

# Public fear of terrorism

[Society](#), [Terrorism](#)



## Introduction

Terrorism has become a global challenge, which must be fought by collaborative efforts. Indeed the war against terrorism takes many forms and shapes. For instance while traditionally the homeland security has been concerned with fighting terrorism from a military point of view; there is a need for it to be empowered to better deal with terrorism from different dimensions. A new challenge is emerging; that is, the way the media is handling the terrorism and especially how it reports and covers terrorism incidences.

Media plays a very important role in shaping public opinion in many issues including terrorism. Media coverage of terrorist activities shapes how terrorism events are constructed in the minds of the public. Of late there are clear indications of general fear in the public to the extent that, whatever the media reports, is seen as a representation of the real situation on the ground. There is a lot of freedom in the media. With so many freelance journalists who are eager to make an extra dime at the expense of the general public.

Indeed, there is little control over the journalists especially the freelance journalists. The criminal justice has little control over the sifting of information to the general public. The seemingly free-flow for news in the media means that, whoever comes out with the 'best' news is likely to receive the most attention. The craving for news has seen the freelance journalists keen on making quick money violate journalism code of conduct and therefore failing to put into consideration professionalism but become only concerned about getting the most enticing news.

Unlike in the past when the media would take the time to censor the news they released to the public, nowadays some television channels air some uncensored images. This has greatly impacted negatively on the media authenticity. Some media houses are less concerned about the moral implications of such images to the general public. Irresponsible coverage of terrorism activities affects the public by inflicting fear amongst the public especially the uncensored images and broadcasts zoomed by television channels and the internet. The consistency with which such images are aired has also come to have a bearing on the increased fear levels amongst the general public.

Indeed most media houses flout media rules and are only concerned with getting the mission accomplished. The criminal justice has largely become incapable of reigning on the media. This can be explained by lack of effective laws to deal with emerging challenges. One area where law enforcers are facing challenges when it comes to reigning on offenders who violate the media laws is the fact that, some of the sources of the media images and reports which turn out to have negative effect on the general public originate outside the US and those local media houses which air them bear no responsibility as they act as third parties and are in no way responsible for the contents of the reports (White, Jonathan, 2006).

With globalization the world has become a small village whereby information is exchanged within a very short time. As a result, most of the information which reaches the American public, does not necessarily originate within America media. The truth of the matter is that, Americans have a choice to tune into any media channel they feel free to. This is not in any way

regulated by the state and as such, what the public consumes in terms of information cannot be filtered by state law enforcement agents (Nicholas, William, 2005).

Taking the example of international media houses, which broadcast, to the whole world, they are in the first place not bound by the American laws nor can the American public be denied access to such. As a result, whatever information they broadcast concerning terrorism ends up being consumed by the American public. This is very hard to regulate. The advancement of the Internet has brought with it very complex challenges especially in terms of authenticity.

It is very hard to know which source to trust. With the craving for news, the public tends to search for any site, whether incredible or not which purports to inform the public. There are many bogus websites which go to the lengths of capturing live some terrible terrorism activities such as beheading of those captured by terrorists. As a result, this has really formed a great avenue for fear amongst the general American public. In addition, there are not many programs or efforts designed to pre-empt the propaganda which some websites linked to terrorists desire to perpetrate in the American public.

The other major problem is the fact that, the laws governing the internet use are at best lax and are not effective to deal with those who decide to use the internet as a media of perpetrating fear amongst the general American public. Efforts of the government to curb the use of Internet as a propaganda tool led to the introduction of amendments to the privacy acts. As a result, the government has come under fierce criticism for infringing on

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the rights of people to access information. This shows how challenging the fight against the phenomenon has become.

In addition the media has strong unions here in the US which means that, it is not easy for the criminal justice to intervene even in cases where it is evident that, the media is causing a great measure of suffering to the public through the broadcasting of information which is uncensored. The homeland security has a duty to intervene in the dilemma but only to the extent whereby the source of such negligence lies within its jurisdiction. Globalization and a culture of consumerism in the American society makes it impossible for the homeland security to impose any meaningful checks and balances to protect Americans from suffering from the fear that has gripped the general American public (Nakaya, Andea, 2005). Indeed, the public cannot be practically protected from the effects of bad media practices today. It is up to the public to learn to choose what they can listen to or watch.

Recommendation for solving the above problem include; the enactment of tough laws which would see only the most professional media houses get the licence to broadcast in the US. In addition the homeland security should engage in awareness campaigns meant to make the public to understand that, not every media source has credible and correct coverage on terrorism and that some media sources are actually being used by terrorists for propaganda purposes and believing in them is giving credibility to the terrorists. In conclusion, there is a need for the criminal justice to work with the information department to reign on the media houses which if unchecked

are likely to continue inflicting fear on the public and therefore affect public support on the war against terrorism.

#### Reference

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