast, any plot to assassinate a senior political figure would have been much more difficult, because the security would have been tighter.

In 2002, Osama Bin Laden wrote in a letter addressed to Taliban leader Mullah Omar: *'The media war in this century is obviously one of the strongest methods; in fact, its ratio may reach 90% of the total preparation for the battles'*¹⁸. Three years later, his successor Ayman Al Zawahiri repeated this sentiment, reiterating that Al-Qaeda is in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of the Umma. This is echoed in the more recent pronouncement of Islamic State that *'half of Jihad is media'*¹⁹. Terrorists are learning to achieve mastery of the media. In particular, the accomplished multilingual skills of terrorist organizations have made for more effective communication with their diverse international target audience spread across the continents.

The professionalism of ISIS in producing slick professional videos of Hollywood quality is evidenced in the documentary 'City of Ghosts', produced by citizen journalists in Raqqa, Syria²⁰. This documentary features a number of powerful and professional ISIS recruitment videos, which ordinarily are not seen on western media. These citizen journalists spread counter-propaganda against ISIS, and so were aggressively targeted by ISIS, and forced to leave for Germany.

In the field of public relations, extensive media publicity about successful terrorist attacks serves as propaganda that can reach the general public automatically and instantaneously, and also manage to influence the policies of democratic governments. The terrorist

¹⁷ Bilevsky and Baume. "Terrorists strike...".

¹⁸ bin Laden, O. "Letter to Mullah Mohammed Omar". Combating Terrorism Center. 2005. <https://ctc.usma.edu/harmony-program/>, Accessed on 7 May 2018.

¹⁹ Silverman, J. "Paris is on fire". *Il Politico*, 14 November 2015. <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/11/paris-is-on-fire-213359>, Accessed on 7 May 2018.

²⁰ Heineman, M. *City of Ghosts*. 2017. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6333056/>, Accessed on 18 April 2018.

aspiration might be to persuade or coerce governments to change their policies, through pressure of fearful citizens.

The media can also be used as a means of communicating with governments. An Al-Qaeda tape broadcast on Al Jazeera in January 2006 said Al-Qaeda was open to a truce with the US if it withdrew from Iraq and Afghanistan²¹. The tape did not say what the conditions for a peace deal were, only that it would be "*a long term truce based on fair conditions ... so both sides can enjoy security and stability under this truce so we can build Iraq and Afghanistan*". It is not the first time Al-Qaeda has offered a truce to the West. Following the killing of 191 people in the March 2004 Madrid railway bombings, a tape recording of Bin Laden offered peace to any European country that stopped "*attacking Muslims or interfering in their affairs*"²².

The striving for media attention serves to explain much of terrorist targeting in the western alliance. Terrorist organizations are engaged in an asymmetric war with nation states, which cannot be defeated militarily or economically. The financial cost of terrorism is not measured merely in terms of the loss inflicted by successful attacks, but also by the burgeoning cost of heightened counter-terrorism security. This involves a competitive race between corporations to avoid being the softest target in a class, and hence the lowest hanging fruit to be taken by terrorists following the strategic path of least resistance.

The cost of security may well be more than an order of magnitude larger than the expected economic loss. Public fear and apprehension over terrorism, which are fuelled by alarmist media coverage, drive up the popular demand for ever higher counter-terrorism security expenditure. Ayman Al Zawahiri has cited the escalating cost of homeland security as a circuitous way in which USA can be bled dry economically through terrorism, even if ambitious plots are mostly interdicted.

The intrinsic utility to a terrorist organization of inflicting economic loss through damaging property may not be so significant. But if a terrorist attack fails to gain much media attention, then it would have contributed little to the terrorist cause. Denying terrorists the oxygen of publicity would be beneficial to counter-terrorism initiatives, if this could be achieved. David Broder of the Washington Post²³ has emphasized that, '*The essential ingredient of any effective anti-terrorist policy must be the denial to the terrorist of access to mass media outlets.*' However, basic democratic rights cannot be infringed, and any step towards restricting editorial authority to headline terrorist attacks would have to be ruled out as unacceptable in a society that values freedom of the press. However, legislation can be introduced to ban propaganda inciting terrorism, as it was done in the aftermath of the 7 July 2005 London Transport bombings. In particular, radical imams can be prevented from publicly broadcasting their views on the justification for Jihad – or else they face arrest, as happened to Abu Hamza²⁴, the notorious imam of the Finsbury Park mosque in North London, a safe haven for numerous Jihadis.

The importance of media exposure to the terrorist cause naturally influences their operational decision-making. Given a choice between a speculative vehicle bomb plot on a major

²¹ "Messages from bin Laden". Al Jazeera. 2 May 2011. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/05/20115272955828212.html>, Accessed on 18 April 2018.

²² Richburg, K. B. "Madrid attacks may have targeted election". *Washington Post*, 17 October, 2004. 16.

²³ Felling, M. "Terrorists' visual warfare uses the media as a weapon". *Christian Science Monitor*. 4 August 2004. <https://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0804/p09s02-coop.html>, Accessed on 18 April 2018.

²⁴ Hamza, A. *Allah's governance on Earth*. London: Deluxe printers, 2001. 12–17.

urban building with good street security, and a suicide IED plot against a popular crowded public space in a capital city, the latter would be more reliable and appealing. It would be easier to organize and perpetrate, involve fewer operatives and have a smaller chance of interdiction, and might cause more fatalities which would generate greater media coverage.

Since 9/11, there have been numerous attacks of the latter type: Madrid (2004); London (2005); Boston (2013) and Paris (2015). By contrast, there have been no successful vehicle bomb attacks in the following countries in the western alliance: USA, Canada, Australia, UK, France, Germany, Spain, Belgium or Netherlands. In Norway, there has been a successful vehicle bomb attack, perpetrated by Anders Breivik in Oslo. But his day of terrorist mayhem, 22 July 2011, is mainly remembered not for this, but for the mindless and brutal slaughter of dozens of young political activists at a summer camp. The media focus afterwards was on this act of mass murder rather than on the vehicle bomb²⁵.

The allocation of resources for counter-terrorism protection should be informed by understanding the importance of the media in terrorist plots. Terrorist targets are more attractive if they have international name recognition, and are well known locally. Terrorist attack modes are more attractive if, like IEDs, they have a distinctive newsworthy kinetic sound and visual impact. Prioritized are locations in which media may already have correspondents and camera crews, and to which media can gain access rapidly. On October 2016, a suspected IED was found on a London subway train. A 19 year-old student was tasered and arrested the following day. If this incident had occurred in a suburban district, it may have gone unreported. The front page headline in the London Evening Standard²⁶, '*Armed police on tube to fight terror*', amplified the impact of this rather minor terrorist incident. Capital cities, and other centres of political, economic and tourist activity, are favoured targets for many reasons, including media coverage.

The following year, 2017, was an extremely active period for Islamist attacks in England. According to Andrew Parker, the director-general of the UK security service, MI5, this has been the most active in decades²⁷. There was the Westminster Bridge vehicle ramming and stabbing attack on 22 March 2017; the backpack bomb in Manchester on 22 May 2017; the London Bridge vehicle ramming and stabbing attack on 3 June 2017; and the Parsons Green London tube attack on 15 September 2017.

All of these attacks gained massive media coverage, especially the attack in Manchester, which targeted the concert given at the Manchester Arena by Ariana Grande, who has a massive following amongst girls who want to be like her. The lone back-pack TATP bomber was Salman Abedi, the son of Libyan refugees. Having evaded the attention of the intelligence and law enforcement services in making his bomb and preparing the attack, he sought out the optimal target for his suicide attack. The target had to be the best possible: a suicide bomber can only die once. One of the criteria for optimal targeting is the level of media publicity attainable. By killing 22, mostly young, people at a pop concert given by an

²⁵ Pidd, H. "Anders Behring Breivik spent years training and plotting for massacre". *The Guardian*, 24 August 2012. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/aug/24/anders-behring-breivik-profile-oslo>, Accessed on 7 May 2018.

²⁶ Davenport, J. "Armed police on tube after North Greenwich bomb alert". *Evening Standard*, 26 October 2016. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/armed-police-to-travel-from-job-to-job-on-tube-after-north-greenwich-bomb-alert-a3379016.html>, Accessed on 7 May 2018.

²⁷ Parker, A. "Director General Andrew Parker: 2017 Speech". Security Service MI5. 17 October 2017. <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/news/director-general-andrew-parker-2017-speech>, Accessed on 16 April 2018.

American superstar with 100 million Instagram followers, Salman Abedi knew that he had maximized the global media publicity. We know that he had considered other targets, such as the main railway station in Manchester. Cable news channels covered the suicide attack continuously²⁸. A lesson for security services is to allocate police resources on a daily basis so as to give extra attention to events that would attract massive media coverage.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In his book on the psychology of terrorism, Horgan²⁹ has pointed out that *‘whenever we read or hear about a terrorist attack, what is almost always focused on is the drama of the event, often at a personal level with emphasis on the scale of destruction and property damage’*. The media focus on drama is an inevitable consequence of a terrorist attack, thus meriting the use of the media to be described as a terrorist weapon in itself.

Horgan discusses the portrayal of some terrorists as narcissists³⁰, who have grandiose views of themselves and seek attention. Narcissists have a sense of entitlement, a willingness to mistreat others, a need to be admired, and a lack of empathy. Whilst there is no specific psychological profile of a terrorist, leaving an individual mark in history, and being a target of international media attention, appeals to many people – including terrorists. A narcissistic personality trait of terrorists is exemplified by Haron Monis, a self-styled Islamic cleric, who took 18 hostages in a Sydney cafe in December 2014. In his trial, his lawyer told the court that his constant goal in life appears to have been achieving significance.

There is an important psychological link between narcissism and aggression. According to Bushman and Baumeister³¹, *‘Narcissists mainly want to punish or defeat someone who has threatened their highly favourable views of themselves. People who are preoccupied with validating a grandiose self-image apparently find criticism highly upsetting and lash out against the source of it.’* The coupling of terrorist violence and media coverage of terrorism would be a natural reflection of the underlying deep psychological link between narcissism and aggression.

Just as military weapons are used by terrorists to take out their aggression on their adversaries, so the use of the media is a weapon that elevates and promotes their self-image. Extensive international coverage would be perceived as a rewarding part of the outcome of an aggressive act of violence. Like many psychological disorders, narcissism varies widely in its degree of behavioural manifestation. So, while the incidence of narcissism (as a formal psychological personality disorder with childhood origins) may not necessarily be higher amongst terrorists than within the general population, it is intuitively plausible that a sense of identity deficit may be linked with narcissistic rage somewhere along the development path of those who turn to terrorism³².

²⁸ Smith-Spark, L., Said-Moorhouse, L. and Almasry, S. “Salman Abedi: bomber in Ariana Grande concert”. CNN. 24 May 2017. <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/23/europe/manchester-bombing-salman-abedi/index.html>. Accessed on 18 April 2018.

²⁹ Horgan, J. *The psychology of terrorism*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2005. 23.

³⁰ Horgan. *The psychology...* 59.

³¹ Bushman, B. J. and Baumeister, R. F. “Threatened Egotism, Narcissism, Self-Esteem, and Direct and Misplaced Aggression”. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75/1. 1998. 219–229.

³² Victoroff, J. “The mind of the terrorist”. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49/1. 2005. 3–42.

CONCLUSIONS

A terrorist action is not all about coercion through violence. Another softer aspect of terrorist strategy is persuasion through the media. It is unsurprising that violence and media publicity should be connected. Aggression and a grandiose self-image of a terrorist organization are linked together psychologically. Terrorists seek publicity and media outlets for their aggressive actions. Psychologists warn that invisibility is a central fear of the narcissist. Their response to exclusion and marginalisation is violence, which lifts the terrorist out of oblivion³³.

Terrorism is a thinking man's game – terrorists know that they have to be very smart over their public profile and messaging. Indeed, in their use of slick advertising techniques for strategic persuasion³⁴, terrorists have often surpassed the media skills of the forces of counter-terrorism.

In recruitment, there are social push factors which drive disillusioned alienated members of society towards extremism, but there are also pull factors that attract recruits and entice them towards joining a terrorist organization. More media-savvy counter-terrorism effort is required to resist these strong pull factors, which are especially powerful because of the media attention paid by terrorist organizations.

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