

In what ways, if any,
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TOPIC: In what ways, if any, have terrorists exploited religion, the media and democratic processes to pursue their goals? The events of September 11 brought the issue of terrorism to the forefront of world affairs through global mass media. The media linked the terrorists to the religion of Islam. Due to international human rights, democratic governments are finding it difficult to combat terrorism. In this essay I will critically discuss how terrorists group has exploited the media, the religion of Islam and democracy to pursue their goals. Media

Terrorism is the use of violence against innocent's victim to bring about political change through fear. It is a combination of indoctrination and drama. With the aid of the present day media, acts of terrorism are now becoming designed to grasp the attention of the entire world and thrust the terrorist organisation's message into the spotlight for the whole world to examine (Weimann and Winn 1994). The relationship between terrorism and the media is symbiotic. As terrorists require widespread attention, the media needs news (Miller 1982). Terrorism in effect is a form of advertisement of the terrorist's goals and what they want accomplished.

In 1980 the New York Times, printed a total of 916 articles on terrorist events. This means that terrorists were getting their message out nearly three times a day to the American public (Miller 1982). Terrorists have usually used the media for four main reasons. The first reason is to have their message heard and to strike fear into their target group. The second is to win over the public's support for their cause, by highlighting themes like,

the righteousness of their cause, and the assuredness of their victory. Third they use media to disrupt government and security responses.

By suggesting that they are overreacting and their efforts are counterproductive. Finally, the fourth is to raise the moral of their current members, raise recruitment, and encourage more attacks (Alexander and Latter 1990). John O' Sullivan gave this quote about media and terrorism, " If the media were not there to explain their political and social significance, terrorism would cease to exist. " (Nacos 1994). With all the interaction between the media and terrorism an option being considered by many governments is censorship of media's coverage of terrorist events.

During many terrorist incidents the police do not want all the information they have gathered to be released, for fear of the public's safety, and the security of their future actions. One motive of terrorists is to sway the public's belief in police forces dealing with the terrorist incident. For that reason the printing of damaging articles and stories requires some restraint (Alexander and Latter 1990). An example of the media needing restraint occurred on April 30, 1980, when a group of Arab secessionists captured the Iranian embassy in London.

As the SWAT teams began to move in their biggest advantage was the element of surprise but a British Independent Television got past the police barricade and broadcasted a live assault on the embassy. One can only speculate what would have happened if the terrorists had been watching the television (Miller 1982). In many countries it is likely that the level of

terrorism will increase rather than decrease after the introduction of
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terrorism. The increase is due to the fact that... groups will feel freer to engage in terrorist acts... ince they can count on not being exposed and criticized by the local media. The mass terrorism of Hitler and Stalin was possible because the people were not fully aware of what was going on. Government imposed censorship on news of... terrorism can, in our view, be a cure that is worse than the disease (Schmid and Graaf 1982). A total blackout of media's coverage of terrorist events is not necessary, if the media will reform its procedure for covering terrorist activities. A leader in this movement of self-censorship is CBS.

CBS has set up a list of guidelines that all the reporters must follow during terrorist situations (Alali 1991). One option for the media to take is that there should be a consensus of standards for covering terrorism stories. There are several parts to this consensus and they are as follows: don't over exaggerate events that are already sensational; the media should paraphrase terrorist demands so they do not get all their political messages out; and they should not broadcast live coverage of terrorist situations unless the head of the news department allows it.

News reporters should also have permission to talk with terrorists, and if there is permission these interviews should not interfere with the ongoing negotiations. (Paletz and Schmid 1992) The reporters should also be attentive to the warnings and orders of law enforcement officials on the scene (Paletz and Schmid 1992). When all the media can set a standard to live by a total blackout of coverage will not be needed. But, if a total blackout of media's coverage of terrorist events becomes policy, many

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believe that there will be abuses made by the relevant forces, which will go unreported to the public and the proper authorities.

Recently, when one of the Bali bombers was captured by the Indonesian police force, he too was brought before the International media in an attempt to get some justification for the horrendous devastation he and his fellow comrades unleashed in Bali. When asked if he felt any remorse for this devastation, he burst into a hysterical laughter and stated that Bali and Australia in turn had no idea what real disaster was, and that where he had failed others will succeed.

The media conference set about a wave of hysteria in Australia, due to the realisation of how susceptible Australians truly are to terrorist activities (ABC Lateline 23/11/2002). Religion America is currently the world's only superpower. Their support for the Israeli occupation of Palestine land outrages Muslims across the world. Being a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the US demonstrated this support for Israel; using their second ever veto to protect Israel from a Security Council resolution that condemned Israel for one of its many attacks on its neighbours (10 Sep. 972, UN Condemned Israel's attacks against southern Lebanon and Syria. Vote: 13 to 1 with 1 abstention) The conflict between Israel and Palestine is a major issue to Muslims. From that moment on the United States " has cast its veto a total of 38 time to shield Israel from the Security Council Resolutions that condemned, deplored, denounced, affirmed, endorsed, called upon and urged to obey the world body" (UN, 23/11/01)

The Security Council resolutions drafted to condemn Israeli practices and measures against the civilian population in southern Lebanon were also vetoed by the United States in 1985. Then came one of the biggest tragic events of the 21st Century; the World Trade Centre bombing. This day did not only change the meaning of what is a terrorist, instead it brought a whole new definition to the term terrorism (Bunch 2003). Soon the majority of the media had constantly referred to these terrorists as Islamic terrorists.

Why did the media bring up the religion of these terrorists so much? They could have tried to point fingers at Al-Qaeda or equally unknown terrorists at that moment. “ today a lot of people feel that Muslims are terrorists ” (Mahathir, 2003) But the western media had got so used to relating any act of terrorism with Muslims now that when there is a shooting at a school in America by a non-Muslim or any other killing that involves a non-Muslim, the term terrorists barely comes up. Ex Prime Minister Dr.

Mahathir who gave an Interview to BBC while in power in 2003 was asked questions on the western attitude towards Muslims and in reply he said: “ I’m talking generally – the attitude is that well these Muslims they are terrorists and you have to confront them”. Now every Muslim in the world feels like they are being treated as terrorists because they all are now suspects in the eyes of America and its allies. Are Muslims related to everything that is bad or evil in history to this day?

If we are to judge and brand others by their religion will Muslims be the only ones with the bad history. Just as we can claim that the outsiders of today are the Muslims. Segregated, now more than ever, most Muslims are

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becoming what society has labelled them as (Becker 2003) Are Muslims the only religion to have terrorists in their community? By labeling these terrorist acts to be done by Muslims, the Western media has helped Al Qaeda to get sympathy from Muslims. They have used this strategy to associate the religion of Islam to terrorism when Islam teaches quite the contrary.

There has been conflict and disagreement throughout the history of Islam, pertaining to the relationship between religion and politics. These disputes have been between more secular Islamic leaders who are 'flexible in their application of Islamic principles to political life', and fundamentalists who believe that there should be a 'strict adherence to the principles and lifestyle of the Prophet' (Heymann 2005). Al Qaeda has seized this opportunity to justify its acts from the Islamic holy book and most of the people are sympathise with them when they see images of the suffering people left by the war in Iraq.

They can see that atrocities done by the coalition of the willing are for the oil and that they are killing people in the name of peace. This makes them sympathise with the terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda and some of them become easy target for recruitment and brainwashing. Democracy Terrorism is an assault on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. It must be defeated with utmost vigour, but not at the cost of those values. We must not destroy or even undermine democracy on the grounds of defending it (European Court of Human Rights 1978)

Terrorism causes people into fear and they are deprived of their democratic rights. Terrorist today not only seek religious or political goals but
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destruction and complete chaos as end in themselves (Malik 1999) By doing this the public are scared and are confined to their homes. They worry about opening their mail and there are metal detector and scanners everywhere. They hardly go on vacations or like to travel (Cornwell 2002) Various governments have brought terrorism legislation to combat terrorism but this has had strong criticism from civil libertarian groups.

In USA, The Patriot Act is a counter-terrorism legislation that can jeopardise basic democratic values such as free speech. Innocent until proven guilty and privacy. (Hook 2001) In Australia, The Anti ??? Terrorism Bill 2004 is believed to have chipped away basic values that are essential to a democracy (Gilbert and Tobin Center of Public Law, University of NSW on 6/05/04). By forcing the government to take counter??? terrorism measures the terrorist are depriving us of our democratic rights thus the terrorist are succeeding in their strategies when it comes to restricting our rights (Fischer 2003).

In conclusion, when the media emphasizes terrorist events it helps to facilitate two of the universal goals of terrorist. The first is that the terrorists gain publicity and attention is drawn to their cause. The second is that when the media shows events and exaggerates, it influences public attitudes about the root of their politically motivated violence. Brian M. Jenkins summed up what terrorism is when he said, “ Terrorism is aimed at the people watching, not the actual victims.

Terrorism is theater” (Nacos 1994). The media also associates religion to the terrorist group. They use as a strategy to gain popularity, sympathy and <https://assignbuster.com/in-what-ways-if-any-have-terrorists-exploited-religion-the-media-and-democratic-processes-to-pursue-their-goals-assignment/>

recruitment through false propaganda. By glorifying terror it helps the terrorist put fear in the hearts of ordinary citizens thus scaring them into hibernation and depriving them of their democratic rights which the terrorists are threatening. Total censorship of terrorist events is not the cure; it will lead to abuses by the forces handling the cases.

The only solution is that the media needs to work out a set of morals that they follow when they are covering terrorist activities. The media needs to remain subjective and not let either the terrorists or the law enforcement take control of what they report. Theodore H. White sums it up with this statement ' ... power in America today is control of the media of communication' (Nacos 1994) Without widespread publicity, terrorist acts can achieve neither of these effects. " (Nacos) The media must not associate any religion, race, colour or creed to terrorism, as terrorism has no face.

The government should also amend acts that deprive basic democratic rights because this is the main difference between the terrorist and us.

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