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## Terrorism and the Media-The Right to Know and the Challenges of Extortion

Mohamed Kirat \*

### Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between media, government, and terrorism. It investigates what terrorists want from the media, what governments seek from the media when covering terrorism, and what the media aims to achieve in its coverage of terrorism. The paper discusses coverage versus boycott, extortion and exploitation, ethical considerations, the war on terrorism and public diplomacy, current trends in terrorist operations, and attacks on journalists and media institutions, the Media in the West, and the Middle East dealings with terrorism. The purpose of the study is to investigate the complex relationship of three parties (terrorists, media, and government) with different objectives and agendas. The problem of media and terrorism lies in the conflicting interests and goals of these three different entities. The author used several case studies related to the problem of this study to highlight the conflictual approach to terrorism and how each entity looks at it, making the equation of terrorism, government, and media complex, challenging, and extremely sensitive that must be managed with caution. Both media and political institutions must consider several factors such as national security, public interest, economic, political, and ethical considerations. The relationship between terrorism, media and governments are characterized by a set of challenges, such as the public right to know and the potential for extortion and exploitation by terrorist groups, and the attempts from the governments to set the agendas. How can the media serve the truth without falling into the trap of extortion, exploitation, without succumbing to the pursuit of journalistic scoops, and sensationalism and without falling into the pressure of control and pressures from the governments?

**Keywords:** Right to Know, Ethical Considerations, Extortion, Sensationalism, Scoops, Nationalism, Bias

## Terörizm ve Medya: Bilgi Edinme Hakkı ve Şantaj Sorunu

### Öz

Bu makale, medya, hükümet ve terörizm arasındaki ilişkiyi araştırmaktadır. Teröristlerin medyadan ne istediklerini, hükümetlerin terörizmle ilgili haberlerde medyadan ne beklediklerini ve medyanın terörizmle ilgili haberlerde neyi amaçladığını incelemektedir. Makale, haber yapma vs. boykot, şantaj ve istismar, etik kaygılar, terörle mücadele ve kamu diplomasisi, terörist operasyonlardaki güncel eğilimler, gazetecilere ve medya kurumlarına yönelik saldırılar, Batı ve Orta Doğu mediasının terörizmle başa çıkma şekilleri gibi konuları ele almaktadır. Çalışmanın amacı, farklı hedef ve gündemlere sahip olan üç tarafın (teröristler, medya ve hükümet) karmaşık ilişkisini incelemektir. Medya ve terörizm sorunu, bu üç farklı varlığın çıkar ve hedeflerinin çatışmasında yatmaktadır. Yazar, bu çalışmanın sorununa ilişkin birkaç vaka çalışması kullanarak, terörizme yönelik çatışmacı yaklaşımı ve her varlığın buna nasıl baktığını vurgulamış, böylece terörizm, hükümet ve medya denklemini karmaşık, zorlayıcı ve son derece hassas bir hale getirmiş, dikkatle yönetilmesi gerektiğini belirtmiştir. Hem medya hem de siyasi kurumlar, ulusal güvenlik, kamu yararı, ekonomik, siyasi ve etik kaygılar gibi birçok faktörü dikkate almak zorundadır. Terörizm, medya ve hükümetler arasındaki ilişki, kamuoyunun bilme hakkı, terörist grupların şantaj ve istismar potansiyeli ve hükümetlerin gündem belirleme çabaları gibi bir dizi zorlukla karakterize edilir. Medya, hem şantaj ve istismar tuzağına düşmeden, hem gazetecilikte skandalların ve sansasyonelliğin peşine düşmeden, hem de hükümetlerin kontrol ve baskılarına boyun eğmeden gerçeğe nasıl hizmet edebilir?

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Bilgi Edinme Hakkı, Etik Kaygılar, Şantaj, Sansasyonellik, Özel Haberler, Milliyetçilik, Taraflılık

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## Introduction

Terrorism is a contemporary phenomenon that affects individuals, societies, and nations. Although this phenomenon has ancient roots in human history and has been known to humanity since ancient times, it has rapidly spread in recent decades. It has become a tool of political practice and a means to raise issues, demand rights, and access local and international public opinion through the extortion of news media. Importantly, it has emerged as a distinct means to reach the public and influence decision-making.

This paper explores the controversial and complex relationship between the media, government, and terrorism, examining how media institutions and journalists go through a complex phenomenon with numerous and serious repercussions across various levels and fields. In the face of such challenges, this paper aims to shed light on how media institutions deal with the complex dynamics of terrorism. It explores the reflections and implications that this phenomenon has on various levels and in diverse fields. The role of the media in shaping public opinion, influencing decision-makers, and addressing the multifaceted aspects of terrorism is a critical aspect of this examination. This paper will delve into the crises experienced by societies and nations, considering the broader context of challenges that humanity has faced in recent decades.

How do the media handle various terrorist acts, and does their performance differ in times of terror compared to normal times? Do the media just cover the crisis, or do they attempt to provide solutions for it? Do they politicize it according to the interests of specific entities, which could be terrorist groups, those in power, the opposition, financial bodies, etc.? Do media organizations face specific pressures when dealing with terrorism? Are there ethical decisions that editors, section heads, chief editors, and managing editors must make due to the numerous risks and implications associated with each terrorist act?

The relationship between government, terrorism and the media raise issues of national security and the individual's right to know, as well as the extortion and exploitation by terrorists. Is there a conflict between extortion and exploitation on the one hand, and the individual's right to know on the other? Is there a conflict between national security on one side and the pursuit of journalistic scoop and sensationalism on the other? This paper attempts to answer these questions.

## The Problem

The problem of this study revolves around the attempt by terrorists to exploit the links between the media, public opinion, and the decision-makers. Does the media's coverage of terrorist acts serve the right to know, national security, and stability? Or does the coverage serve the government? Or it serves the objectives of terrorists? Covering terrorist operations is a challenging, difficult, and complex task for the media.

### Research Questions:

RQ1: What do terrorists want from the media?

RQ2: What do governments want from the media in their coverage of terrorist acts?

RQ3: What are the objectives of the media in covering terrorist acts?

RQ4: What are the ethical dimensions of covering terrorism?

RQ5: Are there conflicting goals between the three parties in dealing with terrorism: terrorists, the media, and the government? What factors determine the relationship between the three parties?

RQ6: How was the media coverage of terrorism in Both the West and the Middle East?

### **Concerns About the Relationship between Media and Terrorism**

There is difficulty in setting and defining the methodological, theoretical, and regulatory framework for journalistic work, especially daily news coverage of the activities and demands of local and global terrorist groups (Cohen-Almagor, 2005; Hess & Kalb, 2003). Therefore, several methodological questions and challenges arise that are difficult to precisely answer due to the nature of the role of the media. What is the relationship between the media and terrorism? Why do terrorists always focus on extorting the media to reach local and international public opinion? How should the media deal with this phenomenon? Through coverage or boycott? Here, we face a thorny and complex ethical problem: if the media cover terrorist events, are they serving the public or the terrorists? Does coverage benefit the public opinion in any way? How can the media determine when an incident should be covered or not? If coverage is decided, how should it be overseen, and what aspects should be focused on or ignored? When should the press and media withhold information and news? If such news is published, it may have severe repercussions on the state and society? These questions and inquiries are posed by every editor-in-chief, section head, and manager in a media institution when it comes to covering terrorist events. The challenge is primarily ethical and requires careful consideration (Kirat, 2011, 2014; Schmid, 1989).

### **What Do Terrorists Want from the Media?**

If a terrorist act receives no attention from various media outlets and lacks any notable coverage, it means that the event is as if it never happened. Thus, there is no impact of the terrorist act on people, the public, public opinion, decision-makers, officials, politicians, or international public opinion and the international community. The fate of terrorism without the media is stagnation, marginalization, and decline. What terrorists want from the media is media exposure, publicity and coverage that focuses on excitement, spreading panic and fear, instilling a state of terror among people, and urging them to try to understand what happened, why it happened, what the motives and reasons are, what the demands are, and the number of victims and material losses, etc. (Bilgen, 2012) For terrorists, acts of terrorism are the only means to draw the attention of people, the public, and decision-makers so that everyone hears about them and knows their problems, issues, and demands. The dilemma here is that the media cannot refrain from covering terrorist acts because its role in society, based on the principle of the public's right to knowledge, is to inform and report to the public all events of interest and values (Kirat, 2014; Nacos, 2000). On the other hand, democratic countries cannot interfere in the affairs of the media and pressure them to refrain from covering terrorist acts, adhering to the principle of freedom of the press.

According to Brigitte Nacos (1994, p. 34), there are three objectives that terrorist groups aim to achieve through media coverage of their terrorist activities:

Firstly, to attract attention by spreading fear, terror, insecurity, and instability among the targeted masses. Additionally, to expose the weakness and incapacity of the targeted government to protect its citizens from terrorism.

Secondly, these groups and their supporters aim to gain recognition for their demands, arguments, and issues.

As for the third objective for international terrorist groups, it is to obtain a degree of respect and legitimacy in the targeted societies.

Regarding the issue of attention, any terrorist act attracts the attention of the media on one hand and, to a greater extent, the public on the other. Terrorists' news and information become extremely important for the public. On the other hand, the media is the only institution with the capabilities and resources to collect a large volume of information and disseminate it quickly. This information becomes of vital importance not only for the public but also for private and public institutions (Nacos, 2000).

When the public becomes aware of a terrorist act, they seek information and details by turning to radio and television stations, newspapers, and social media around the clock to learn about the latest developments and measures to counteract terrorism. This intimate relationship between the public and the media and the reliance on the media are confirmed by increased sales of newspapers and magazines, and an extremely high TV and radio audience figures when terrorist operations occur.

Taking the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979 as an example, we observe that the three major American television networks (CBS, ABC, and NBC) allocated between 40 to 60% of their news broadcasts to the event. From the public's perspective, Americans followed the event closely for fourteen months without boredom or fatigue. During this period, the Iranian crisis dominated the news on the three channels and was the most covered event ever.

The media coverage of terrorist events and the interviews conducted by television channels, radio stations, newspapers, and magazines with the leaders of terrorist groups provide a significant service by acknowledging them and their demands. They are elevated to the status of politicians, decision-makers, and news makers in the public minds and public opinion. They gain public recognition, media visibility, and a presence in the minds and thoughts of people and the public. This means that through their coverage of terrorist events, characterized by excitement, sensationalism, details, and journalistic scoop, the media offers terrorists and their demands to the public, effectively acknowledging them and their cause, arguments, and justifications.

By gaining access to the media and public opinion, a terrorist is no different than a political party leader, a government minister, or a parliament member. He is in direct contact with the public, presenting his issues, viewpoints, concerns, solutions, and ideas. Undoubtedly, there are millions who sympathize with him or share his opinions, especially among the marginalized, and the poor. This segment seeks revenge against the existing system and authority, viewing terrorists to change their circumstances and solve their problems. The media thus humanizes terrorist groups, recognizing them as actors in the political system with issues and problems they raise, perspectives, and solutions that differ from the official narratives of the system and its various institutions.

Some argue that simply conducting a television or press interview with a leader of a terrorist group is an acknowledgment and legitimization of terrorists and their demands. Nacos (2007) believes that the process and mechanism of conducting a media interview, regardless of the nature of the media outlet, whether it is a terrorist, foreign diplomat, or government official, are the same. Simply conducting an interview with a terrorist by a reputable media representative and treating them as a figure contributing to public discourse is an implicit acknowledgment that what they say is a matter of interest. This elevates the terrorist to the level of legitimate political discourse.

What do governments want from the media when covering terrorism? Governments aim to gain understanding, cooperation, and loyalty from the media with the goal of minimizing the damage of terrorist acts on society, punishing terrorists and those responsible for terrorist acts. Governments want the media, when dealing with terrorist acts, to explain, present, and endorse their arguments, views, and perspectives, rather than those issues and ideas adopted by terrorist groups. The media is required to support and back the government's efforts to provide security, stability, and protect the lives and properties of the people. One of the main goals of governments is to separate terrorists from the media and deprive them of a platform that could manipulate the emotions and minds of people. Governments also try to influence the media to portray terrorists as criminals, refusing to acknowledge them, their arguments, and ideas, focusing on their sins and crimes. Kidnapping a prominent figure, destroying a hospital, or hijacking a plane are criminal acts regardless of the terrorist's cause.

In cases of hostage-taking, governments wish to exclude the media and other entities from the conflict arena, but they hope that the media will provide authorities with information if journalists reach the hostage location. Governments seek to maintain calm, while terrorists aim to gain publicity by spreading tension, fear and confusion. Governments also prefer to avoid exaggeration, sensationalism, and stirring the emotions of the public, especially the relatives of hostages and victims, as such coverage can lead to significant public pressure on governments to make concessions to terrorists. Governments also aim to impose restrictions and pressure on the media to limit information and news about hostages that may lead to further terrorist, destructive, and criminal acts. Governments prefer that the media does not disclose their plans and strategies to combat terrorism or provide terrorists with information that could help them achieve their goals. Governments also want the media to be cautious about the misinformation and media distortion practiced by allies and sympathizers of terrorists. For vital national interests and security, governments want the media to cooperate with them (Nacos, 2000).

### **What Do the Media Want from Their Coverage of Terrorism?**

Media outlets want to always be free and independent from any external pressure, whether from media owners, advertisers, editors-in-chief, or the government. Media outlets always prefer to be the first to cover an event, as journalistic scoop is the golden rule for success. Media outlets always aim to be present at the scene of the event the moment it happens, with as much excitement and drama as possible. Although most media outlets try to be professional and accurate, avoiding misinformation and distortion, attempts at extortion and exploitation, work pressures, and exceptional circumstances may hinder that in many cases. Journalists dealing with terrorism-related issues face several problems, even physical threats if media coverage does not align with the terrorists' agenda. Through their coverage of terrorist acts, media institutions seek to protect society's right to information by presenting images of victims, their reactions, the responses of their families, the public's stance on terrorism, the demands of terrorists, and providing information that security and government authorities may attempt to conceal. Taha Najem argues:

The relationship of coexistence between the media and terrorism can be explained through understanding that the media sees horrific incidents as news scoops, which in turn proves the credibility of these means. Media is seen as a reliable source of information, thus creating a kind of marketing and publicity, which coincides with the vision of perpetrators of terrorism. These terrorists consider the media as the largest investment to their legitimacy within a social entity, thus creating an illegitimate space within the legitimate entity. Evidence to this claim, is that the primary objectives of terrorist attacks are often embodied in gaining publicity. In some cases, publicity is the only objective in order to create terrorist propaganda rather than resolving specific political demands (Najem, 2014).

### **Coverage or Boycott?**

Terrorists conduct terrorist acts to achieve three main objectives: gaining attention, recognition, and a degree of respect and legitimacy. Often, media outlets succumb and respond to these objectives through media coverage and exaggerated attention by journalists to achieve journalistic scoops, distinctiveness, and exclusivity in presenting information, analyses, and various interpretations of terrorist actions (Nacos, 1994).

Terrorists typically engage in crimes, acts of murder, sabotage, hostage-taking, and hijacking of planes to pressure governments to respond to their demands and objectives. To reach the public opinion, they rely on the media, which eagerly rushes to report terrorist events and excels in amplifying these incidents. In the end, we observe that the entire process is propaganda and the dissemination of the terrorists' message. They work diligently to convey it to officials, politicians, decision-makers, and the local and international public. It is noteworthy that terrorists have exploited a strategic tool, which is the media, using it as a means of communication and expression of their demands and objectives.



The challenging dilemma faced by the media here is: what to do? What stance should be taken? Should coverage be conducted, presenting the demands and objectives? Or should coverage be completely boycotted, ignoring terrorist acts? If local media abstain, will foreign media follow suit? If the media refrains from coverage, who ensures that news does not leak, and rumors do not spread? These are numerous, diverse, and complex questions touching on organizational, security, and ethical aspects that must be seriously addressed and carefully studied to avoid problems that may have serious repercussions on society. The matter is complicated and requires coordination with security agencies and the government to make sound decisions and contribute to marginalizing those who use illegal, unethical means to achieve their goals and interests at the expense of the security and safety of the innocent (Domke et al., 2006; Farsoum, 2002).

### **Extortion**

One of the most significant criticisms addressed to the media in its handling of terrorism is that it has become a crucial player in crises and terrorist operations, being exploited to serve interests and goals that may completely contradict the noble mission of media in society. With its strength and vast communicative capabilities, the media provides an excellent opportunity for terrorists to reach millions of people locally and internationally to express their demands. O'Sullivan argues:

The process of interviewing someone, whether he is a terrorist or a foreign diplomat or a government official, is the same process. It does not make a difference whether an interviewer is though on the terrorist or his sympathizer. The mere fact that the terrorist is interviewed by respected media representatives and treated as someone whose contribution to public debate is worthy of attention elevates the person to the level of a legitimate politician (O'Sullivan, 1984).

Satellite television channels and latest information technology escalate and exaggerate crises, increasing their panic, fear, and impact. This can serve the terrorists' cause, exerting immense pressure on the government to concede and negotiate from a position of weakness. After sensationalism, amplification, and exaggeration, decision-makers find themselves weak in the face of the public opinion's effects domestically and internationally. Gaining access to the international public opinion is one of the most important objectives for terrorists, attempting to reach international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and other ethnic, and minority groups. This exploitative equation is considered a negative practice by the media, despite the consideration that it provides a valuable service to the public opinion and fulfills its social responsibility. However, it serves causes that have nothing to do with the public interest and the well-being of society (Zabyelina, 2022). The decision here is ethical, and it is the duty of the media to rid itself of any commercial considerations, competitive thoughts, or journalistic scoops, as the issue is much more critical, involving the security and safety of the public and the state.

### **The Ethical Dimension**

Dealing with terrorism from a media perspective is a delicate and complex issue with incredibly important ethical dimensions. The problem ranges between the responsibility of reporting and informing and the citizens' right to know on one hand and falling into the trap of extortion and exploitation by terrorists who seek specific goals through media coverage on the other hand. On another note, some media institutions exploit terrorist acts to achieve sensationalism, journalistic scoops, and to gain fame, build the institution's reputation, and increase the audience ratings. On another account, the government has its say in all of this. Usually, governments try to influence the media to cover terrorism according to their agenda. The famous US patriotic act was a technique of taming the American media to be nationalistic and prioritize national security and interests of the American nation over any other concern. State terrorism is another controversial issue to be addressed,

Handling terrorist operations and terrorists requires a great deal of caution, care, professionalism, and insight from the media and those overseeing it. The idea of press freedom, the free flow of information, and blind obedience to the principle of people's right to know has no place when it comes to the security and safety of society. What is required here is the establishment of strict standards for dealing with terrorist acts. If the media can marginalize these acts and not give them any significant importance, it serves the entire society and prevents terrorists and their acts from gaining publicity and access to public opinion. In this case, the media should not think in terms of profit, competition, or the logic of freedom and non-state intervention in its private affairs. It should also avoid sensationalism, journalistic scoops, and obtaining the largest possible audience.

The need for collaboration between security agencies, the government, and the media in dealing with terrorists and covering their activities is crucial to avoid exploitation, extortion, propaganda, and sensationalism. The combined efforts lead to successfully containing and marginalizing terrorism from a media perspective. This means that terrorism, without publicity and media coverage, is inconsequential and cannot achieve its goals and reach public opinion. When the media covers terrorist acts, it amplifies the events and makes them widely circulated by the public and the society, charged with emotions and tension. Often, these coverages, especially television broadcasts, lead to public sympathy with terrorists (Nacos, 2007). Here, the media finds itself in an awkward situation: balancing freedom of expression, playing the role of reporting and informing, meeting public demands, and at the same time, harnessing its media services for terrorists who use violence and force to access the media and, consequently, public opinion on a national and international scale. As mentioned earlier, cooperation and coordination among various parties are essential to marginalize terrorists and their acts. This is to protect the public interest, citizens' safety, and national security.

For most Western media, especially those focusing on sensationalism and selling odd, strange, violent, and criminal content, terrorism is considered a lucrative and profitable good that helps the institution increase sales and reap substantial profits (Nacos, 1994). For the media to succeed in its strategic mission in dealing with terrorism, it is crucial to establish a shared database. Collaboration channels must be created to exchange information and provide the necessary and essential data about various terrorist networks, including their backgrounds, composition, ideology, goals, and other information that might be available to some but absent from many Arab media outlets. Unfortunately, acts of terrorism in some Arab countries have been overseen in a random manner lacking precision in information and prominent journalistic intuition. Most writings on the phenomenon of terrorism have been simplified, serving terrorism more than attempting to undermine or enlighten public opinion in a rational and purposeful way about the background of terrorist groups, their ideology, and objectives.

Against the backdrop of the cultural conflict between the East and the West, particularly within the framework of undermining and distorting Islam, the phenomenon of terrorism in the Arab world serves as a necessary and essential pretext for unleashing hatred and animosity, along with all kinds and forms of stereotyping portraying the 'barbarism' of Arabs and Muslims, as well as their ignorance, backwardness, and savagery. Whenever a terrorist incident occurs in the West, fingers are invariably pointed at Arabs, often resulting in the imprisonment of Arab expatriate youth in countries such as France, Belgium, the United States, and other Western nations, solely because of their Arab features. This is what has happened and continues to happen in many terrorist acts in the West, even though the culprits behind these events are Western terrorist networks. As for the acts of terrorism in Arab and Islamic countries, it is noteworthy that the West excels in tarnishing anything related to Arabs and Islam, as if the main cause of terrorism within Arab countries is the Islamic religion.



### Media Manipulation and Intellectual Terrorism

The events of September 11, 2001, in the United States and the subsequent war on terrorism revealed the intellectual terrorism practiced by Western media on the minds of people, humanity, and public opinion. The words 'Arab' and 'Muslim' became synonymous with terrorism, and diverse types of media began weaving and stitching stereotypical images, ideological systems, and beliefs that portray Arabs and Muslims as enemies of humanity, ethics, and noble values. What is strange is that the Western media did not raise fundamental questions in its handling of the events in New York and Washington—important and pivotal questions that, if asked, would undoubtedly contribute to completing the true picture of the backgrounds and repercussions of these event (Noha Ali, 2003).

Why was America specifically targeted by terrorism, and why did the American-Western machine not act when countries like Britain, France, Belgium, and Germany were harboring terrorists of various nationalities under the guise of political asylum, human rights, freedom of expression, and more? Why did the Western media not react to the state terrorism practiced daily by the Zionist entity against the Palestinian people? Can America eliminate terrorism by striking the Afghan people, eliminating Osama bin Laden, and invading Iraq? Did the Western media address the real causes of terrorism? Did the Western media inquire about who created bin Laden, the 'Arab Afghans,' the 'mujahideen,' armed Islamic groups, their 'leaders,' and others? Did the media address the existing contradictions in international relations, the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the lengthy list goes on?

The media plays a crucial role in shaping our perception of others based on the images and ideas they present to us. What applies to individuals is applied to countries and societies as well. What we see in movies, browse in newspapers and magazines, watch on television, and hear on the radio about other societies and their people significantly influences our stance towards these cultures, countries, and their people. This is due to various considerations, with one of the most important being that most of us rely on the media to form a specific knowledge base and mental images. Often, individuals cannot resist what is presented to them; instead, they accept, especially matters that go beyond their frame of reference and knowledge.

Numerous studies have confirmed a positive correlation between mental images and stereotypes about countries and their impact on political, economic, and cultural relations between them. These images influence public opinion, which, in turn, plays a role in shaping foreign policy towards a particular country. It is likely that a country portrayed negatively with biased stereotypical images and misleading ideas will garner a negative public opinion, placing it at the bottom of the list of friendly nations. Conversely, it will be at the top of the list of perceived enemies subject to policies of marginalization, containment, and economic blockade (Awni, 2003).

From this perspective, we seek to shed light on the behaviors and attitudes of Western media towards Arabs. Due to its significance, this issue must receive considerable attention from Arab policymakers and political decision-makers due to its strategic importance. In this context, we observe that the Arab nation has faced serious confrontations and challenges related to its national image in Western media for decades. Interestingly, most studies addressing the portrayal of Arabs in Western media have been conducted by Western researchers, with very few Arabs showing interest in studying this issue. Most studies and scientific research overwhelmingly confirm that Western media, especially American media, including press, radio, television, cinema, and even books, depict a distorted, negative, and inaccurate image of Arabs in various fields and content.

These stereotypical images are often the result of preconceived ideas, animosity towards the Arab nation, ignorance of Arab history, civilization, and culture, and, finally, the clash of civilizations between the West and Islam. The question that arises here is: what are the mechanisms and

mechanisms that govern media coverage of Arabs in Western media, and what are the determinants that direct such coverage in one direction or another? Western interest in covering Arab affairs has been linked to the discovery of oil in the region, the liberation wars waged by some countries, the Palestinian issue, the 1967 and 1973 wars, and the stone revolution and recent uprisings in recent years.

Naturally, any media coverage is determined by a range of factors, including the relationship between Arab countries and Western countries in the economic, political, and cultural fields. Also, cultural, civilizational, and religious dimensions play a role. The closer the relationship in these factors, the greater the understanding of the other party, and vice versa. This means that the media is an institution that reflects the system in which it operates, and it is part of it, unable to break away from it. This reality is manifested in economic, political, social, cultural, and other values, which may contradict with other societies and cultures, such as Islam, for example.

The media is constrained by the mechanisms of state policy, as it, in one way or another, represents this policy and advocates for the system within which it operates. Taking the United States as an example, we observe that over the past five decades, American foreign policy in the Middle East has been characterized by its blind allegiance to Israel and its intense hostility towards Arabs. The success of a candidate in American presidential elections is now contingent on their allegiance to the Zionist lobby and Israel, demonstrating commitment and loyalty to the service of the Hebrew state. Here, undoubtedly, the role of pressure groups, political parties, and lobbies comes into play, working diligently to influence decision-makers to adopt positions that serve their interests and goals (Hawwat, 2002).

Discussing the outputs of media institutions leads us to consider organizational pressures, regulations, laws, judgments, and ethical values that govern journalistic work. The media institution is primarily a commercial entity representing and expressing the superstructure, which consists of a set of beliefs, values, customs, traditions, and more. The media institution must preserve and entrench these values. The journalist is nothing but a product of society and these values and traditions. Thus, through the mechanisms that link them to the media institution, they work to establish and reinforce the legitimacy of the system and the values governing that system. Some of these values or principles may be unsound or inconsistent with universal human values.

Due to various professional pressures, time constraints, and the need for quick and efficient work, the communicators find themselves in a constant struggle with time and deadlines, depriving them of investigating and questioning the reality, mechanisms, and pace by which events unfold. As a result, this journalist becomes assimilated into the system and becomes an integral part of it, never thinking of challenging, rejecting, or resisting it.

Even the principle of objectivity in the West has always been associated with the process of organizing the news, arranging its elements, and highlighting different perspectives, but without questioning preconceived ideas, values, and stereotypes. Objectivity for them has become a more computational process than anything else. One of the main problems facing media coverage of Arabs is the cultural contrast between Arabs and the West. The Western communicator covering the Middle East, or the Arab Maghreb often knows little about the history and culture of Arabs. Moreover, they rely on their preconceived ideas, values, judgments, and traditions of their system in covering Arabs and Arab society. Many of these journalists sent to the Middle East do not even know the Arabic language. One peculiar aspect of American media is that it gathered three hundred journalists in Tehran to cover the crisis of American hostages, and not a single journalist among them knew the Persian language, let alone the Persian culture and civilization.

According to Edward Said, the distortion, misrepresentation, and bias in the coverage of Arabs by Western media primarily stem from the cultural and civilizational conflict between the West and Islam. This conflict became apparent after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of bipolarity, giving rise to a new international system challenging diverse cultures worldwide,

especially Islam. The term "Islamophobia" emerged to express the hysteria that the West experienced against Islam after the collapse of communism, with Islam becoming the primary enemy of Europe and America (Kirat, 2014).

### **The War on Terrorism and Public Diplomacy**

The war on terrorism has affected individual freedoms, human rights, individual liberties, and the foundations of democracy. The U.S. administration utilized lies, censorship, and misinformation, along with various forms of propaganda, to justify its invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Thousands of people were unjustly detained in Guantanamo without trial. Thus, American democracy became entwined with authoritarian regimes, and media merged with propaganda, public diplomacy, and the intelligence apparatus.

September 11, 2001, a date that brought about radical changes in the global political map, international relations, and many internal and external affairs of the United States. The book "Static: Government Liars, Media Cheerleaders, and the People Who Fight Back" by Amy and David Goodman, in one of its sections, provides a study, analysis, and evidence of how the United States spent billions of dollars practicing deception and forgery to justify the invasion of Iraq and disseminate misleading information about the conditions of Iraqis under occupation. The U.S. administration employed what it calls "public diplomacy" to improve the image of the United States in the world after realizing, post-9/11, that its image was highly negative, and most people around the world held a negative view of U.S. practices globally. The U.S. administration also hired writers in various countries to highlight America's role in fighting terrorism and getting rid of dictators like President Saddam Hussein. Inside the United States, various methods of repression and suppression of public freedoms were used under the pretext of the war on terrorism. These measures included targeting those who protest in defense of issues such as the environment, human rights, individual freedoms, press freedom, and freedom of expression.

The Bush administration employed various methods and means to shape public opinion. One of the most crucial tactics used is concealing facts and focusing on what supports its policies and decisions. A key approach has been secret public relations campaigns to gain the loyalty of American and foreign news media, to promote its policies, strategies, and ideology. The Bush administration has consistently exerted efforts to persuade the Iraqi people, the American public, and the international public opinion that the situation in Iraq is much better now than it was during Saddam's era. However, the reality is quite the opposite. Paid and pro-White House media outlets ignore the daily hardships faced by the Iraqi people, such as declining services, lack of security, mistreatment, injustice, and crimes.

Instead of addressing these issues, the media has focused on positive news, embellishing America's image domestically and globally, particularly in the Arab world. The Bush administration established what is known as the "Information Operations" to produce articles and journalistic reports written under the names of Iraqi writers, misleading public opinion. This administration, operating under the Pentagon, allocated hundreds of millions of dollars to disseminate political propaganda and positive media discourse, diverting attention from negatives to positives.

The Bush administration also relied on the Iraqi opposition, which provided false news. Figures like Ahmed Chalabi gained substantial funds to present lies to Americans, including the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, meetings between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden, and close ties between Iraq and al-Qaeda. These news pieces were circulated by American media without accountability, investigation, or scrutiny of their credibility.

In its war on terrorism and subsequent invasions, the Bush administration allocated significant resources to enhance its global image. It recruited numerous journalists and used the mainstream media as a tool for government propaganda. Simultaneously, to win journalists' favor,

the administration adopted measures to remove serious journalists committed to public issues. This approach was employed in press conferences for President Bush to avoid fundamental questions based on field data and facts. Large media institutions justified their failure in the war on terrorism, presenting it as a success to the public, both in America and around the world.

## **New Trends in Terrorism Operations**

In recent years, there has been a rise in terrorist operations worldwide, affecting both advanced and developing, democratic, and non-democratic countries alike. A distinctive feature of recent terrorism is the proliferation of unidentified and unclaimed terrorist operations that also lack specific demands. This type of terrorism provides more space for the media to explain, interpret, and analyze, as well as confront and combat terrorism, at least in the collective memory of society. Twenty-first century terrorism is characterized by its significant exploitation of communication and information technologies, utilizing sophisticated means to build transcontinental networks and advanced communication channels. This poses a major challenge for the media to monitor and track the activities and global spread of terrorist networks. Moreover, contemporary terrorism is marked by extreme violence, with casualties numbering in the tens of thousands. Algeria serves as a stark example, with over two hundred thousand people losing their lives.

What the international community fears most is the possibility of terrorists resorting to the use of advanced weapons and weapons of mass destruction. This would further complicate the task of the media in dealing with terrorism issues.

- Reduce press interviews in hostage situations.
- Delay the distribution of sensitive and provocative information.
- Limit media interference in terrorism affairs.
- Work towards providing balanced coverage, avoiding sensationalism and exaggeration (Combs, 2003, p. 155)

The challenge posed in the context of media and terrorism is ignoring and refraining from covering terrorist activities. The public has the right to know what is happening around them and what affects their security, stability, and the safety of their lives. On the other hand, due to the revolution in communication and information technology, media abstaining from coverage may open the door for various entities to conduct actions that lead to the spread of rumors, misinformation, distortion, among other issues. However, without a doubt, terrorism coverage can fuel amplifying terror, sensationalism, over-publicize, exaggerate and escalation, meaning more terrorism.

Thus, the problematic relationship between the media, government, and terrorism remains complex and sensitive. Dealing with it involves many risks, pitfalls, and challenges. Ignoring terrorist activities by the media has its drawbacks, risks, and repercussions. On the other hand, covering the actions of terrorists inadvertently serve them, and may be detrimental to the public interest, the security and stability of the state, and the international community.

## **Conclusion**

The media has failed in many cases to manage the coverage of the phenomenon of terrorism professionally and ethically. Similarly, the international system and many countries worldwide have faced challenges dealing with it. Over the decades Arab media have lacked a clear strategy in dealing with terrorist acts, especially those occurring in Western countries. Global news agencies set their own agenda based on their criteria, beliefs, policies, and ideologies. The phenomenon of Islamophobia has negatively impacted the professionalism of many news media organizations.

Governments, as the third party in the terrorism and media equation, aim to gain the favor and sympathy of media outlets to reduce the impact of terrorist acts and focus on their narratives,



rather than the demands and goals of terrorists. Hence, the problem of terrorism, media, and governments remains complex, sensitive, thorny, and fraught with risks and challenges. This study showed that each party in the equation seeks in the first place its interests at the expense of serving the general interest of the country, truth, and the people. The present relationship between media, terrorists and governments features significant considerations and hurdles that must be seriously studied by experts to establish methodological, practical, and ethical strategies to deal with terrorism. This should serve the truth, the public interest, the security of citizens and the state, rather than sensationalism, over-publicizing, or succumbing to extortion and exploitation by individuals, entities, and parties employing unlawful, unethical, and illegitimate means to showcase their rights and achieve their goals. The study suggests that news organizations should be more professional and should have specialized journalists to deal with terrorism to avoid exploitation and extortion from terrorists. On the other hand, governments should have experts to manage media and oversee coverage of terrorist acts and refrain from imposing censorship and control over the media.

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**Araştırmacıların Katkı Oranı Beyanı/ Contribution of Authors**

Araştırma tek bir yazar tarafından yürütülmüştür.  
*The research was conducted by a single author.*

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**Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı / Conflict of Interest**

Çalışma kapsamında herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.  
*There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of the study.*

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