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Preface

Dear readers,

We are happy to send you this fourth newsletter of the FP-6 research project *Transnational Terrorism, Security, and the Rule of Law* (TTSRL). This newsletter will introduce our Deliverable 6, in which the complex relationship between terrorism and the media has been analyzed.

The relationship between terrorism and media has been described as “symbiotic”: On the one hand, terrorists are believed to use the media extensively and deliberately in order to increase the chances of achieving their objectives. On the other hand, media have been accused of assisting terrorists in doing so, by spending relatively much attention on the issue. This tension has been one of the main reasons for including the subject in our research. You can find the full version of the deliverable on the [publication section of our website](#).

In the paper, we dive into the relationship, discussing the objectives that terrorists may have in using the media, as well as the media’s objectives in broadcasting terrorism, and in putting a relatively large emphasis on the subject. Then we go on to analyze the effects of this relationship: is this phenomenon really something we should fear? Thirdly, we discuss what can or should be done about terrorists using the media. There are of course ethical and judicial barriers that make it difficult and undesirable to regulate the media.

In this newsletter all of these subjects will be touched upon. In the next sections we will first briefly summarize the entire deliverable. Conclusions and policy recommendations will be discussed in a policy brief that will be published soon. Of course, they can be found in the [full deliverable itself](#) as well, but they are not part of this newsletter. Of course, the “reading corner” and “upcoming events” sections, by now well-known regulars in our newsletters, will conclude this latest edition as well, with new material and events.

We sincerely hope that this newsletter will encourage you to read the entire deliverable, and that it will help in stimulating the academic debate on this subject. Any feedback or comments are welcome. To contact us click [here](#), or visit our website, <http://www.transnationalterrorism.eu>.

Kind regards, on behalf of our entire consortium,

Frédérique Petit

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Terrorism and the Media

"Terrorism is theatre," publicity is the "oxygen" of terrorism, and "without massive news coverage the terrorist act would resemble the proverbial tree falling in the forest."¹ These are just some of the one-liners that have been used by politicians and academics to characterize the relationship between terrorism and the media. In our research paper we have researched to what extent these one-liners are true, what the effects are of the relationship between the two, and what can be done about it.

Terrorist use of the Media

First we found that there are several objectives that terrorist organizations attempt to achieve by using the media. Each organization has its own individual motives, and not all of the objectives are applicable to each organization, but generally the objectives can be listed under one of four categories, as put forward by Brigitte Nacos, expert in this field: gaining awareness and attention, recognition of motives, gaining respect and sympathy, and gaining legitimacy. Gaining awareness and attention includes letting people know that the organization and its causes exist, as well as creating fear within the population, that may pressure the government to change its policies. Terrorists will therefore often try to attack places where media is widely available, for instance the Munich Olympics in 1972.

Recognition of motives means that terrorists want people to think about why they are carrying out their deeds that are often horrendous and bloody. Why, for instance, would someone who has a family and a job blow himself up in a train killing many others riding the train? If people try to answer such a question, they will be forced to consider the underlying reasons as well.

Gaining respect and sympathy indicates that those who plan or commit terrorism want to show people who identify with their cause that their way works well. In other words, using the media is considered a good recruitment tool.

The last objective is for the leaders to gain legitimacy, or to get a status similar to that of world leaders or other important figures. By appearing on television in interviews or video messages, they hope to be seen as part of the political process, or at least they hope to be seen as approaching that level and status.

Media use of Terrorism

At the same time, the media are widely broadcasting and emphasizing terrorist events, even if the death toll of terrorism is lower than that of many other issues that are not as clearly emphasized, for instance crime or poverty. This is because terrorism has several characteristics that make it a very "sexy" subject for media. For example, terrorist attacks are sudden, dramatic, human interest stories come up, and there are heroes and villains. In addition, since one of the goals of terrorists is to appear in the media, they pick locations where media will be quickly present. As a result there is often much video footage available, and the

¹ All of these quotes, as well as the other information listed in this summary can be found in the full text deliverable, including appropriate references.





footage is very compelling. Of course, the media like viewer ratings, in fact, "the higher the ratings, the better" is likely to be a motto for most media. Competition and the speed that is required from media in their news coverage may reduce the time available to scan footage. Live feeds of terrorist attacks may lead to gruesome details that are broadcast into the living rooms of the audience, increasing the effects intended by terrorists.

New Developments

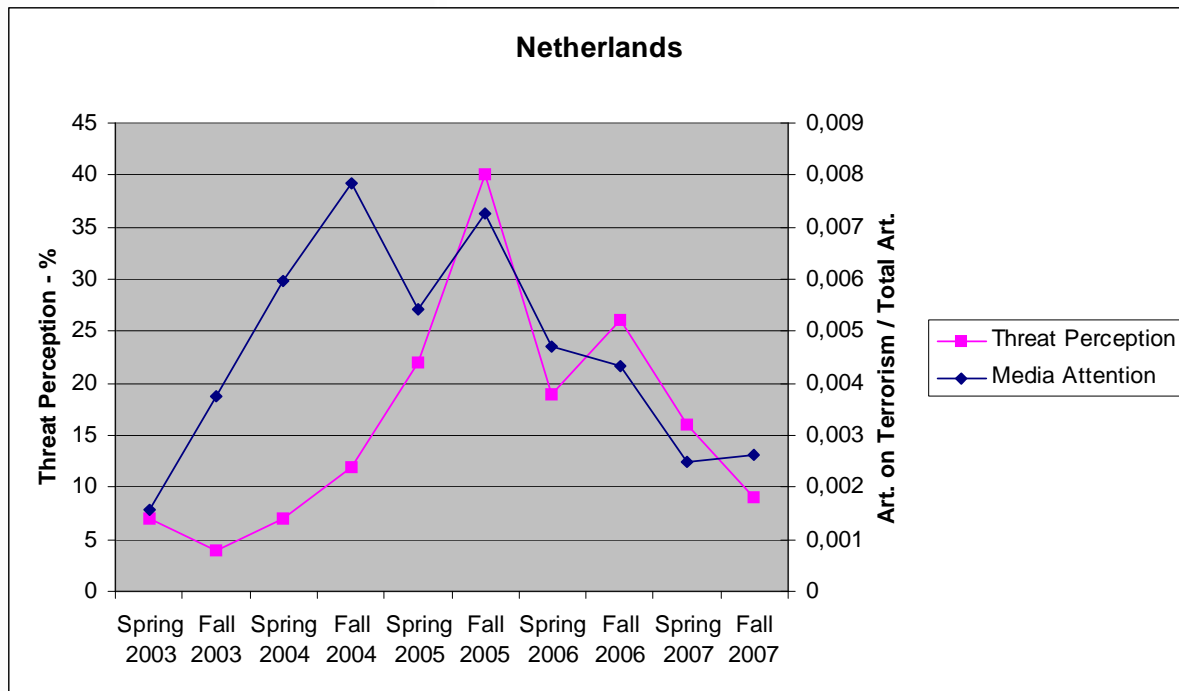
Whereas the "old" media may have a role in spreading messages of terrorists – after all, who would know about an event on the other end of the planet if there were no media – the "new" media play an even larger role in terrorist activity. In old media the journalists and editors are "gatekeepers" of the news. They decide whether a certain news event will be published or not, and how the message is framed. The Internet gives terrorists the opportunity to send out the messages they want, the way they see fit to.

Own television stations broadcast via satellite, such as Hezbollah's channel al-Manar, have the same advantage, with the additional benefit that people do not need to look for the website or click on movie clips, but just wait and see what is broadcast. On the other hand, the disadvantage from a terrorist perspective is that satellite television does not offer the flexibility, the anonymity and the low costs that the Internet provides.

The Effects on the Public

It has proven very hard to gauge the effects of terrorists using the media. Others have extensively debated the subject, and although in many cases some effect was found, no conclusive evidence that terrorism in the media leads to an increased threat perception, to increased radicalization, or a change in government policies according to the wishes of the terrorists has been provided. Unfortunately, the research that we have carried out shows a similar pattern. Using our own text mining tool *PARANOID* as well as publicly available EU *Eurobarometer* opinion polls for 11 member states, we have not been able to prove a direct link between media attention for terrorism and the threat perception. Below, as an example, the graphs for the Netherlands are shown. There are some clear dissimilarities in the graphs. There are several possible explanations. For instance, a change in attention for terrorism may not directly lead to a change in threat perception, but with a delay. Additionally, certain types of media attention for terrorism may have a larger impact than others. Although the "delay" hypothesis proved a possible explanation for the Netherlands, other member states show very different results, and thus this hypothesis was not sufficient.





To investigate the second hypothesis we listed the most important words in terrorism related articles for a number of years. For each member state, we created a table with a top 10 of words for each year. For the Netherlands, the following table was created:

2003	2004	2005	2006
CDA*	(basket1)***	(basket1)***	Netherlands
Iraq	Netherlands	Netherlands	(basket1)***
Netherlands	people	terrorism	American
American	terrorism	European	Dutch
Bush	yesterday	people	terrorism
Fortuyn	American	yesterday	people
The Hague	Dutch	other	minister
Hillen**	Iraq	minister	Bush
percent	Bush	American	other
people	President	Dutch	yesterday

Top 10 of words: highest semantic weight

* CDA - Christian political party, coalition leader.
 ** Hillen - Hans Hillen, CDA parliamentarian
 *** Basket1 is a combination of the words: Muslim, Islam, Islamist and Islamism

From the table it becomes clear that in 2003 more emphasis is put on international terrorism, for instance concerning the war in Iraq. After that, the emphasis shifts inwards to a more homeland security focused approach. A hypothesis we had was, that people may react stronger to media attention on terrorism in their own country than on terrorism abroad. Within the figure shown above, the graphs for 2003 would then be less likely to correspond than those for 2004 or 2005.

However, as can be seen in the graph, this is not the case. We found similar results for other member states. We have not been able to find an adequate explanation for this using the variables of delay and internal (homeland) related terrorism or internationally oriented terrorism. Others have looked into variables such as the role of who delivers the message (authority or non-authority) or the medium that broadcasts the incident (for instance newspaper versus television).



Some results were found, but none were conclusive. More research is necessary to find the exact variables governing the relationship.

The Effects on the Government

The exact effects of the relationship between terrorism and the media on the government are subject to discussion as well. An oft quoted phenomenon that is relevant in this regard is the "CNN Effect" (In European context sometimes called "BBC Effect") that describes the global mass media's ability to change the conduct of (foreign) policy. Decision makers partly lose control because of the power and the immediacy of the mass media. The main consequences ascribed to the CNN Effect are threefold. First, the media is said to be able to put an issue on the policy agenda, especially by emotional and compelling coverage. Secondly, media coverage could mean an operational setback for the government: it is harder for the government to act when the media is looking over its shoulder. For terrorism this may be problematic in for instance hostage situations. Lastly, media coverage forces governments to make quicker decisions. According to the theory, almost no time for consideration, deliberation, or secret agreements exists anymore, because once a story is out, a politician must react soon, if not immediately.

Although politicians admit that they are influenced by the media from time to time, the CNN Effect and the consequences for the government of terrorists using the media are difficult to prove. Additionally, in Europe, the role of 24 hour news networks is different than in the United States. Nevertheless, some authors believe it is important because even a slight change in the behavior of politicians may have significant consequences. Others think it is negligible, since it almost never undermines the objectives of policy makers: they do what they were planning to do, with or without media attention. Besides, many argue that while terrorists use the media, governments do so too, helping them to implement counterterrorist legislation.

The Effects of New Media

There is more agreement as to the effect of the new media. The opportunity for terrorists to frame their own messages makes it more likely that the Internet and satellite television play a role in radicalization processes. Several intelligence agencies throughout the world express their fear that especially the Internet makes it easier to spread terrorist messages and methods. This would make people more prone to radicalization, since this can now happen to otherwise unlikely suspects that do not even need to leave their armchair. Once people have crossed the line to the use of violence, it is now, online, much easier for them to find ways to build weapons or carry out attacks.

Countering Terrorist Use of the Media

Several governments – not only in countries with repressive regimes – have tried to break the link between terrorists and the media by imposing regulation or censorship. In Europe the best known example is the United Kingdom. For instance, under Margaret Thatcher, the UK prohibited the broadcast of interviews





with IRA members. Although the BBC found a way around this by hiring actors to read the statements, it was an infringement on freedom of expression. The example of the United Kingdom brings us to the question whether such measures are useful, legitimate, or desirable. For all of these three factors, significant problems rise. The usefulness of such measures is debated by many, arguing that terrorists will find ways around censorship, especially now that the Internet has become an important factor. In fact, if the old media do not report on terrorism, rumors may spread over the Internet, and increase fear among the population, thus exacerbating the terrorist threat. Legitimacy in a judicial context is problematic as well. Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) on freedom of expression, as well as jurisprudence in several cases, all confirm the extended scope of this particular freedom. As long as laws are not transgressed, for instance by inciting violence, it is very difficult for censorship measures to stand. Lastly, there are some substantial ethical questions as well. There is the danger of a slippery slope: governments may call anything terrorism if it is contrary to their interests. Moreover, it is the specific role of the media to inform the public, and unless lives are in direct danger, coverage of a subject posing a risk is not necessarily enough to prohibit it.

For the new media, again, the situation is a bit different. After all, in some cases, the terrorists have their own media. Prohibiting such a media outlet is something else than curbing regular, non-terrorist media to broadcast certain programs on terrorism. Therefore, although usefulness is still an issue – after all Internet sites may just pop up elsewhere and satellite stations may be broadcast via other, non-European satellites – less problems exist for this form of censorship; banning the media of an outlawed organization that breaks the law and may often incite to violence in those media is not considered ethically unjust by most. That is probably why few people protested when the European Commission and several member states banned Hezbollah channel al-Manar from their satellites.

Conclusion

Obviously, our research has led to several conclusions and policy recommendations. The latter will be discussed in a future policy brief on the entire fourth workpackage of TTSRL. Of course, both for conclusions and for policy recommendations, as well as for much more detail on the subjects touched upon above, we refer to the extended version of our research on this subject, to be read [in deliverable 6](#) on our website.





Upcoming Events

Transnational Terrorism, Security & the Rule of Law

www.transnationalterrorism.eu



Presents:

The Concluding Conference

February 2009, Brussels

TTSRL Conference

In February 2009 our concluding TTSRL Conference will be held in Brussels. All our findings will be presented. Instructive workshops and interesting lectures will characterize this event.

<http://www.transnationalterrorism.eu>

Other events:

- International Disaster and Risk Conference, 25 – 29 August 2008, Location: Davos, Switzerland
<http://www.idrc.info/>
- International Terrorism Conference 2008, 2 – 3 October 2008, Location: London, United Kingdom
<http://www.rusi.org/events/ref:E48454259CD2CD/>
- How Terrorism Ends Conference, 5 – 6 December 2008, Location: Aberystwyth University, United Kingdom
<http://users.aber.ac.uk/mys/csr/news.htm>





Reading Corner

No Dream Ticket to Security - PNR Data and Terrorism

By Frank Kuipers

(Clingendael Security Papers No. 5)

The diverse threat of terrorism requires a multi-faceted approach to mitigate its many risks. Acting on this threat, the European Commission presented on November 6, 2007 its proposal to oblige airlines operating flights to and from Europe to transfer the Personal Name Records (PNRs) of their passengers. This should be done to enable a risk analysis of the passenger on board. Supposedly, PNR data records are one of the cornerstones of an effective effort to keep terrorists off airplanes and outside Europe.

This paper questions that assumption. Its guiding principle is one simple objective: to determine the need and necessity to transfer and collect PNR data. Furthermore, it sheds light on the differences between PNR data and other passenger data; retraces the origins of the viewpoint that PNRs are a dream ticket to security; and discusses the differences and similarities in PNR Agreements that the European Union has concluded thus far. Also, it examines the arguments in favor and against the belief that PNRs 'work' for counterterrorism purposes. On the basis of this analysis, this paper probes the need and necessity to introduce this regulation Europe-wide and makes recommendations for policy makers involved with this topic.

If there are any new publications or events on terrorism to which you would like to point our attention, do not hesitate to [contact us](#).

