

Terrorism as a Strategic Communication Phenomenon

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Abstract

At present, terrorism is still an ambiguous concept. The multiplicity of types and causes of terrorism is often concealed by the factual similarity of terroristic acts in their consequences. In addition, as ‘terrorism’ continues to reinvent itself, its ever-changing nature persists in puzzling academics around the world. Nevertheless, there are some common themes which have outlined the directions for terrorism research over the last decades. Most of them are applicable to particular aspects of the phenomenon rather than its holistic structure due to limitations, partly described above. In an attempt to present ‘terrorism’ as fully as possible, the present work focuses on its specifics as a communication approach.

Through a detailed analysis of theoretical work and a comparative analysis of case study materials, the article demonstrates significant benefits in perceiving terrorism as a strategic communication concept. The positives of placing the phenomenon within this framework include, but are not limited to, the opportunity to examine the role of different actors, define their positions and aspirations, and account for both the rational and emotional aspects of their behavior. Using a classical set of tools for analyzing a communication process, the research provides a new approach towards understanding and countering terrorists’ activity in the future.

Key words: terrorism, strategic communication, Munich 1972, September 11, counter-terrorism, comparative analysis;

Introduction

The concept of ‘terror’ and particularly ‘ruling through terror’ has been a part of the human civilization throughout history. Initially, it was associated with religion and the ‘divine right’ of the sovereign to take life. Much later, during the French revolution, its meaning shifted and it was conceptualized as a tactic employed by the enemies of society, a connotation closer to the one it has today. At present, terrorism is still an ambiguous concept. The multiplicity of types and causes of terrorism is often concealed by the factual similarity of terroristic acts in their consequences (Schmid & de Graaf, 1982). In addition, as ‘terrorism’ continues to reinvent itself, its ever-changing nature persists in puzzling academics around the world. As Spencer has stated: ‘if people know anything about the field of Terrorism Studies it is most probably that it has failed to find a definition of its own subject’ (2010, p. 1).

Nevertheless, there are some common themes which have outlined the directions for terrorism research over the last decades. Some of them more successfully than others. Most of them applicable to particular aspects of the phenomenon rather than its holistic structure due to limitations, partly described above. In an attempt to present ‘terrorism’ as fully as possible, the present work will focus on its specifics as a communication approach and through a detailed analysis of theory and practical examples will prove that it is indeed a strategic concept. The positives of placing the phenomenon within the framework of communication include but are not limited to the opportunity to examine the role of different actors, define their positions and aspirations, and account for both the rational and emotional aspects of their behavior.

It is not the purpose of this article to condemn or encourage the use of terrorism as a communication form. The term ‘terrorism’ itself, as stated by some scholars (e.g. English, 2010),

has a strong pejorative connotation in our modern society and is rarely used to describe one's own actions. The intention of the present work is to simply provide another perspective to the already wide range of terrorism research whilst acknowledging the efforts of other academics to look at the investigated phenomenon through the prism of 'communication' even if differing from the one presented here.

Violence as Communication

Crelinsten is one of the most prominent scholars arguing in favor of the idea that violence can be conceived as a form of communication. He also acknowledges the fact that it can sometimes be used in concert with other forms of communication and sometimes in their stead (2002). If we assume this notion to be true, then there is a pending question which needs to be answered. Does 'terrorism' fall in the broader category of violence mentioned above or do its specifics separate it as the exception which proves the rule?

If we had a single definition of the term, it might have been easier to find an answer. Nevertheless, we shall try and explore the definitions of the phenomenon provided by different scholars over the years and compare them with the idea of strategic communication. The essence of communication is the exchange of information and/or expression of ideas, thoughts, feelings etc. to a second party (Burlison , 2010). In this regard, nearly all existing definitions of terrorism would suggest at least two active sides in an exchange (terrorists and victims). Thus, terrorism is indeed a communication form but can we classify it as a form of strategic communication?

Communication is strategic when there is a short or long-term goal involved and it dictates the way it is carried out by at least one of the participating parties (Hristov, 2008). Looking closely at the definitions of 'terrorism' we can outline that it is 'intended to influence'

(US State Department cited in English, 2010, p. 2), ‘intimidate or coerce’ (FBI cited in English, 2010, p. 3), ‘achieve political objectives’ (US Department of Defense cited in English, 2010, p. 3), ‘attain political goals’ (Kydd & Walter, 2006, p. 52), ‘intimidate or frighten’ (Pape, 2006, p. 9), ‘to have far-reaching psychological repercussions’ (Hoffman , 1998, pp. 43-44), ‘to manipulate’ (Schmid & Jongman, 2005, p. 17) and also – ‘to communicate a message’ (Gearty, 1992, p. 1). All of these definitions are clearly stating that there is an agenda on behalf of the terrorists which they try to fulfill in the process of the act itself or in its aftermath and this agenda can range from communicating a message to intimidating and coercing. It can be argued that terrorism can indeed be perceived as a form of strategic communication which has its own specific goals and methods to pursue them.

However, in order to examine the phenomenon as an act of communication, we need to establish the elements involved in such. The original communication model was developed by Shannon and Weaver (1949) but for the purposes of the present work it would not be suitable as it does not include a ‘message’ which is an essential component of every terrorist activity. Without a message, there can be no political aspirations and subsequently – the instances of violence are simply a crime (Richardson, 2007). Thus, we will turn to the models of Berlo (1960) who introduced the ‘message’ element in his model of communication and Wilbur Schramm (1954) – indicating that we should also examine the impact that a message has (desired and undesired) on the target of the message. On the basis of this theoretical framework, we can establish that the key elements in a communication process are:

- Sender – encodes the message in such a way as to suit the planned strategic objectives.
- Channel – the means through which the message is conveyed to the Recipient.
- Message – the actual information, notion, sentiment which is to be expressed.
- Recipient – decodes the message, not necessarily in its full and original form.
- Feedback – actions taken by the Recipient to indicate their understanding of the message and subsequent behavior.

A more visual representation of the model we will use can be found in fig. 1 below:

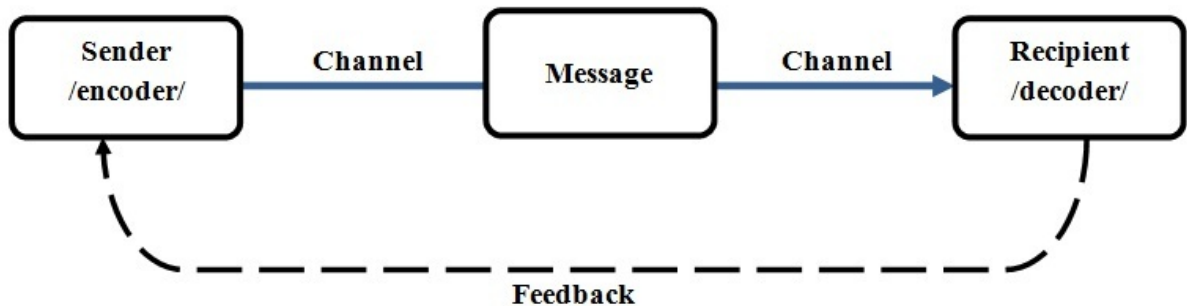


Figure 1 - Pavlova, G. (2013) *Is there a difference between public diplomacy and propaganda?* Unpublished

Having this model as a base would greatly benefit our exploration of terrorism as a communication strategy. But before we proceed with a detailed investigation of its separate elements, it is essential to use a particular case-study to supplement the presented theoretical framework.

When we consider the terms ‘terrorism’ and ‘communication’, the first events which would come up are probably the 9/11 attacks launched by al-Qaeda upon the United States. And even though there is a reasonable argument behind undertaking the challenge and examining them in detail, as many scholars have done over the course of the last decade, the event is still a part of the relatively recent history and its implications and specifics have not yet been defined. This is why we should focus our attention towards what Hoffman considers to be the beginning of ‘the modern-era of international terrorism’ (1998, p. 56). Schmid and de Graaf proclaimed in the 1980s that ‘there can be little doubt that the most effective recent non-state terrorist users of the media have been the Palestinian fedayeen’ (1982, p. 27). And they were probably right as the Palestinians outlined the course for development of many terrorist organizations for decades afterwards, including the infamous al-Qaeda.

As a result, our primary case study to which we will apply the above-described communication model as an analysis tool will be the terrorist attack in Munich 1972. However, in order to extend the practical relevance of the present paper, newer examples of terrorist activity will be used as a comparative point. This will serve to indicate the model’s applicability to newer instances of terror. The chosen cases have mostly illustrative character. Rather than aiming at a representative sample and quantitative analysis of terrorism, the current work is a part of an on-going research in the field and further contributions would be more than welcomed.

Background

After the loss of the Six Day War in 1967, the Palestinians focused towards winning the ‘hearts and minds’ of the world and for them, terrorism served primarily as ‘an instrument of mass communication’ (Schmid and de Graaf, 1982, p. 27). Two of the most successful terrorist

operations in terms of media coverage are carried out by Palestinians. The first is the hijacking of an Israeli El Al commercial flight on 22nd July 1968. It changed the terrorism paradigm in two important ways, namely: it was the first time when terrorists travelled from country to country to plan and organize attacks; they targeted ‘innocent civilians’ from countries that had little to do with the political grievances related to their cause.

These were largely facilitated by the technological advancement and the beginning of globalization. Modern technological developments have provided a ‘determined minority with new sources of strength and with a sense of power’ (Ivianski, 1977, p. 54). The notion has carried on through the decades and through different terrorist organisations up to modern instances such as ISIS and their use of Twitter to recruit women. Nevertheless, it was the Palestinian fedayeen who reshaped the understandings of terrorism and made a crucial step in its development.

The event which managed to draw the most attention to the Palestinian cause, occurred on 5th September 1972 when the PLO’s Black September Organization attacked in Munich during the Olympic Games. They took the Israeli Olympic team as hostages and offered to exchange them for 236 Palestinians being held in Israeli jails, along with 5 other terrorists being held in Germany. The rescue plan went horribly wrong and resulted in the deaths of 11 Israeli Olympic athletes and 1 West German policeman.

The notion of such an extreme form of violence during the Olympic Games is just as terrifying today as it was in 1972. The world was shocked as the attack was completely unexpected. It is easily shown in the fact that Jim McKay¹ – a sports journalist, had to cover the

¹ James Kenneth McManus a.k.a. Jim McKay (1921 – 2008) – American television sports journalist.

events for the American television ABC. He was on the air for fourteen hours without a break (Hiestand, 2008) and as the tragedy came to an end he proclaimed from the screen:

When I was a kid, my father used to say: 'Our greatest hopes and our worst fears are seldom realized'. Our worst fears have been realized tonight. They have now said there were 11 hostages; two were killed in their rooms yesterday morning, nine were killed at the airport tonight. They're all gone. (Jim McKay cited in Hiestand, 2008)

And this phrase, along with the image of a man, standing on a balcony with a mask on his head, became the headlines of media across the world. As horrific as it might seem, undertaking such a radical terrorist action during the Olympic Games was a perfectly rational idea from a communication standpoint and it proved itself beneficial. 'Eight Black September terrorists captured the attention of an estimated 800 million spectators' (Commer, 1972, p. 13). Even though they demanded exchange, it wasn't the material purpose of the operation which was leading them in action, but the psychological effect. They wanted to convey a message to as many people as they could. Abu Ijad, Chief of Intelligence for the PLO and also a co-founder of El Fatah has indicated 3 distinct goals or aims of the action:

1. Strengthening of the existence of the Palestinian people.
2. Echo with the international press assembled there.
3. Liberation of fedayeen imprisoned in Israel. (cited in Schmid and de Graaf, 1982, p. 30)

The first two goals are obviously closely related. Just a few years before that, the Palestinian issue was mostly neglected throughout the Western world. For twenty years, the world had 'hardly taken any notice of the fate of the two and a half million displaced Palestinian

Arabs' (Schmid and de Graaf, 1982, p. 27). Placing the physical goal last, Ijad prioritizes the communication aspects of the action and hints that at that point in time, attracting attention to the grievance of the Palestinian people was the primary task. And they did manage to fulfill it as media representatives from around the globe were in Munich to report the Games.

Another terrorist attack of similar magnitude and with its own cornerstone position in modern history is the one which took place on 11th September 2001. It was again a direct effect of globalization and advancements in technology which made it possible. 2 996 people died as a result of the 4 coordinated terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda. Investigators pointed towards Osama bin Laden, then the leader of the group and his declaration of a holy war against the United States in a fatwa² issued in 1998. A little over a year after the attacks, bin Laden himself declared the following motives:

1. U.S. support of Israel;
2. Support for the "attacks against Muslims" in Somalia;
3. Support of Russian "atrocities against Muslims" in Chechnya;
4. Pro-American governments in the Middle East (who "act as your agents") being against Muslim interests;
5. Support of Indian "oppression against Muslims" in Kashmir;
6. The presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia;
7. The sanctions against Iraq (bin Laden, 2002).

On the outlook, seven different motives seem a bit too much for a single act of terrorism, even if it is of the magnitude of 9/11. However, a closer look would present us with a much

² 'Fatwa' in the Islamic faith is the term for the legal opinion or learned interpretation that the Sheikhu'l Islam, a qualified jurist or mufti, can give on issues pertaining to the Islamic law (Hallaq, 2004).

clearer picture. As some scholars have noted, bin Laden hoped that the move would provoke the US to enter a military campaign which would unite ‘the faithful’ against the West and start a wave of revolutions across the Arab world (Doran, 2005, pp. 72–75). The view does not lack evidence to support it. There is little in common between the problems in Israel, Somalia, Chechnya and Kashmir besides the fact that all these conflicts involve a portion of the Muslim population. Therefore, “increasing the military and cultural presence of the US” in the Middle East might force people from the region to respond violently and even form conservative Islamic governments or ruling systems as is the case with ISIS (Bergen, 2006, p. 229). All the mentioned reasons can be summed under one common umbrella – defending the Muslim population around the world. Subsequently, the 9/11 attacks can be perceived as an attempt to support pan-Islamism as a form of religious nationalism, distinguishing itself from similar pan-nationalistic ideologies like pan-Arabism by excluding culture and ethnicity in their role of unifying factors.

It is obvious that both the Palestinians and al-Qaeda recognized and utilized an opportunity in a very radical way. And even though both did some initial damage to the righteousness of their respective causes, strategically – they managed to achieve some of the objectives.

In the case of the Palestinians, millions of people in around 100 countries became aware of the Palestinian issue and the world was forced to take notice. It is not entirely coincidental that less than 18 months after the incident in Munich, the PLO leader, Yasser Arafat was invited to address the UN General Assembly. Shortly afterwards the PLO was granted special observer status at the UN and by 1980, it (a non-state actor) had formal diplomatic relations with more countries (86) than Israel (72). It is doubtful whether the Palestinians would have achieved that recognition without the use of terrorism as one of their strategic tools.

It can be argued that 9/11 was a strategic success as well. The US response in the form of an invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq was met with wide discontent, particularly in the Middle East. The development of the Arab spring a few years later can be perceived as a direct result of the American military moves. An even stronger case can be made for the formation of ISIS as a response towards the US aggressive policy in the region. And while bin Laden himself was reported shot and al-Qaeda lost many of its assets and strength, the idea of pan-Islamism is stronger today than it was before 9/11.

All of this raises the question of how an act of terrorism fits into the previously outlined communication model and which aspects of its planning and execution proved to be particularly important in achieving the set goals?

Communication Analysis of Terrorism

Returning to the different elements from earlier, we can assume that everything starts with a 'sender' (or the person who encodes the message and afterwards initiates its transmission). As Post noted, 'because of the diversity of terrorist groups and causes, there is no one terrorist 'mindset' (1984, p.152). Or to put it in other words, we cannot actually expect to have a single set of features for the 'sender'. They are different in every single instance of terrorism and even though there might be some overlapping, we cannot draw conclusions on the basis of personal features.

What we can note in regards to the 'sender' are the intentions. Perceiving terrorism as a communication act allows us to explore the aims of the strategic approach. Perl has attempted to list all possibilities related to the sender/terrorists' aspirations in such an exchange (1997). His list, as comprehensive as it might be, is still over exaggerating some aspects while neglecting

others. However, he does list 4 terrorist aims which are probably the most common ones: publicity, understanding, legitimacy and damage to the enemy. If we go back to the case-study of the Munich Olympics, we can easily trace the very same aspirations in the Palestinians.

Publicity was probably the main reason for choosing the Olympic Games as a venue for terrorist activity. Having media representatives from 100 countries provided a perfect platform for extending a message. The successful attainment of this goal allowed them in the long-term to acquire legitimacy for their requests (the speech before the UN) and also to seek support and understanding in people from other nations. As far as damage to the enemy is concerned, the psychological trauma of losing 11 Olympic athletes is immense but it could be argued that in terms of image, Israel did more damage to itself by choosing a particular type of response to the tragedy.

The same model can be applied for the 9/11 attacks. Crashing the planes into the towers in the center of New York creates all the necessary publicity and provides a huge amount of legitimacy and credibility to a previously not-that-well-known group which al-Qaeda was at the time. Furthermore, the demands of al-Qaeda are soon enough supported by extremists from all over the world and their influence in international terms rises.

A similar behavior can be observed by ISIS in recent months. The publication of photos and HD videos of beheadings immediately attracts wide publicity for its 'unprecedented' brutality towards innocent and unsuspecting victims. Furthermore, it gives them much needed credibility and legitimizes their actions in the eyes of possible recruits and supporters. The understanding sought and the damage it does to the enemy are slightly different. Apart from killing civilians, ISIS manages to antagonize Western audience not only towards itself as a

terrorist organization but towards the Muslim community as a whole, which in turn antagonizes the Muslims even further from the West. A dangerous precedent which was started with the 9/11 attacks but continues evolving on its own.

A key notion relating to the 'sender' is that terrorism has a political (and thus rational) motive; such as gaining concessions from another country, culture, etc. (Abrahms, 2006, p. 44). However, these rational motives can (of course) be mixed with less rational affective motives, such as revenge and ideological vindication (Saucier et. al., 2009).

Additionally, when we are examining the role of the 'sender' it is important to note that the terrorists are not a single entity, a concept which seems to elude many authors on the subject. Just as in any other formation, there are leaders and followers. And these two types of subjects have their own sets of very distinctive characteristics. If we look at the 'root causes' idea, for example, we might easily conclude that it is indeed practical as means to understand 'specific incidents and certain categories of terrorism' but are 'less helpful in describing and explaining terrorism as a general phenomenon' (Newman, 2006). As O'Neill has noted, 'poverty of resources, combined with poverty of prospects, choices and respect, help enable terrorism to thrive' (cited in Newman, 2006, p. 751). Nevertheless, modern terrorist organizations also require management and technological skills which can be found in the upper and middle classes. Thus, many terrorist organizations consist of a leadership, often people from the middle and upper class, and following or foot-soldiers gathered from the poor population.

Of course, this is not a solid rule but more of a possibility for context allowing further interpretation on the subject. If we do assume such a scenario, then the leadership would be the communicators forming the message and planning its transmission. The foot-soldiers, just as in

the case of Munich, would be mere messengers or the 'channel' through which the message is conveyed. The 'channel' in most communication processes is relatively easy to define. Just as in many other aspects, here 'terrorism' proves much more complicated. If we take into account the purely physical setting, the communication channel for a terrorist attack would be the media and that can include any of its representatives. It is worth mentioning that the media and the journalists in particular are separate actors from the government and the terrorists and hopefully the victims. Thus, they have their own agenda which is mostly related with reporting the story in a timely and professional manner, protecting their ability to function and the society's right to know. However, the channel through which the message is conveyed encompasses one more key actor in the communication process – the direct victims of the attack.

The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as 'message generators' (Schmid and Jongman, 2005, p. 74). The media itself is simply transmitting the events but the actual message of the terrorist act is delivered through several means and with the rise of anonymous terrorism it is mostly related with the victims of the attack. There is a consistent pattern of symbolic or representative selection of the victims or objects of acts of terrorism (Hutchinson, 1972, p. 15). The victim is never completely random. Even in the cases when it might seem like that on the outlooks.

In Munich, the 11 Israeli Olympians were obviously precisely chosen victims and conveyed the idea of the Palestinian struggle against Israel. Quite a different notion can be observed in the Birmingham pub bombings of 1974, when seemingly random people died as a result of the explosions. What must be taken into account is the fact that these people were in British bars and particularly in Birmingham – the second largest city in the UK. The message

was clear – ‘there can be no security in the UK until there is a free Ireland’. Even when the Provisional IRA officially denied responsibility and the act was claimed by a small group called Manchester Brigade of Red Flag 74, the idea of the Irish struggle was still there as the girl who phoned the news agency in London and made the announcement also claimed to have trained and received explosives from the IRA. The same notion can be traced in Osama bin Laden’s statement after the attacks:

You may then dispute that all the above does not justify aggression against civilians, for crimes they did not commit and offenses in which they did not partake: [...] the American people are the ones who choose their government by way of their own free will; a choice which stems from their agreement to its policies. [...] The American people are the ones who pay the taxes which fund the planes that bomb us in Afghanistan, the tanks that strike and destroy our homes in Palestine, the armies which occupy our lands in the Arabian Gulf, and the fleets which ensure the blockade of Iraq. (bin Laden, 2002)

Even for 9/11 there is a rational definition of the target. Even more so when considering the idea of the World Trade Center as a monument of liberal democracy and capitalism. Thus, the role which the terrorists and the victims play in the communication model presented in this work is significant. They serve as a communication ‘channel’ and it is through them that the message itself is encoded. Some authors have suggested a concept of perceiving a terrorist incident as ‘the collective message itself’ (Fischer et al., 2010, p. 692). This is a useful approach when it comes to the dissection of the message structure.

Terrorists can translate the meaning of the attack by integrating attributes of the sender (e.g., the terrorists’ perceived identities and motives), the act (e.g., the specific mechanism of the incident, its scale and brutality, and how long it was planned for) as well as perceived attributes of their own society or culture (e.g., its perceived threat level or vulnerability) (Fischer et al., 2010, p. 695).

If we look back to our case study, we can easily note the exact elements of the attack which shaped the message. The terrorists were identified as Palestinians. Their request for hostage exchange further developed the idea that the Palestinian cause was their prime motive. And as noted earlier, their victims were not random at all. Turning towards the recent events of 7th July 2005 and the London bombings, we can see a similar pattern. Four terrorists have managed to cause the death of 52 victims. The attack has a devastating effect upon the population and spreads terror.

The message itself is conveyed through several important aspects which include not so much the victims but the terrorists themselves and the property destroyed. The fact that the attacks were carried out in the London underground (and one on a bus) is a clear signal that the terrorists are targeting the infrastructure and through it – the state itself. The message is related to the inability of the state to serve its primal function – provide protection for its citizens.

Other aspects of the message are conveyed through the profiles of the terrorists. All of them – young people (the oldest one was 30 years old), three of the bombers – British-born sons of Pakistani immigrants, all of them followed the Islam, all of them were ‘clearskins’³. This presents on a subconscious level the information which the message is meant to contain. The fact that such young people were ready to sacrifice their lives in the ‘battle of Islam’ is a notion of determination. To the Arab world, it is a signal for stronger unification and to the West, it is a sign that security is no longer a part of their society. Especially interesting is the case of Germaine Lindsay – born in Jamaica and later converted to Islam. At the time of the attack, he was months away from becoming a father for the second time. The fact that he chose to sacrifice himself in a suicide attack rather than staying with his family is pointing towards severe

³ Clearskin – a term describing the person as previously unknown to authorities.

ideological reasoning rather than disagreements with his wife, for example. ‘And throughout history, suicide attacks are often used to disseminate feelings of fear, loss of control and helplessness. The suicide bomber is the most difficult to detect weapon in military history’ (Fischer and Ai, 2008, p. 340).

All of this leads to the consideration of the utility of terrorism as a ‘[communication] strategy employed by actors who believe, rightly or wrongly, that through such means they can advance their goals’ (Newman and Smith, 2008, p. 576). And in order to do that, they need to get a message across to the right ‘receivers’.

If we examine this particular element of the communication chain in closer detail, we can easily note a mistake which some authors (Fischer et al., 2010) are making, namely – perceiving the receivers as a single entity. Crelinsten makes a much better effort by distinguishing between ‘targets of demands’ and ‘targets of terror/attention’ (2002, p. 84).

Often, the first category relies to a state actor in the face of one or several governments. All governments have different approaches and readings on terrorism as a phenomenon but more often than not, they are attempting to deny the terrorists an access to a platform and discredit them by presenting their acts as simple criminal activity. The second set of ‘receivers’ is normally the general public. However, even here we must take note of different sub-categories. People living in a certain type of cultural environment with its own societal rules might perceive news about a terrorist attack quite differently than people from a significantly different cultural upbringing, holding a distinctive set of values.

Such an example is easily spotted in the case-study of Munich, described earlier. The Western societies had a strictly negative and judgmental response towards the events while the

terrorists were regarded as heroes throughout the Arab world. This leads us to the conclusion that different segments of the general audience respond differently to terrorism as a communication strategy. Thus, the general principle expressed by notable authors like Heidegger (2002) and Huntington (2011) about the importance of the cultural upbringing in the perception of the world around us is just as valid when applied to terrorist activity. And it can be seen just as clearly in the last element of the communication model – the ‘feedback’.

Here we have the response of the receiver, often the government, but also the general population towards the act of terror. Hutchinson has noted that in its core, terrorism is ‘intended to have psychological influence on politically relevant behavior’ (1972, p. 15). So, the feedback is an essential part of concluding whether the communication strategy has been successful. Terrorism wins only if you respond to it in the way that the terrorists want you to, which means that its fate is in the hands of the ‘receiver’, not the ‘sender’. ‘That is the ultimate weakness of terrorism as a strategy’ (Fromkin, 1975, p. 281).

Thus, ‘the most significant costs imposed on Americans by the successful terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, undoubtedly are those arising from the erosion of individual freedoms, private property rights, limited government and the rule of law’ (Rathbone and Rowley, 2002, p. 219). It all comes to finding the proper response to the challenge presented by the terrorists. And when forming such a response, one must never forget that the provided ‘feedback’ is just as much a strategic form of communication as the initial act of terror.

In this regard, invading Afghanistan and Iraq with the full military force of a superpower might not be the most sensible decision. The same can be said about the assassination of people even remotely connected to the original event as was the case with the Israeli ‘feedback’ after

Munich. Such a violent response often restarts the pattern of terror exchange. As English has noted, maintaining a strong credibility in counter-terrorism argument is an essential part of preventing future instances of terror (2009, p. 139).

Conclusion

Different scholars have acknowledged (e.g. Laqueur, 1986) that the notion of eradicating terrorism in a non-violent manner is absurd, relates more than anything to the world of abstract ideas and is rarely applicable to the real world – never quite free of conflicts. This is what makes it crucial to find the right balance. Just like in any other form of strategic communication, it is essential to keep an eye on the long-term goals and at the same time manage the exchange in the present moment thoughtfully. A completely non-violent response might render the efforts made to eradicate this phenomenon pointless while an overly aggressive approach runs the risk of antagonizing the general audience even further and legitimizing the terrorists' cause.

Martin Luther King Jr. said that the riot is the language of the unheard. He suggested that rioting is a form of communication people adopt when other channels are blocked (cited in Crelinsten, 2002, p. 77). The very same idea can be applied to terrorism. And it is of utmost importance to keep one's credibility when dealing with such sensitive issues. It is as much true for our case study and the complicated relationship between Palestine and Israel, as it is in many other instances of terror. The essence of any terroristic activity lies in a desire to be heard, to be taken into account and to play a role in the political development. Terror might be a radical approach but more often than not, there is a rational background which has led to the particular escalation of a conflict.

Prominent scholars who have investigated this phenomenon over the years claim that the cultural differences are irresolvable and different civilizations are bound to find themselves on the opposite sides of a conflict (Huntington, 2011). And while there is more than a single argument to support such a stance, it is dangerous nonetheless. For if it is true, then the only means to eradicate terrorism is through the annihilation of an entire civilization until only one remains. And even if we assume that the so-called West ends up on the winning side, the ideological sacrifices which this would require will certainly result in the mutilation of our own civilization and the very ideals it is based upon. Hence, we must continue our search for a peaceful way of coexistence and mutual understanding and any form of radical violence, even as a response to such a move, can be considered a step in the wrong direction.

‘Not only lives, but ideals of liberal democracy are threatened by terrorism’ (Price Jr., 1977, p. 295). As true as it might be, we must be careful and take note of the fact that the actual threat lies as much in the hands of the terrorists as it does in our own.

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