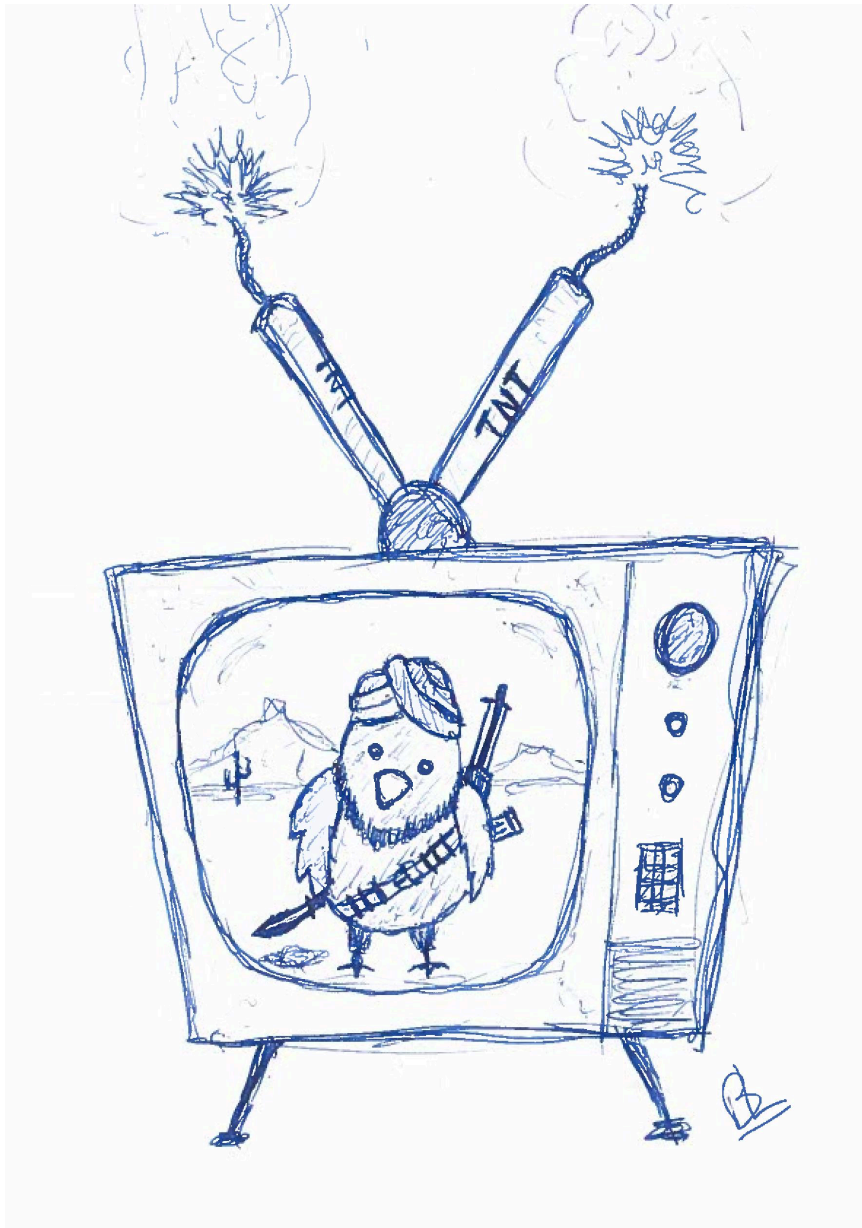


From Television to Twitter

The changing role of the media in terrorism and its implications



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MA-thesis MA International Relations in Historical Perspective | Utrecht University

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Date: 3 July, 2017



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MA-thesis

Submission date: Monday 3 July

MA International Relations in Historical Perspective

Department of History and Art History

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Supervisor: prof. dr. Jacco Pekelder

Word count: 18720

Abstract

Terrorism is a form of communication and therefore a medium to convey the message is crucial for the success of an act of terrorism. In the seventies, satellite television became available for the public and television networks were able to cover events live from all over the world. Because bad news is good news from a commercial point of view, television networks kept an eye out for violent and dramatic news items. Terrorists quickly stepped in to supply this eager demand of television networks. Communication and terrorism experts of whom some saw television as an ideal tool for terrorists regarded this symbiotic relationship between the media and terrorists with suspicion.

However, during the nineties, a new medium emerged: the internet, and terrorist organisations immediately saw new opportunities to use the next invention of the West against themselves. After the turn of the century the internet became an interactive medium that allowed multiple forms of communication through the use of social media and again, terrorists adapted quickly to these technological innovations to exert mass psychological impact on the biggest possible audience. Terrorism now seems to be more a theatre than ever because of the versatility of uses the internet and social media platforms offer.

Terrorists are known to adapt to the newest technological developments and to immediately use them against their adversaries. Countering these terrorist efforts is difficult because in both the case of television and in the case of social media, government censorship is undesirable while self-restraint by the media is unlikely. This thesis examines the changing role of the media in terrorism between the time of satellite television in the seventies and eighties and social media now and the implications that this changing role has on the media, on society and on counterterrorism efforts.

Keywords: terrorism, television, internet, social media, violence, communication, radicalisation, online radicalisation, counterterrorism, propaganda, recruitment, censorship.

Glossary and list of abbreviations

<i>Al Qaeda</i>	A Salafist jihad network of Sunni Arab and Muslim militants. with many followers worldwide. It originated from around 1988 and Osama bin Laden was one of the founding fathers.
<i>Communication</i>	The exchanging of information by speaking, writing or using another medium.
<i>Dabiq</i>	ISIS's online glossy containing propaganda, justifications, instructions and other articles affiliated with radical Islamic ideas.
<i>Facebook</i>	American corporation, founded in 2004, offering online social media and social networking services that allows people to create a user profile indicating their name, occupation, schools, interests etcetera. Users can also add friends and communicate with others users.
<i>Hijra</i>	The journey of the prophet Mohammed and its followers from Mecca to Medina mentioned in the Quran. Currently this word is used for the explicit journey to the caliphate.
<i>Inspire</i>	Al Qaeda's online magazine containing instructions, propaganda and other articles affiliated with radical Islamic ideas.
<i>IS</i>	Islamic State, the name of ISIS after the declaration of the caliphate in 2014.
<i>ISI</i>	Islamic State in Iraq, the al Qaeda affiliated insurgent terrorist group in Iraq from the death of Zarqawi in 2006 until 2012.
<i>ISIS</i>	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, the successor group of ISI after it expanded from Iraq into neighbouring Syria.
<i>Jihad</i>	Arabic word that literally means striving or struggling. This is called the greater jihad because it is an inner battle. The lesser Jihad is according to classical Islamist law the armed struggle against the unbelievers.
<i>Mujahid</i>	One who struggles for the sake of Allah and Islam.
<i>Ummah</i>	The global Muslim community.
<i>Taliban</i>	An Islamic fundamentalist organisation that controlled the government of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001.
<i>Twitter</i>	American corporation, founded in 2006, offering online social media services and online news. Users that have registered can post tweets and follow and message other users. Unregistered users can only read them.
<i>Web 2.0</i>	After 2004; the internet became an interactive participatory collaboration.

YouTube

American website, founded in 2005 and owned by Google since 2006, offering users to share and watch video's.

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Introduction

Terrorism changes as the instruments of violence and communication change and as contexts evolve. – Alex P. Schmid.¹

Introduction

Terrorists have a close alliance with the media. Terrorism is a specific form of political violence characterised by its communicative function.² The victims are chosen because of who they represent and because their victimisation will resonate with a specific audience. The attack will inflict fear or affect allegiances and behaviour on the target audiences.³ Terrorists must publicise their actions to achieve their goals; namely, to reach a bigger audience than just the victims they chose. This can be achieved in many ways. To deliver this message to their audiences, the media are essential to the success of the terrorist attack.

When seen as a form of communication, a terrorist attack is a new coercive media event, which becomes a commodity because of the double morale in covering it.⁴ News channels on the one hand meet the demand for breaking news with their supply of items on terrorism and on the other hand they help the cause of the terrorists because it needs publicity. Terrorists can maximise media coverage by choosing popular times and places to execute attacks or they can take the stage and give interviews directly to the press.⁵ Besides using the ordinary media outlets, terrorists also tend to use self-published items, which used to be papers, pamphlets or videotapes delivered at television channels. The widespread availability and use of social media has presented terrorist organisations nowadays with a much greater arsenal of options than in the past. They can tweet about their motivations and recruitment can be done more directly. Terrorist organisations now have the possibility to post movie clips or other documents to legitimise their actions or to create fear among the public. Terrorists are making use of social media to reach their constituencies and the biggest audience possible.

In contemporary discussions about the role of the media in terrorism, some argue that media coverage, particularly television items on terrorist attacks, legitimises their efforts and helps their cause.⁶ Others argue that television coverage does not increase the use of terrorism because the terrorists' deeds are shown and condemned by reporters and experts and their

¹ Alex P. Schmid, 'Introduction', in: Alex P. Schmid (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*

² Ronald D. Crelinsten, 'Terrorism and the Media: Problems, Solutions, and Counterproblems', *Political Communication* 6 (1989) 312.

³ Crelinsten, 'Terrorism and the Media', 313.

⁴ David L. Paletz and A. P. Schmid (ed.), *Terrorism and the Media* (Newbury Park 1992) 7.

⁵ Paletz and Schmid, *Terrorism and the Media*, 2.

⁶ Ronald D. Crelinsten, 'Television and Terrorism: Implications for Crisis Management and Policy-making', *Terrorism and Violence* 9 (1997) 16.

cause is not portrayed.⁷ Still, it cannot be denied that today's terrorists are again making the most out of the mass media. Companies such as Facebook and Twitter are being criticised because they provide a stage to the terrorists on which they can portray themselves without reporters or journalists reviewing the events. This discussion shows many similarities with the denunciations in the seventies and eighties when terrorists took immediate use of the rise of available satellite television, showing the terrorists' capability for rapid adaption to change. Television stations were criticised by experts and governments because they gave the terrorists the stage they longed for and because media coverage often interfered with counterterrorist operations.

Television stations have a choice to cover or not to cover terrorist attacks and their aftermath. At the least they could decide how to cover the events. Social media companies offer the terrorists a stage, however they can choose to what extent they allow propaganda. They cannot influence the items that are posted online because the terrorists are their own journalists on these media platforms. Furthermore, it is difficult to delete all the accounts terrorists use for propaganda purposes because they will create new ones under different names.

YouTube, Facebook and Twitter became very popular media for terrorist recruiters and supporters to get in touch with each other.⁸ Television is a stage for terrorists on which their actions will be portrayed in a certain way; social media gives terrorists the chance to comment on and report about their deeds in real time. They can justify and legitimise their actions horrify their target audience. Furthermore, terrorists are able to impress their loyal followers, reach their entire constituency and try to enlarge it by spreading propaganda instead of just broadcasting their attacks.⁹

Where terrorists were used to fight for coverage on news programmes and would have to wait and see how they would be portrayed, social media gives them the chance to take matters into their own hands. The implications of these developments have not been mapped yet. The central theme in this thesis is the extent in which new developments in ways of communication, like the internet and social media, changed the role of the media in terrorism compared to the time of satellite television. While regarding terrorism as a violent way of communication, the hypothesis of this thesis is: that terrorists, from the seventies onwards, increasingly gained control over their coverage in the media by adapting to new technological developments in ways of communication, and thereby turned the media into a effective tool to achieve their goals. This increase in control could mean different positive gains for terrorists.

⁷ Crelinsten, 'Television and Terrorism', 22-23.

⁸ J. M. Berger, 'Zero Degrees of al Qaeda, how Twitter is supercharging jihadist recruitment' (version August 14 2013), <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/14/zero-degrees-of-al-qaeda/> (7 March 2017).

⁹ Paul Wilkinson, 'The Media and Terrorism: A Reassessment', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 9 (1997) 52.

The sub-questions of this research thus focus on the particular ways in which the role of the media changed. For instance, the ways in which the terrorists gained control over the way in which they could reach a specific audience and the control over the coverage that is accompanying their actual messages. Furthermore, the relationship between the government and the media within the role of the media in terrorism has been subject to change due to the rise in media outlets made possible by the internet. Keeping a couple dozen of television stations under control is easier than controlling the labyrinthine depths of the internet. Besides the extra possibilities the internet gave to terrorists, the government is also able to use the internet and social media to survey possible radicals and counter their efforts online. However, this is not made easy due to the laws protecting the freedom of speech and other values of the liberal democracy. The discussion about the extent of freedom of speech against the possibilities in banning radical content of the internet is one of the aspects of this thesis that contributes to its relevance. The thesis ends with the implications of this change for the media, the government, and the possible countermeasures.

Structure and method

The first chapter includes a theoretical framework of the relation between terrorism and the media. It also introduces some base concepts as for instance communication, terrorism and media. The framework clarifies the complex role of the media when it comes to terrorist's goals. This role consist of five different elements; (1) the stage the media offers terrorists, (2) the possibility of legitimising or de-legitimising terrorist acts, (3) the part the media plays for propaganda purposes for its constituencies, (4) the aspect of recruitment to attract and retain new members, and (5) the ways governments use the media to counter terrorism and the measures that are taken to limit the terrorists possibilities in the media. The debate concerning the role of the media in terrorism as well as the extent to which this role changed between the seventies and the current period is easier to comprehend after dividing it in these five elements. For this theoretical framework the works of Alex Schmid, Janny de Graaf, Des Freedman, Daya Kishan Thussu and Roland D. Crelinsten will play a central role because of their expertise on this specific relation.

The second chapter applies the elements of the theoretical framework on the role of the media for terrorist attacks in the seventies. The third chapter analyses the role of social media platforms in terrorism using the same elements as in the second chapter. By defining the relation of media and terrorism in a theoretical framework in the first chapter, the comparison between the two periods is more comprehensible and makes a historical analysis of the developments in the changing role of the media possible. The fourth chapter consists of the specific changes that occurred in the role of the media in terrorism, and addresses the possible

implications of this development. The comparison gives insight in the transition in use of the media by terrorists and why it occurred as it did.

Because the transition from the television to the internet as the preferred medium for terrorists was a gradual one, there is overlap in coverage of terrorist acts. Terrorists started using the internet during the nineties, when television coverage was still the main tool to get recognition and renown for terrorists. Al Qaeda used the internet for communication and propaganda purposes prior to the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York City and Washington.¹⁰ Thereafter, the use of the internet by terrorists increased exponentially, especially to create interactive radical milieu's.¹¹ The O'Reilly Web 2.0 Conference introduced the term Web 2.0 in 2004 and it is seen as the turning point in which the internet became an interactive participatory collaboration.¹² Because this transition occurred in the middle of David C. Rapoport's fourth wave of modern terrorism, most examples of the use of social media are from radical Islamist terrorist organisation considering their level of activity and their extensive use of social media.¹³

Relevance

With the widespread availability of the internet and the countless possibilities it offers, the role of the media in terrorism changed significantly and has given terrorists new opportunities that might require a new approach to counter these developments, hence the relevance of this thesis. Terrorists are adapting extremely quick to the fast rate of technological development within the media, which causes social unrest. To prevent the situation in which the government is always one step behind the terrorist, research into this relationship between terrorism, the media, the public and politics is a contribution to improving counterterrorism strategy. Furthermore, the question of censorship touches upon counterterrorism efforts but also upon the freedom of speech, which we so explicitly adhere to in the West. Germany has recently adopted a law that makes it possible to fine social media networks like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube up to 50

¹⁰ On September 11, 2001, nineteen members of al Qaeda kidnapped four passenger airlines flying domestic flights in the U.S. Two of these planes flew into the North and the South tower of the World Trade Centre, the third airplane flew into the Pentagon and the fourth airplane crashed into a field after the passengers tried to overpower the kidnappers. The attacks killed 1996 people and injured over 6000 others. As a retaliation, U.S. President George W. Bush unleashed a 'War on Terror', and invaded Afghanistan where the Taliban regime had harboured al Qaeda. For more information on these attacks see: Randall D. Law, *Terrorism, A History* (Cambridge 2016); Alex P. Schmid (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research* (Abingdon 2011).

¹¹ Maura Conway, 'From al-Zarqawi to al-Awlaki: The Emergence and Development of an Online Radical Milieu', in: 'Special Issue on 'Social Media in Jihad and Counterterrorism', *CTX: Combating Terrorism Exchange* 2 (2012) 12.

¹² Business Dictionary, 'Definition Web 2.0', <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/web-2-0.html> (8 May 2017).

¹³ David C. Rapoport, 'The four waves of modern terrorism', in: Audrey Kurth Cronin en James M. Ludes (eds.), *Attacking terrorism. Elements of a grand strategy* (Washington DC 2004) 46-73.

million euro if they do not delete inflammatory messages. This new law received lots of criticism from civil rights activists, internet activists and the big tech companies because they say this law infringes the freedom of speech. Furthermore, these tech companies do not think they should be the ones deciding which messages should be allowed and which ones not.¹⁴

Both television stations and social media are meant to inform people and to provide them in their needs. However, the media also provides a channel for the terrorists to reach their audiences and achieve their goals. With the growth of social media and thus the reach of terrorists, this dilemma will become increasingly relevant in the coming years. When terrorists manage to inflict increasing fear into societies and recruit more radicalised individuals, the discussion about censorship and social media is going to take a central stage in this theme. Furthermore, the voices for far reaching measures against possible terrorists and limitations on freedom of speech are increasing. This is happening as a consequence of the expanding visibility of terrorism due to sensationalistic television coverage in combination with all out visibility and availability of terroristic content on the internet and social media. Since this tendency is exactly what terrorist organisations are trying to achieve, it is crucial to increase the awareness among the public that these highly visible measures are in contrast with the values of the liberal democracy. The fear for terrorism accompanied by these anti-terrorism legislation and other measures are exactly the reactions terrorist organisations are trying to achieve.

The public debate during the seventies on sensationalistic coverage of acts of terrorism has returned and has intensified due to the increased availability and possibilities of the modern ways of communication.¹⁵ Large-scale developments in adaption to new ways of communication by terrorist are clearly always accompanied by a public debate on the attitude of the big media companies considering the coverage of terrorism. This on-going and returning process adds to the relevance of this thesis and to the fact that it will remain relevant.

Demarcation

Next to the use of the media by terrorists, the government uses the media to counter terrorism. Furthermore, certain governments make use of the media to cover up their repressive nature and their violent control measures. This is called state-terrorism. When states use the strategy of terrorism on their own people, they often control the media to keep the atrocities out off the television, or at least, the role of the state in the events.¹⁶ In other cases, the media is used to

¹⁴ Der Spiegel, 'Bundestag verabschiedet umstrittenes Facebook-Gesetz' (version 30 June 2017), <http://www.spiegel.de/netzwelt/netzpolitik/heiko-maas-bundestag-beschliesst-facebook-gesetz-a-1155192.html> (30 June 2017).

¹⁵ David van Reynebrouck, 'Moeten media anders berichten na aanslagen? Denk en praat mee' (version 1 July 2017), <https://decorrespondent.nl/7003/moeten-media-anders-berichten-na-aanslagen-denk-en-praat-mee/2089012015332-e5da6153> (3 July, 2017).

¹⁶ Crelinsten, 'Terrorism and the Media', 316

communicate the consequences of not complying with the government, as is often the case with the use of death squads by states.¹⁷ The extent of the role of the media with state terrorism and state-sponsored terrorism will not be analysed in this research because this is sufficient for another research. Furthermore, newspapers will not be included in the analysis of the changing role of media because this would increase the scope of the research significantly and because of the comparable social and political criticism on the role of the media in terrorism with television and social media.

¹⁷ Lamb, K. 'Philippines secret death squads: officer claims police teams behind wave of killings (version 4 October 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/04/philippines-secret-death-squads-police-officer-teams-behind-killings> (18 April 2017).

Chapter 1: Terrorism and the Media: a Short Introduction and a Theoretical Framework

“We are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the Media.”

Ayman al Zawahiri (2005)¹⁸

1.1 Introduction

Without the media, terrorism would lose its purpose: reaching a bigger audience than the actual act can. The communicative aspect of terrorism is essential in defining the phenomenon, because this aspect distinguishes an act of terrorism from, for instance, a homicide. As opposed to a homicide, terroristic acts need a witness to be effective.¹⁹ Terrorism is as old as human civilization and occurs around the world. The use of terror in a systematic way, however, first occurred after the French Revolution during the Reign of Terror under Robespierre.²⁰ Tens of thousands of alleged counterrevolutionaries were killed, mostly by means of the guillotine or other highly symbolic and public executions in order to sow fear among the population.²¹ Although terror employed by Robespierre was originally an instrument of those in power rather than those trying to take power, the methods were the same.²² The start of modern terrorism as we know it can be traced back to Russian anarchists in the nineteenth century. In the time between Robespierre and anarchist terrorism, mass communication became a reality.²³

1.2 A short introduction to the historiography of terrorism

In order to understand the role of the media in terrorism, we need to have a clear idea of the phenomenon terrorism. There are many different definitions; however a combination of descriptions and definitions introduced by Louise Richardson and Alex P. Schmid are best applicable because of their **strong** emphasis on the instrumental use of violence **in terrorism**. The short historiographical introduction on terrorism includes David C. Rapoport's wave theory.

Rapoport argues that modern terrorism can be divided into four waves; (1) the Anarchist wave, (2) the Anti-Colonial wave, (3) the New-Left wave, (4) and the Religious wave. The creators of modern terrorism, Russian Anarchists, realised that they could reach a far bigger audience with acts of violence than only with pamphlets. “Propaganda by the Deed”, named by

¹⁸ Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger, *Isis: The State of Terror* (New York 2015) 163.

¹⁹ Alex P. Schmid and J. De Graaf, *Violence as Communication: Insurgent Terrorism and the Western News Media* (London 1982)

²⁰ R. D. Law, *Terrorism, a History* (Cambridge 2016) 61.

²¹ Law, *Terrorism*, 62.

²² Schmid and de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*, 9.

²³ *Ibidem*, 10.

Peter Kropotkin, a Russian anarchist, became their new strategy because it would command respect considering the serious risks the rebel took.²⁴ To make the most impact, a big audience for their actions was vital. This is where the mass media proved to be an essential tool.

Within 50 years from the rise of the mass media, the potential audience expanded twenty-five to fifty times.²⁵ The news that was most prevailing was about war and about the powerful. By affecting the life of the powerful, the powerless got the attention they longed for. By making the victim instrumental and no longer identical with the enemy they could influence public opinion.²⁶ The victims of terrorism are chosen because of who or what they represent and because their victimisation will resonate with specific audiences, either in generating fear or exhilaration, or in affecting allegiances and behaviour.²⁷ Or victims are chosen because of whom they elected as their leader. Osama bin Laden for example, declared every American an enemy because they choose their leaders, who intervened in the Middle East. Even if victims are indiscriminately chosen tourists, commuters or bystanders, the lack of discrimination between combatant and non-combatant, between involved or uninvolved, has a symbolic function. The victims could not have done anything to change their destiny. This is what Rapoport calls the “politics of atrocity” and it is designed to attract widespread attention through the shock value of the attack.²⁸

1.3 The relationship between terrorism and television

Terrorism and the media enjoy a symbiotic relationship because they are interdependent. Western media do not represent terrorist values, generally they represent opposite views. However, as mentioned before, the press quickly learned the commercial value of ‘bad news’.²⁹ Furthermore, media in an open society are in a fiercely competitive market. They are constantly under pressure to reach more people with entertainment, information, and excitement in lesser time than their competition. News has become a commodity, and news on terrorism is of really high value. The dramatic news of terrorist attacks is therefore always on top of their lists.³⁰

Television proved to be the ideal medium to cover these dramatic news items because it could let the viewers experience the events almost first hand instead of providing a written article or spoken broadcast. The competition to be the first one to cover an event increased even further. As media-expert Micheal J. O’Neill states: “Western television, with its competitive spirit, its zest for violence, and its technical efficiency in covering it, can sometimes serve as the

²⁴ Rapoport, ‘The four waves of modern terrorism’, 50.

²⁵ Schmid and De Graaf, *Violence as Communication*, 10.

²⁶ Ibidem, 12.

²⁷ Crelinsten, ‘Terrorism and the Media’, 313.

²⁸ Ibidem, 313.

²⁹ Schmid and De Graaf, *Violence as Communication*, 12.

³⁰ Wilkinson, ‘The Media and Terrorism: A Reassessment’, 54.

unwitting handmaiden or tool for terrorism".³¹ This extreme competition made some networks rearrange and dramatise reality to meet the demands of theatre, which made the news lose its essence and made it drift towards fiction. Terrorism and the media became interdependent.³²

Consequently, television rapidly replaced the printed media as preferred medium to cover terrorism, especially with on-going terrorist hijackings because of its live coverage and 24-hour availability. Besides, the power of moving images made the message significantly more intense. Television made it possible for everybody to experience the news items instead of reading the story in which the witnesses converted the experience into words. Moreover, these images could be shown again and again. This created a new way of experiencing the news that intensified the processing of the news for the public. By experiencing and re-experiencing a terrorist attack, the public felt the experience of seeing people die before their eyes. This is a highly emotional experience that can be repeated over and over again, multiplying the effects, which can create a different kind of knowledge and can form different opinions than formed by reason.³³ Television coverage of terrorism magnifies certain essential emotions. The power of images in combination with the lack of accompanied context and information can create reactions that are out of proportion to the reality. This causes short-sighted reactions that can have a polarising effect on a society, which is what terrorists want.

1.4 Approaches to terrorism and the media

As Rapoport argues, terrorism is subject to change over time and the goals terrorists pursue differ; their secondary motives however stay the same. **The renowned Irish political scientist, Louise Richardson** describes three of these secondary motives as the three R's: revenge, renown and reaction.³⁴ The revenge they seek is most commonly for a wrong inflicted on the community they identify with. The acts of terrorism they subsequently commit are to provoke a reaction from the government that caused the grievances in most cases. Terrorists often aim to provoke an unreasonable aggressive reaction to 'reveal' the true nature of the oppressing nation. To achieve their goal, renown, they need to reach a large audience. This is why the relationship with the media is essential for the terrorists' success.³⁵

By using indiscriminate victims as an instrument to influence others, terrorism is an act of communication. In their excellent book, 'Violence as Communication', that caused their breakthrough Alex P. Schmid and Janny de Graaf explain violence as a form of communication.

³¹ Micheal J. O'Neill, *Terrorist Spectaculars: Should TV Coverage Be Curbed?* (New York 1986) V.

³² O'Neill, *Terrorist Spectaculars*, 8.

³³ Richard Heffner's Open Mind: a half-century of public affairs interviews, 'Michael J. O'Neil, Terrorism and Television' (version November 22, 1986), <http://www.thirteen.org/openmind-archive/public-affairs/terrorism-and-television/> (6 April 2017).

³⁴ L. Richardson, 'What terrorists want' [Kerntesen, lecture, Vienna, 4 July 2007] 4.

³⁵ Richardson, 'What terrorists want' 4.

Schmid and De Graaf also offer the most applicable definition of terrorism, which is also used in this thesis:

The deliberate and systematic use or threat of violence against instrumental (human) targets (C) in a conflict between (A, B) or more parties, whereby the immediate victims C – who might not even be part of the conflicting parties – cannot, through a change of attitude or behaviour, dissociate themselves from the conflict.³⁶

The combination of the three motives of terrorism and the definition provided by Schmid, illustrate the importance of publicity within the strategy of terrorism and the use of violence as an instrument for communication. The media can serve various functions to achieve publicity for terrorist organisations. On the one hand they can serve as amplifiers, conduits, or even legitimisers of terrorism. On the other hand they can decontextualise, depoliticise, or trivialise terrorism.³⁷ However, with the rise of social media, terrorists obtained the opportunity to reach widespread audiences without outside interference from reporters, anchors or journalists. This makes it difficult to de-legitimise or criticise their publications. Thus, through social media, terrorists have gained more control over their message. Social media furthermore enable terrorists and sympathisers to get in contact and establish a relation. These extra possibilities changed the role of the media in terrorism in several ways and might continue to do so. These changes will be examined through the five elements of the role of the media in terrorism mentioned before.

1.5 The role of the media

As mentioned above, the media are essential for terrorist organisations to reach their goals. Terrorists can use the media for different functions of which a number overlap. Among others, they use the media for generating publicity regarding their existence and purposes; achieving legitimacy; getting their desires on the agendas of policymakers and the public; obtaining obedience from the public; provoking oppressive measures from the authorities; undermining the authority of the state; and having their grievances settled if possible.³⁸ As mentioned before, these are categorised using five different overarching elements to compare the use of television in the seventies to the use of social media nowadays.

The first element of this role is that the media provide a stage for the terrorists. Because the audience is not necessarily the victim, witnesses are essential - preferably witnesses with cameras. The use of political communication techniques like hostage videos in which they publish demands, and the recording of 'martyr' tapes in which political or religious justifications are offered to underpin the communicative dimension of terrorism. Thus on many occasions,

³⁶ Schmid and de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*, 15.

³⁷ Crelinsten, 'Terrorism and the Media', 316.

³⁸ Paletz and Schmid (ed.), *Terrorism and the Media*, 7-8.

media and terror are interwoven and part of the same communicative phenomenon.³⁹ Due to this symbiotic relationship, television coverage of terrorism causes a constant modulation between security and insecurity for the public in which they feel unsafe because they watched the news, but keep on watching the news because they want constant confirmation on the status of the event. On the one hand television networks amplify the acts of terrorism and the danger it poses, on the other hand they cover governments efforts to contain it, keeping the public ever interested and glued to the tube. By not properly contextualising, putting things in perspective, and substantiating the occurrences, television networks have laid the groundwork for the assertion that journalists do terrorists' work and television becomes a terrorist's weapon.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the media are working as a filter for the one using it, thus having the power for setting the agenda of what is the threat.⁴¹ When terrorism occurs more often, the fear increases. However, when this is not the case but the news about terrorism gets significant airtime, this still becomes the daily discourse and occupies people's mind. By setting the agenda of what exactly is the current fear in a society, the media are again doing the terrorists work. The massive media coverage of terrorism in the seventies contributed to the upsurge of terrorist attacks, according to Neil Livingstone, Terrell E. Arnold and other terrorism experts in that day. Terrorists create news in order to communicate their existence, ideas, and power to the general public. They just have to produce an event and the news media will do the rest.⁴² The success of acts of terrorism expands exponentially as reports and images of the act reach larger publics.⁴³ The media ensures that most people on earth have access to the reports of the events and thereby contribute to the goals of the terrorists to sow fear into a society and claim a place in people's minds. With the widespread use of social media nowadays, the number of stages to take for terrorists are countless.

The second aspect of the role of the media in terrorism is that it can legitimise or delegitimise the events or attacks being covered. Terrorists (try to) use the media to legitimise their own actions. Media coverage of (successful) terrorist attacks always supports their cause of delegitimizing the government. By showing the public that their government is not capable of providing its inhabitants security against terrorists, they sow fear and thereby delegitimise the government's monopoly on violence. In the case of television coverage of terrorist events like hijackings or kidnappings, the media play an essential role in the resolution of the stalemate between the government and the terrorists. When a television station interviews terrorists

³⁹ Andrew Hoskins and Ben O'Loughlin, *Television and Terror: Conflicting Times and the Crisis of News Discourse* (New York 2007) 9.

⁴⁰ Hoskins and O'Loughlin, *Television and Terror*, 16.

⁴¹ Crelinsten, 'Terrorism and the Media', 321.

⁴² O'Neill, *Terrorist Spectaculars*, 35.

⁴³ Philip Seib and Dana M. Janbek, *Global Terrorism and New Media: The post-Al Qaeda generation* (New York 2011) 10.

during a hijacking for example, they automatically legitimise their act because they allow him or her to take the stage of national television and say what they want. This protracted session of coercive bargaining is that of an equal partnership between terrorists and government in which the fact that they are put on the same foot can lend an aura of legitimacy to the terrorists.⁴⁴ By allowing terrorists to have their say in an interview, or by taking the message of the terrorists as a basis for a story, there is a good chance that the reporter takes over some if not all of the language of the source.⁴⁵ Language is essential for the legitimisation of the concerning acts of terrorism. If the terrorists are able to frame their attack as a defensive act of oppressed freedom-fighters against an illegitimate state, the public will react differently than without this legitimisation. Thus, interviewing terrorists, can, just like governments negotiating with terrorists, portray them as equal participants in a certain conflict, which can legitimise their acts.⁴⁶ Most traditional media however, de-legitimises terrorism by focusing exclusively on the violence and victims and ignoring the espoused political goals of the terrorists. The barbaric and criminal nature of the act is emphasised and the absence of commentary on the political goals obliterate its political nature and de-legitimise the violence.⁴⁷ Recognition and attention are the terrorists' main gains for media coverage of their acts. Genuine legitimacy by explaining their cause is rarely achieved, except in the eyes of their constituencies who already think their cause is legitimate. Since most legitimising videotapes were never shown and because chances to give an interview were scarce, the internet provided an alternative medium for legitimisation for terrorists without outside interference. Terrorist narratives can thrive in such a medium because of the lack of consideration, contextualisation and the attendance of experts to dispute alternative facts. Because terrorists can be their own reporters on social media, they can choose their own language and legitimise their acts without dependency on news channels or exclusive interviews with networks where they can legitimise their cause.⁴⁸ Thus the element of legitimising terrorist efforts is one of the most essential parts of the role of the media. Moreover, can the element of legitimisation be the one that endured the most radical changes from the seventies until now? Legitimacy is crucial for terrorists to please and expand their constituency and by sowing fear in a society they can de-legitimise the government, it can therefore be expected that terrorist's efforts to increase their means of legitimisation had top priority.

Thirdly, propaganda is an important element of the role of the media. Propaganda has significant overlap with the other three elements. The Cambridge dictionary defines propaganda as: "information, ideas, opinions, or images, often only giving one part of an argument, that are

⁴⁴ Crelinsten, 'Terrorism and the Media', 315.

⁴⁵ Schmid and de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*, 88.

⁴⁶ O'Neill, *Terrorist Spectaculars*, 12.

⁴⁷ Crelinsten, 'Television and Terrorism', 23.

⁴⁸ Crelinsten, 'Terrorism and the Media', 321.

broadcast, published, or in some other way spread with the intention of influencing peoples opinions".⁴⁹ Nevertheless, it is still worth mentioning because it has become an ever more easy available weapon. Propaganda is of course as "propaganda by the deed", used to legitimise terrorist acts or de-legitimise the government; it is however also used for instructions, briefings, information and other purposes. Television has become a weapon of terrorists in the displaying of propaganda, acts and the threatening of acts of terror to mass audiences. However, the internet provides terrorists with a much wider arsenal of spreading propaganda than earlier media did. Since terrorists are not required to phone news networks to request a slot, they either record the act themselves and post the video on the internet or rely on bystanders to do the recording.⁵⁰ Furthermore, through social media, terrorists can spread propaganda without necessarily claiming attention through repeatedly executing violent acts. The element of propaganda in the role of the media in terrorism has evolved significantly with the spread of worldwide internet accessibility.

The fourth element in the role of the media for terrorism is that of recruitment. This element is essential to the sustainability of terrorist organisations because the key vulnerability of violent organisations is its inability to attract and retain new members.⁵¹ This particular role of the media has grown significantly since the time when satellite television was introduced and the launch of internet. Television's role in recruitment was limited because of the terrorists' inability to control the coverage and thereby the message they were trying to convey. Ways for terrorists to gain recruits through television were limited to sending hidden messages in videotapes that would likely make the news and hope to inspire through their actions and lead by example. Recruitment in the time without internet mostly took place in social surroundings, and incidentally, with the help of media. News items about and footage of terrorist activity were used to reach their constituencies but also to act as an inspiration for people with radical thoughts and persuade them to join the terrorist organisation.

The internet and especially social media created new possibilities for terrorists to recruit individuals for their cause. Everybody with access to the internet has the opportunity to watch terrorist propaganda. The most essential change is the possibility to get in contact with terrorists through the same media channel. For terrorists, the new media are, collectively, a transformative tool that offers endless possibilities for communication and expansion. News media are crucial in helping terrorist groups to endure – to sustain themselves by reaching various publics and to become global players. Dissemination of videos over the internet enables

⁴⁹ Cambridge Dictionary, 'Meaning of "propaganda" in the English Dictionary', <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/propaganda> (11 April 2017).

⁵⁰ Hoskins and O'Loughlin, *Television and Terror*, 121.

⁵¹ Bradley McAllister and Alex P. Schmid, 'Theories of Terrorism', in: Alex P. Schmid (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research* (Abingdon 2011) 257.

terrorists to rely less on traditional news media to deliver their messages to widespread audiences.⁵² The possibilities of establishing a horizontal global network makes the computer-mediated communication an ideal tool for coordination, information exchange, training, and recruitment.⁵³ The internet thus radically increased the potency of this element in the role of the media in terrorism. The fact that terrorists are now able to control their message has a significant influence on the way they can address their constituencies. The implications of this change will be addressed in the fourth chapter.

The media offers terrorist organisations a stage where they can articulate their grievances and legitimise their cause by delegitimising the state. However, governments also use the media to emphasise or exaggerate the terrorist threat in order to execute far-reaching counterterrorism measures and, if possible, try to limit the terrorists options within the media. This is the fifth element of the role of the media in terrorism. Counterterrorism policies do not concern objective measures alone, they concern framing and presentation as well.⁵⁴ By affecting the social impact of terrorist attacks and framing the enemy, the government uses the public's sense of security, so called 'securitization', for its own benefit, as George W. Bush did with the 'War on Terror' after the attacks on 9/11.⁵⁵ Counterterrorism is a form of communication, as terrorism is. To communicate antiterrorism measures to the public, a construction of the 'enemy' and its immediate threat is necessary.⁵⁶ This is called the 'performative power' of counterterrorism and can be defined as:

The extent to which the national government, by means of its official counterterrorism policy and corresponding discourse (in statements, enactments, measures, and ministers remarks) aims to mobilize public and political support and in the last instance, wittingly or unwittingly, assists the terrorists in creating social drama.⁵⁷

Thus in its counterterrorism efforts, the governments' performative power adds to the social drama in order to increase the publics' feeling of insecurity to implement counterterrorism measures that otherwise would not be possible. This increase in performative power, as terrorism expert Beatrice de Graaf concludes, aids the terrorists' campaign instead of countering it.⁵⁸ Regardless of the effect of this increase of social drama, the media thus is a tool for terrorist organisations and their adversary, the state. Media expert Crelinsten sums up the relationship between the media and the government in a comprehensive way:

The relationship between government and the media, specifically as it pertains to terrorism, highlights the hegemonic function of the mass media in manufacturing public consent for

⁵² Seib and Janbek, *Global Terrorism and the News Media*, ix.

⁵³ Ibidem, 21.

⁵⁴ Beatrice de Graaf, *Evaluating Counterterrorism Performance: A Comparative Study* (London 2011) 10.

⁵⁵ De Graaf, *Evaluating Counterterrorism Performance*, 10.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, 11.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, 124.

⁵⁸ De Graaf, *Evaluating Counterterrorism Performance*, 130.

counterterrorism policy and official frames for terrorism discourse by preferential disclosure of official information and agendas at the expense of other perspectives. On the other hand, it also highlights the sometimes adversarial position of the media in its role as social critic and defender of the public's right to know.⁵⁹

In other words: counterterrorism is communication as well. The terrorists and governments have a similar relation with the media, because of their agenda setting function and influence on public opinion.

1.6 Conclusion

Because of the communicative nature of terrorism, the role of the media is essential for the success of terrorism. As prominent terrorism-expert Alex P. Schmid stated: 'Terrorism is subject to change as the instruments of violence and communication change'. This observation indicates that the technological developments in ways of communication can have far reaching consequences for the effectiveness of terrorism. Whereas the instruments of violence still mostly consist of bombs and firearms, the means of spreading the news of acts of terrorism have changed dramatically over the past 40 years.

By breaking up the role of the media in five different elements, it is possible to analyse this complex relationship between media and terrorism more thoroughly, and a comparison of this role between the seventies and now will be more useful. The five elements are; (1) the stage it offers to terrorists, (2) the possibility for legitimisation, (3) the spread of propaganda, (4) the means of recruitment, and (5), the justification of precautionary measures and counterterrorism.

The combination of the theories on terrorism as a form of communication provided by Schmid, De Graaf and Richardson, with the insights on the symbiotic relationship between terrorism and the media provides a theoretical framework that contributes to the comprehensibility of the thesis. Furthermore, by dividing the role of the media in terrorism into five elements, the particular changes that occurred within each element in the given time-period are revealed.

With the objectives of terrorists in mind and the tactics they apply to achieve these objectives we can analyse the role of the media in the strategy of terrorism. With the analysis of these five cornerstones of the relationship between terrorism and the media in the seventies and the current period, we can test the hypothesis mentioned in the introduction and clarify the particular changes in this relationship, the implications these changes have and possible countermeasures to limit terrorists' possibilities to use the media while retaining liberal democratic values regarding privacy and freedom of speech.

⁵⁹ Crelinsten, 'Terrorism and the Media', 320.

Chapter 2: Television and Terrorism

“[I would rather] have 30 seconds in an evening news program than coverage in every newspaper in the world.”
*Robert Kennedy (1966)*⁶⁰

2.1 Introduction

During the 1970s a series of technological innovations allowed American TV networks to broadcast cheaply and quickly all over the world through satellite television. This paved the way for extraordinary attention for terrorism in the media.⁶¹ At first these means of mass communication were still dominated by states and large corporations and terrorist organisations had to make do with pamphlets, audio cassettes and videos. These were passed from hand to hand hoping to mobilise those already predisposed to participation. However these hand-to-hand methods of propaganda were ineffective in comparison with the capabilities offered by television.⁶²

The development and the increasing importance of television changed the definition of news. When the technology was still primitive, television followed the newspaper model in its approach to news. As technology and equipment got more advanced during the seventies and eighties, television started to develop its great potential for drama.⁶³ Television added entertainment, emotional impact, and theatrical manipulation to create a whole new kind of communication.⁶⁴ In their search for ever more entertaining news items, networks went as far as managing negotiations and performing all sorts of other services or disservices. Television literally changed the course of some events. The hijacking of the TWA Flight 847 in 1985⁶⁵ is an example of a situation in which the media became a conduit between the terrorists and the governments because one of the television networks bought the television rights from the Shi'a Amal militia for a very high amount of money.⁶⁶ In this case the television station altered

⁶⁰ Crelinsten, 'Television and Terrorism', 12.

⁶¹ Jason Burke, *The New Threat: the Past, Present and Future of Islamic Militancy* (New York 2015) 53.

⁶² Burke, *The New Threat*, 53.

⁶³ O'Neill, *Terrorist Spectaculars*, 11.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 11.

⁶⁵ Trans World Airlines is an American Airline company, Flight 847 one of their flights from Athens to Rome in 1985. The airplane was kidnapped and the pilot was forced to crisscross the Mediterranean Sea. The terrorists demanded the release of Shi'ites Muslims from Israel and the immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon. The hijackers killed one passenger to speed up the process, the other 146 survived. After seventeen days the final hostages were released after some demands were met. This event was watched on television by millions of viewers worldwide. For more information on this kidnapping see: Joe Stork, 'The War of the Camps, The War of the Hostages', *MERIP Reports* 133 (1985) 3-7+22.

⁶⁶ Terry Anderson, 'Terrorism and Censorship: The Media in Chains', *Journal of International Affairs* 47 (1993) 130.

positions. Therefore, it could be argued that the advent of this new medium had serious repercussions with regards to journalism's traditional pose of detached objectivity.⁶⁷

The ability to transmit actual experiences in a living, breathing, visual form is what distinguished television from other ways of communicating, at that moment. Television could capture events with motion, sound, and colour, and deliver the actual event to its viewers without translation or dilution.⁶⁸ Especially, combined with the selectivity of the images used by reporters, using the most dramatic images in news shows, television's direct means of communicating, resulted in a television experience often differing considerably from reality.⁶⁹ Because of its emphasis on drama and emotion, television discouraged secondary knowledge or explanation, using experts and scholars more to provide legitimacy for their own news coverage than to contextualise the events.⁷⁰

The news has an agenda setting function. With the increased popularity of television news, coverage of terrorist attacks became hot news. Extensive television coverage of terrorism caused the threat of terrorism to come alive.⁷¹ The symbiotic relationship between terrorism and the media fuelled the extent to which the threat was perceived. In the early 1980s, ABC news reported an overall increase in terrorism and the news coverage escalated over the next five years. However, when in 1982 the Department of State published a report concerning the drastic decline of terrorism and connected mortal casualties. The media ignored this report and statistics based on different definitions of terrorism were used to keep the supposed threat alive by including state sponsored terrorism in Latin-America.⁷² Because of the competitive nature of the news industry, people want coverage that sells, regardless of whether it will be a less balanced or truthful presentation of the event. Furthermore, media that try to offer truly balanced coverage often get criticised by policy experts and government officials for legitimising the terrorist cause. By doing so, policymakers are arguing for unbalanced and less contextualised coverage that stigmatises the terrorist's cause and methods and favours the official perspective. This is why governments so often use war analogy to describe terrorism; only in a time of war does a democracy permit its media to be used for propaganda purposes and does it permit far reaching counterterrorism measures.⁷³

The characteristics of television mentioned above made it the ideal tool for terrorists to reach the largest audience possible. The widespread availability of television news in combination with its craving for sensational, dramatic and violent news made the relationship

⁶⁷ O'Neill, *Terrorist Spectaculars*, 13.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, 16.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, 17.

⁷⁰ Crelinsten, 'Television and Terrorism', 11.

⁷¹ Crelinsten, 'Terrorism and the Media', 321.

⁷² Bethami A. Dobkin, *Tales of Terror: Television News and the Construction of the Terrorist Threat* (Westport 1992) 90.

⁷³ Crelinsten, 'Terrorism and the Media', 333.

between television and terrorism firmer and more intense than that of terrorism and other media of that time because the newspapers focussed more on reason and tried to offer contextualised and considered articles.

2.2 The stage television offers terrorists

In their search for revenge, renown and reaction, terrorists found their ideal tool in television. By executing an attack, hijacking a plane or kidnapping Western tourists, terrorists got their revenge; the victims were symbolic and represented their target audience. The new technologies of satellite television meant that their actions could be broadcasted live around the world instead of people reading about it in the newspapers the day after, accompanied by maybe one image of the events. This made a difference in the renown the terrorists accomplished. Television with its large and widespread ranging audience and for its visual impact, was ideal for the recognition factor, one of the other goals terrorists have.⁷⁴ Terrorists recognised that their targets should be highly visible and important for the Western world. The key is publicity: terrorism is aimed at the people watching, not at the actual victims because terrorism is theatre.⁷⁵

Terrorists quickly learned that news networks are eager for news on terrorism because of the guaranteed success. Audiences that might be interested in a terrorist incident or political crisis can be quite large because this audience consists of the terrorist constituency, the enemies of the terrorists, bystanders and targets.⁷⁶ This guaranteed success by covering traumatic events caused the symbiotic relationship that escalated some events. Competition with other media-outlets and short-term self-interest replaced the concern for the common good. Television coverage was aimed at emotions and it bypassed verbal analysis and rational deliberation.⁷⁷

The symbiotic relationship the media has with terrorism causes the role of the media in terrorism to flourish under the guidance of eager television networks. Much of the media coverage of terrorism tended to spread false rumours or to exacerbate existing ones by reporting them as facts. No attempts were made to verify the information because of the constrained time and space available for television items. Furthermore, the dramatic and sensationalistic presentation of such rumours also increases circulation and viewer-ratings by fuelling a crisis atmosphere and creating consumer hunger for any kind of information.⁷⁸

Thus the demand of the public for dramatic and violent news made the media into a catalyst for terrorism. The fact that already dramatic terrorist attacks were dramatised even

⁷⁴ Crelinsten, 'Television and Terrorism', 12.

⁷⁵ Gabriel Weimann, 'The Theater of Terror', *Journal of Agression, Maltreatment & Trauma* 9 (2008) 381.

⁷⁶ Crelinsten, 'Television and Terrorism', 21.

⁷⁷ O'Neill, *Terrorist Spectaculars*, 49.

⁷⁸ Crelinsten, 'Terrorism and the Media', 322.

further in order to keep the public watching is a clear example of the willingness of the media to provide a stage for the terrorists. At the time television was seen as the most effective way of spreading terror, because of the news media's inability and unwillingness to refrain from becoming the main outlet of the terrorist message. This reluctant attitude stemmed from the fact that news on terrorism meant guaranteed viewers.⁷⁹ Mass media functioned as the most important link between terrorism and the public. The media not only provided the public with the information it demands, their actions also feeds the publics worries in order to keep them watching.⁸⁰

2.3 Television as a tool to legitimise terrorism

The legitimisation of terrorism, or specific terrorist acts, through television is very difficult to achieve because of the lack of control the terrorists have over the way their actions are portrayed.

Terrorists start with aiming to delegitimise the government by embarrassing their authority. By executing attacks they show that those in power are more vulnerable than the public might assume and more important: unable to protect its citizens. Violent deeds against this supposed stronger power also underline the strength of the terrorist group.⁸¹ This helps with justifying their own existence and acts.

In another attempt to legitimise their cause, terrorist organisations show and emphasise the repressive nature of the government they oppose, and find out to what extent there is popular support for their cause.⁸² This popular support is crucial for the success of a terrorist organisation and to achieve legitimacy. However, publicity on television often de-legitimises the terrorists by focusing exclusively on the violence and victimisation and ignoring the espoused political goals of the terrorists. To achieve legitimacy, terrorist organisations often tried to execute a protracted event as a kidnapping or hijacking because of the on-going television coverage and the possibility of having negotiations with the government. When a government decides to negotiate with terrorists, they are recognised as equal partners in a conflict that lends them much more legitimacy than for instance a bombing.⁸³ Terrorists often gain recognition and attention through television, but they rarely gain legitimacy from people other than their own constituency. By giving exclusive interviews to television networks, terrorists try to legitimise their actions by trying to influence the way the media covers their actions to reach a larger

⁷⁹ Hoskins and O'Loughlin, *Television and Terror*, 102.

⁸⁰ Alex. P. Schmid, J. F. A. De Graaf, F. Bovenkerk, L. M. Bovenkerk-Teerik, and L. Brunt, *Zuidmoluks terrorisme, de media en de publieke opinie* (Amsterdam 1982) 120.

⁸¹ Paletz and Schmid, *Terrorism and the Media*, 36.

⁸² *Ibidem*, 37.

⁸³ Crelinsten, 'Terrorism and the Media', 315.

audience.⁸⁴ Using terrorist tactics thus will gain terrorists the recognition and attention they desire, but it will likely deprive them of the legitimacy that can only be achieved by maintaining some degree of control over how they are presented in the coverage afforded to them.⁸⁵

Television coverage of horror and suffering like dead bodies or hostages being executed increase the shock effect terrorists desire, but this can also have a delegitimising effect on the terrorist cause because it portrays them as criminals and this triggers retributive feelings in the general public and increases the support for the government in countering the organisation.⁸⁶ Publicity on television of terrorism often has a catalysing effect on the society where the terrorism occurs. The public opinion gets polarised to the point that few people can form a nuanced and sensible standpoint on the events.⁸⁷ The terrorists get all the attention they want and they gain legitimisation from their constituency but repulsion from the society.⁸⁸ Achieving legitimacy through television coverage proves very difficult because of the lack of control terrorists have over the way in which they are portrayed on television.

2.4 Propaganda through television

Terrorism as violence in itself is not an effective method to overthrow states or change historical structures. However, terrorism can achieve that goal as propaganda, because then it can transform to actions that compel general attention.⁸⁹ Violence and propaganda have much in common. Where violence aims at behaviour modification by coercion, propaganda aims at the same by persuasion; terrorism is a combination of the two.⁹⁰ Propaganda is more than communication or discourse alone; it is a communicative practice that combines discourse with concrete action.⁹¹ Terrorists use propaganda to accompany their concrete actions and to provide the discourse they deem appropriate in order to persuade targets of attention to support their cause or join their ranks.⁹² The 'Mini-manual of the Urban Guerrilla' is an example of terrorist propaganda that reached a large audience before the use of television.⁹³ In this manual the author Carlos Marighella wrote instructions on how to be an urban guerrilla, this sort of

⁸⁴ Crelinsten, 'Terrorism and the Media', 321.

⁸⁵ Ibidem, 318.

⁸⁶ Crelinsten, 'Television and Terrorism', 25.

⁸⁷ Schmid, de Graaf, Bovenkerk, Bovenkerk-Teerik, and Brunt, *Zuidmoluks terrorisme, de media en de publieke opinie*, 120.

⁸⁸ Ibidem, 116/117.

⁸⁹ Schmid and de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*, 14.

⁹⁰ Ibidem, 14.

⁹¹ Des Freedman, and Daya Kishan Thussu (eds.), *Media and Terrorism: Global Perspectives* (London 2012) 79.

⁹² Crelinsten, 'Terrorism and the Media', 314.

⁹³ Carlos Marighella. *Mini-Manual of the Urban Guerilla* (1969). Carlos Marighella wrote this manual in 1969. He was a Brazilian Marxist politician and guerrilla. The manual consists of advice on how to live as a guerrilla and how to overthrow an authoritarian regime.

propaganda was hard to achieve on television, the internet however may prove ideal for instructional magazines.

Terrorist acts call for an explanation, otherwise they would be pointless, and therefore statements or communiqués are issued to enable the terrorists to present their own well-considered stories.⁹⁴ For example, Bin Laden gave a string of carefully choreographed press conferences and a series of videoed statements that were carefully couriered to Al Jazeera's offices in the Pakistani capital in the nineties. This proved unsatisfactory because the coverage of these rambling communiqués was still determined by editors. If they were aired at all, the videos were heavily edited and commentated.⁹⁵ By picking one of the most symbolic targets possible, Bin Laden was able to attain the undivided attention of the entire planet, ensuring airtime for all his propaganda from that day onwards.⁹⁶

Al Qaeda was the first terrorist organisation that was able to achieve this amount of attention. Furthermore, the propaganda that received airtime on television was still edited and commentated by the television networks. Due to the lack of control over their message, terrorists did not depend solely on the television and radio for the spread of their propaganda; they tried other inventive options for their psychological aims. Also, there were significant differences between the degrees of professionalism with which terrorist organisations handled their propaganda.⁹⁷ The mass media during this time were an important and attractive instrument for terrorists, however the old methods of local distribution in paper and audio or video were also still in use.⁹⁸

2.5 Recruitment through television

The element of recruitment through television produces the greatest challenge for a terrorist organisation. As mentioned above, terrorists can only hope that their actions in combination with the propaganda, and legitimisation of their actions inspire people to support them and join them.⁹⁹ As said, the mass media in the seventies and eighties provided terrorists with the stage to get their attention and recognition. They were able to reach large audiences and hoped to inspire their constituencies.

The most common way to reach possible recruits in the first three waves of modern terrorism was in the social milieu of the radical groups. The Rote Armee Fraktion¹⁰⁰ in Germany

⁹⁴ Paletz and Schmid, *Terrorism and the Media*, 52.

⁹⁵ Burke, *The New Threat*, 54.

⁹⁶ Ibidem, 55.

⁹⁷ Paletz and Schmid, *Terrorism and the Media*, 59.

⁹⁸ Ibidem, 59.

⁹⁹ Crelinsten, 'Terrorism and the Media', 314.

¹⁰⁰ The Rote Armee Fraktion was a West German far-left terrorist organisation founded in 1970 by Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, Horst Mahler and Ulrike Meinhof.

for example was highly dependent on pamphlets, issues and videotapes to attract new recruits.¹⁰¹ There are, however, no indications that more than a few radicals were convinced and recruited for the RAF's cause and strategy by these brochures.¹⁰² The RAF's support base grew significantly after they acquired the position of the underdog fighting against the oppressing state with authoritarian police methods.¹⁰³ Graphic TV images of the violent arrests of Baader and other RAF members thus had a more lasting effect on the increase in size of their constituency than their own efforts.¹⁰⁴ However this was still the most common way at the beginning of the fourth wave as well. For example, at a mosque located in Finsbury Park in London, radical Islamist propaganda was sold, including audiotapes and videos with graphic combat footage in order to inspire and convince possible radicals.¹⁰⁵

An increase in popular support for the cause terrorists pursue does not necessarily mean more recruits. Pamphlets and TV images need additional argumentation to convince a person to take up arms and join a terrorist organisation. Television coverage of terrorism thus is a difficult way to attract new recruits. However, it can inspire other individuals to conduct similar feats. Because nobody is born a terrorist, the tactics have to be learned. Watching terrorist activity on television can inspire and instruct potential terrorists.¹⁰⁶ For example: the chief advisors of major American television networks were phoned by the National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, one month after the attacks of 9/11, not to broadcast videotapes of Osama Bin Laden, because they might contain hidden messages to stir up violence against America and recruit more followers.¹⁰⁷ Multiple studies have concluded that, especially with young adolescents, viewing violence increases aggressive behaviour.¹⁰⁸ Now new evidence is emerging that suggests that reporting on violence can trigger further attacks. Especially sensationalist media coverage of acts of terrorism result in more such acts being committed.¹⁰⁹ This shows that the impact of news on violence has the effect that terrorists try to achieve with their actions. They achieved this in the time of television through inspiration on a smaller scale. As will be emphasized in the next chapter, the internet not only expanded the possibilities to spread the message, it also

¹⁰¹ Jacco Pekelder, 'The RAF and the Left in West Germany: Communication Processes between Terrorists and Their Constituency in the Early 1970s', in: Klaus Weinhauer and Jörg Requate (eds.), *Gewalt ohne Ausweg? Terrorismus als Kommunikationsprozess in Europa seit dem 19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt 2012) 203-222.

¹⁰² Pekelder, 'The RAF and the Left in West Germany', 19.

¹⁰³ Ibidem, 21.

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem, 25.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Taarnby, 'Recruitment of Islamist Terrorists in Europe. Trends and Perspectives', *Research Report funded by the Danish Ministry of Justice* (January 2005) 7.

¹⁰⁶ Schmid and de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*, 122.

¹⁰⁷ Pippa Norris, Montague Kern and Marion Just, *Framing Terrorism: The News Media, the Government, and the Public* (New York 2003) 36.

¹⁰⁸ Schmid and de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*, 124.

¹⁰⁹ Jamie Doward, 'Media coverage of terrorism 'leads to further violence'' (version 1 August, 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/aug/01/media-coverage-terrorism-further-violence> (27 June 2017).

extended the reach of television stations through the internet. This meant that the internet did not replace the role of television in terrorism, but contributed to its role.

The mass media in the seventies and eighties were the ideal tool to reach a large audience through violence. The lack of control over the coverage only meant that legitimisation and recruitment were difficult to achieve. But, the terrorist acts, or governmental repercussions, shown on television could provide the potential terrorist with all the ingredients that are necessary to engage in this type of violence.¹¹⁰ Thus, the media fulfilled and keeps on fulfilling a crucial role for terrorism, being a form of violent communication. Especially sensationalistic and dramatised coverage can inspire those who already share the grievances of the terrorists.

2.6 The use of television by the government

The term propaganda has a distinctly negative connotation, deriving from the omnipresent role it played in both World Wars. As a result the term 'public relations' was born in order to avoid the negative associations while creating a profession out of using propaganda.¹¹¹ Governments often use the media for the same purposes, but especially in the case of counterterrorism.¹¹² Those in power can take advantage of this privileged access and the working relationship they have with the media by timing the release of information, footage or images according to policy needs. They can use official channels like press conferences that are always covered, and they can leak information to a favoured reporter to check the public opinion without revealing the source.¹¹³ Furthermore, the fear terrorism generates in a society can be manipulated by politicians to pass legislation that undermines individual privacy rights and liberties that otherwise would have been less likely accepted by the public.¹¹⁴ The British Prime Minister Theresa May, for example, has recently declared that she is prepared to rip up human rights laws to impose new restrictions on terror suspects, as a reaction to the terrorist attacks in London on the third of June 2017.¹¹⁵

Besides the possible negative sides of the relationship between the government and the media, cooperation on a productive level is also possible. The government uses the TV for public awareness and to help with police investigations by identifying suspects or to hand over the unedited versions of the videotapes delivered by terrorists.¹¹⁶ Especially with protracted terrorist events, cooperation between the government and the media is crucial. There have been

¹¹⁰ Schmid and de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*, 142.

¹¹¹ Freedman, and Kishan Thussu (eds.), *Media and Terrorism: Global Perspectives*, 78.

¹¹² Crelinsten, 'Terrorism and the Media', 317.

¹¹³ *Ibidem*, 319.

¹¹⁴ Weimann, 'The Theater of Terror', 389.

¹¹⁵ Rowena Mason and Vikram Dodd, 'May: I'll rip up human rights laws that impede new terror legislation' (version 6 June 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jun/06/theresa-may-rip-up-human-rights-laws-impede-new-terror-legislation> (7 June 2017).

¹¹⁶ Crelinsten, 'Television and Terrorism', 19.

many incidents where the efforts of the police have been directly threatened by the behaviour of the media. Because of the live coverage of the events during hijackings or kidnappings the terrorists with direct or indirect access to a television could watch the police's every move.¹¹⁷ To counter these dangers, governments and the media can work together and ask for a news blackout for example. This was used during the actions to free the hostages from the 1977 Moluccan train hijacking and the holding of 54 hostages in the Netherlands where a second group of terrorists had access to media at a second site. The media agreed on a blackout of 45 minutes during the final assault to free the hostages.¹¹⁸ The police allowed the reporters to videotape the assault and to broadcast it after the incident was resolved.¹¹⁹

There have been different public debates about the role of television in terrorism and what to do about their symbiotic relationship and by whom. Newscasters and reporters typically justify all their coverage as being done for the people's 'need to know' and in the United States reporters explicitly claim that all the press freedoms are guaranteed by the Constitution.¹²⁰ Critics have argued that tasteless, exploitive, and sensationalised coverage brought by celebrities is not news but misuse of sensation in order to attract more viewers.¹²¹ To decrease these excessive ways of covering the news, restrictions are necessary. However, experts agree that the government alone cannot restrict the media because of the possibilities this entails to oppress non-terroristic opposition for the government.¹²²

The appropriateness of government-induced censorship in liberal democracies is hotly contested. In Uruguay the government prohibited the use of the names of terrorist organisations in the media and news items about persons who conspired against the nation and in Argentina the media were prohibited from reporting, mentioning or commenting on political violence.¹²³ Censorship by government control is mostly only a measure and no solution to the actual problem. It reduces the value of the terrorists' strategy. However, the grievances and aspirations remain and it cannot prevent terrorist organisations from engaging in other forms of political violence. In many countries, as in Uruguay and Argentina, this had the effect of an increase instead of a decrease of political violence.¹²⁴

To decrease the attractiveness of the media as a tool for terrorism, cooperation and open communication between government and media is necessary. Besides this cooperation, media

¹¹⁷ Wilkinson, 'The Media and Terrorism: A Reassessment', 58.

¹¹⁸ Schmid, de Graaf, Bovenkerk, Bovenkerk-Teerik, and Brunt, *Zuidmoluks terrorisme, de media en de publieke opinie*, 136.

¹¹⁹ Crelinsten, 'Television and Terrorism', 19.

¹²⁰ O'Neill, *Terrorist Spectaculars*, 58.

¹²¹ *Ibidem*, 58

¹²² Richard Heffner's Open Mind: a half-century of public affairs interviews, 'Michael J. O'Neil, Terrorism and Television' (version November 22, 1986), <http://www.thirteen.org/openmind-archive/public-affairs/terrorism-and-television/> (29 April 2017).

¹²³ Schmid and de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*, 149.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*, 150.

self-censorship is crucial in achieving this goal without government-induced censorship.¹²⁵ Next to government-media guidelines, some TV networks have developed their own guidelines in the case of covering a terrorist attack. These guidelines are mostly confidential, which makes it impossible to verify if and how news is manipulated.¹²⁶ The mixed government-media guidelines would keep both interests in mind while restricting the benefit of the use of media for terrorists without the use of censorship.

2.7 Conclusion

The use of television by terrorists provided access to a considerably bigger audience than their previous ways of communicating did. Especially the live coverage of protracted terrorist attacks was a new phenomenon that kept thousands of people glued to the tube. However, the endless possibilities some saw in the role of television for terrorists were not realised. The lack of control over their coverage meant that the medium of television had a couple of limitations, especially for legitimising the cause and recruiting new members. Because of this limitation terrorists kept on looking for ways to improve their media strategy.

Due to the ever-present hunger for dramatic and violent news of television stations, the news became increasingly dramatised and sensationalistic in order to keep viewers watching. To increase this dramatic value, the emphasis lay on the violence and the deathliness of the events, which got the terrorists their attention. This sensationalistic coverage of acts of terrorism proved to inspire other individuals to commit further terrorist attacks; thereby the media were doing the terrorists a huge favour. Despite this success, terrorists already were adapting to the developments in the media. The terrorists' efforts to maximise their presence on television illustrates their crusade for control over their message. From mere coverage of their deeds they tried to access that coverage through interviews and protracted terrorist attacks. This tendency confirms the expectations of the terrorist's ability and urge to use the newest technology in their fight to control the coverage on their violent way of communication mentioned in the introduction. However, their main goal – to achieve legitimacy – proved very difficult because the media mostly focussed on the violence and cruelty of the terrorist acts. Thus, the lack of control over the message terrorists try to send has been the main limitation in the role of television in terrorism. New kinds of internet-based media that became widespread in the late zero's provided the interactivity and accessibility that terrorists longed for to control their message. In the next chapter I will examine the role of social media within terrorism using the same five elements of the role of television as in this chapter.

¹²⁵ Richard Heffner's Open Mind: a half-century of public affairs interviews, 'Michael J. O'Neil, Terrorism and Television' (version November 22, 1986), <http://www.thirteen.org/openmind-archive/public-affairs/terrorism-and-television/> (29 April 2017).

¹²⁶ Schmid and de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*, 163.

Chapter 3: The Internet, Social Media, and Terrorism

“Another account gone, another one back up. Death to you filthy kuffar monkeys and pigs of Twitter. Like waves on a ocean we will not stop.”
@KuffarKilla (August 10, 2015).¹²⁷

3.1 Introduction

When access to live satellite television became widespread, the possibilities of television were deemed endless. The access to news from across the globe without any delay was seen as a big step forward in comparison to newspapers. The possibility of showing moving images and of repeating this process endlessly where especially important for the development of the television-media. However, the downside of these developments became apparent fairly quickly. Terrorists immediately learned that by creating bad news they could get into the media for free.¹²⁸ Television proved to have different limitations as a tool for terrorism, the lack of control terrorists had over the coverage meant that legitimisation and recruitment were difficult to achieve.

Furthermore, technical developments made it possible for news stations to gather news through portable mini cameras linked via radio waves to the studio. This meant that the role of the journalist and editor as middleman between newsmaker and public began to lose its significance.¹²⁹ This process quickened with the rise of widespread internet access and even faster with the rise of social media.

In the early days of the internet during the nineties and the early zero's, so-called online message boards developed into the preferred networking tool for terrorists. These message boards are commonly referred to as “forums”. These forums are highly structured environments with different major themes of discussion under which users can start a “thread” on a specific topic.¹³⁰ There is a clear hierarchy within these forums, with the owner who exercises top-down control over the forum. He or she has the power to delete the entire forum or individual threads and accept or ban users. Beneath the owner there are moderators who almost have the same power except for the right to delete the forum. The hierarchical structure and the multiple inner circles within made it hard to gain access to terrorist-related forums and especially to the important inner circles, because of the security risks of being monitored for the terrorists.¹³¹

¹²⁷@KuffarKilla, a radical Islamist Twitter user promoting Jihad and expressing his displeasure with the fact that his former account was suspended. (version 10 August 2015), <https://twitter.com/KuffarKilla> (9 June 2017).

¹²⁸Alex P. Schmid, ‘Counter- and Alternative Narratives for a Comprehensive Strategy to Effectively Combat ISIS Propaganda’ (Text Lecture Prof. em. Alex P. Schmid delivered at the GMM Distinguished Lecture in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 27-10-2015) 16.

¹²⁹Schmid and de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*, 163.

¹³⁰Stern and Berger, *Isis: the State of Terror*, 193.

¹³¹Ibidem, 195.

As a result of security risks and because of the fact that terrorists are always quick in adapting to new trends and technologies, they started accounts on open social media like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter from which they could operate anonymously. These media became increasingly popular during the transition to Web 2.0 after 2004 because they made horizontal interaction and participation possible.¹³² YouTube soon became the main stage for terrorist propaganda. Anwar Awlaki for example, discussed radical Islamic concepts on his YouTube account. He was a Yemeni-American jihadist cleric who established himself on social media in an early stage and became increasingly radical in his lectures, some hours long, on a variety of religious topics.¹³³ He died by the cause of a drone strike in Yemen.

The rise of social media had profound influence on worldwide communication. Social media allows international two-way communication within the reach of hundreds of millions of people. However, the services of platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Google+ and YouTube have also become the preferred communication platforms for terrorist groups seeking to recruit followers, intimidate adversaries and spread their propaganda.¹³⁴ YouTube for example started to apply some degree of censorship after continued criticism on its policy that allowed for freedom of speech. They added the option for users to flag terrorist content that “depicted gratuitous violence, advocated violence, or used hate speech”, after which it would be removed.¹³⁵ To properly assess the role of social media in terrorism, it is necessary to establish a clear definition of what social media exactly are and which psychological effects the seemingly limitless communication through social media have.

3.2 What are social media

Prior to the modern forms of internet-based media, there were two main forms of communication through media. The first was public broadcasting such as television, radio and newspapers. With access to these kinds of media, one could get an audience. The transmitter, however, had no direct control over who would make up their audiences. The second form consisted of media facilitating private communication between two people such as telephones, also called ‘dyadic’ communication.¹³⁶ These kinds of media did not offer the possibility for group-based communication. In other words: there was a polarisation between public and private media.

With the widespread public introduction to internet, the polarisation between public and private media started to change. Emails, for instance, could be sent to a group and forums and

¹³² Stern and Berger, *Isis: the State of Terror*, 195.

¹³³ *Ibidem*, 196.

¹³⁴ Schmid, ‘Counter- and Alternative Narratives for a Comprehensive Strategy to Effectively Combat ISIS Propaganda’, 18.

¹³⁵ Stern and Berger, *Isis: the State of Terror*, 197.

¹³⁶ Daniel Miller et al., *How the World Changed Social Media?* (London 2016) 2.

chat rooms appealed to wider audiences. Most social media platforms have either, scaled down from public broadcasting or scaled up from private communication.¹³⁷

Thus there are two scales: the first is the scale from the most private to the most public; the second is the scale from the smallest group to the largest group. At the one end we see private dyadic conversations and at the other end we see fully public broadcasting.¹³⁸ Social media plays an important part on both these scales. Furthermore, most social media platforms have different functions to cover large parts of these scales to fit certain needs.

Moreover, social media are not simply performance spaces that simply send out information, like television for instance does. Social media are performance spaces where users interact instead of just receive. Social media have been an important driver of the shift within media towards 'participation' of its users. And in doing so, it constructed a close relationship between virtual and real communities. Social media make the transition from digital contact to action; users pass from a representational space to a relational and a performative one.¹³⁹ Social media allows its users to form social relations with people and participate in communities, without being physically there. Consequently people may form different kinds of relationships on social media than they would in real-life. As a result of the different social environments online communication may trigger different attitudes and behaviours, just as that without written rules, people behave different in office than in a pub.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, young people with internet access can live in the same house as their parents, but have limited 'real-time' family connectivity and simultaneously have big extended sociality online.¹⁴¹ Another factor that adds to the possibilities that lie in online social relationships for terrorists is that these relationships are sometimes experienced as being much purer, without the visibility of power and money involved.¹⁴²

In sum, social media have expanded the scale of communication methods, especially on the side of the private sphere. Television is still the most public way of communicating because it is a one-way means of communication. Social media give people the possibility to communicate on a public scale themselves and simultaneously communicate on a highly private level within the same medium. When large numbers of people gained cheap access to the internet, social media like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube changed the nature of the internet. These changes encouraged increasing numbers of supporters of violent jihad to post and re-post articles and analyses, exchange information, voice opinions, and debate ideas on blogs, websites, and forums

¹³⁷ Miller et al., *How the World Changed Social Media?*, 3.

¹³⁸ *Ibidem*, 3

¹³⁹ Tatiana Mazali, 'Social Media as a New Public Sphere', *Leonardo* 44 (2011) 290.

¹⁴⁰ Miller et al., *How the World Changed Social Media?*, 103/104.

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 105.

¹⁴² *Ibidem*, 108.

that they themselves established hereby creating strong online radical milieus.¹⁴³ Through social media, terrorists gained the control over their message. The chapter continues by describing the role of social media in terrorism using the five introduced earlier.

3.3 Social media as a stage for terrorists

While television provided the stage to get the attention of the targets of terrorism, social media provided terrorists with a tool whereby they could control what to publish and when. Social media differs from traditional or conventional media in aspects such as interactivity, reach, frequency, usability, immediacy and permanence.¹⁴⁴ By making it possible to publish different sorts of material, in the form of videos, texts, audio, images, etcetera, the internet gave the element of a stage for terrorism a far wider scope than television.

In 2004, when the internet was already widely used and the social media were developing, Al Qaeda in Iraq differentiated itself with graphic violence. They took the stage with the videotaped execution of American contractor Nicolas Berg and continued to release a seemingly endless series of graphic videos showing executions of hostages and prisoners, often by decapitation.¹⁴⁵

The successor of al Qaeda in Iraq, Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), took the use of the internet to a whole new level and continued to develop graphic videos. They used different camera angles and slow motion and most important they used foreign fighters to emphasise their success in attracting fighters from the West willing to fight and die for their cause.¹⁴⁶ Thereby undermining the legitimacy of governments of countries they originated from. In other words, by filming and editing their own message, terrorist organisations are able to manipulate the stage where they perform and showcase their deeds until its circumstances ideally fit their goals. Particularly ISIS makes use of these techniques.

They issued multiple videos featuring foreign fighter rejecting the current borders in the Middle East as drawn up by foreign powers.¹⁴⁷ They furthermore released a video called: "A Message to America" in which an American reporter named James Foley was kneeling in the desert. His arms and legs were bound and he was dressed in an orange jumpsuit to invoke the garb worn by jihadist prisoners in Guantanamo Bay and Iraq during the American occupation. A masked ISIS fighter stood besides him with a small black microphone clipped to the collar of his shirt just as used in Western news broadcasts. Foley spoke of how the U.S. government were responsible for his death, and the final phrase was: "I guess, all in all, I wish I wasn't an

¹⁴³ Conway, 'From al-Zarqawi to al-Awlaki: The Emergence and Development of an Online Radical Milieu', 3.

¹⁴⁴ Gabriel Weimann, *Terrorism in Cyberspace: The Next Generation* (Washington D.C. 2015) 309.

¹⁴⁵ Stern and Berger, *ISIS: the State of Terror*, 162.

¹⁴⁶ Ibidem, 126.

¹⁴⁷ James P. Farwell, 'The Media Strategy of ISIS', *Survival* 56 (2014) 50.

American”.¹⁴⁸ After the execution, the fighter gripped another hostage, an American journalist named Steven Sotloff and said to the camera: “The life of this American citizen, Obama, depends on your next decision.”¹⁴⁹ The video attracted large audiences on the internet because ISIS supporters took to social media to make sure their message was delivered not just to American policymakers, but to anyone within the reach of the internet. With the release of following videos, many ISIS Twitter users crashed hash tags for British television shows and directed harassing tweets and videos at British prime minister David Cameron’s official Twitter account to extend the reach of their message even further.¹⁵⁰ In this way ISIS could combine the maximum reach of public broadcasting with personalised messages they designed themselves.

In addition to the horrific images, which aim to sow fear into societies, terrorists use social media as a stage for other kinds of messages as well. The online efforts of ISIS also frequently turned to the themes of fun and adventure.¹⁵¹ They also released images of jihadist fighters eating Snickers bars and nurturing kittens to communicate the message that ISIS stands for promoting the welfare of people, not murdering them¹⁵² in order to assure possible foreign fighters of the delights they would experience next to the fighting.

Some terrorists also used social media in order to plea for internal disputes within terrorist organisations. A young Syrian-Irish-American from Alabama, Omar Hammami became the public face of al Shabab after rapping in English about the delight of radicals.¹⁵³ In 2012 he posted a video on YouTube claiming that al Shabab wanted to kill him and he openly criticised the al Shabab leadership. He took to social media to promote his video and drew media attention on Twitter from Western terrorism analysts and journalists. He discussed openly with his enemies and with journalists about the schism between him and al Shabab, drawing as much attention to his stage as he could.

Summing up, as a stage social media offers terrorists more possibilities to ensure that their message is received by the audience they aimed for and in the form they preferred. In contrast to television, social media and terrorism enjoy a less symbiotic relation, because social media requires more participation than endurance from its users. However, because all news networks are also active on social media, the symbiotic relationship between television and terrorism ensures airtime for terrorists on social media as well. In addition, the demand for dramatic and violent news of the public also found its way into the channels of social media. Social media therefor offers terrorists the ideal stage because they can be the director, the stage manager, and head of stagecraft for their own theatre. Sometimes this freedom backfires on the

¹⁴⁸ Stern and Berger, *Isis: the State of Terror*, 185.

¹⁴⁹ Ibidem, 185.

¹⁵⁰ Ibidem, 186.

¹⁵¹ Ibidem, 136.

¹⁵² Farwell, ‘The Media Strategy of ISIS’, 50.

¹⁵³ Stern and Berger, *Isis: the State of Terror*, 109.

terrorist as with the burning of the Jordanian pilot by ISIS on the third of January 2015. Senior religious clerics from around the world, including a former jihadi, insisted the militants had gone too far in burning a fellow Muslim. Other clerics said that no human is authorised to do this because it is restricted to Allah.¹⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the fact that terrorists now possessed all this power over their messaging meant that smaller terrorist attacks also would get the attention the terrorists wanted. The attacks would not have to be large, costly operations anymore.¹⁵⁵ Consequently, by joining a social network, young radicals, not even closely associated to a terrorist organisation, can execute a terrorist attack, film the operation themselves or expect bystanders to do so, and achieve the renown they were looking for.

3.4 Terrorist legitimisation on social media

Legitimacy is crucial for terrorist organisations to draw support. Except for de-legitimising the government, it proved to be difficult to legitimise terrorist attacks or a terrorist cause through television. Due to the dependency on the coverage, editing and commenting of television networks and their anchors, the internet and especially social media offered the possibility to bypass this complication. YouTube was what they needed, as the slogan of the company “Broadcast Yourself”, emphasised. Being able to broadcast their own videos, the media departments of terrorist organisations saw their chances clear.

A key to the jihadist strategy to win the broader conflict with the West was the development of a shared sense of identity amongst the *ummah*, the global Muslim community, encouraging the internalizing of suffering by Muslims everywhere in the world.¹⁵⁶

In 2012 a small Al Qaeda affiliate that would grow into ISIS issued a video called *The Clanging/Clash of the Swords*.¹⁵⁷ In this hour-long movie, emphasis of the hatred was placed on Iraqi Shi’a politicians, who were allegedly under Iranian influence. The video subsequently focussed on the atrocities Muslims were suffering at the hands of the Shi’a in Iraq.¹⁵⁸

To keep the stream of propaganda consistent, its sequel was issued before one would have the chance of forgetting its predecessor. After only a few weeks *The Clanging of the Swords Part 2* was released, which was significantly different from its predecessor, consisting almost entirely of combat footage and the quality of the video and camerawork was comparable to that

¹⁵⁴ The Guardian, ‘Muslim clerics denounce ‘savage’ Isis murder of Jordanian pilot’ (version 6 February 2015), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/06/muslim-clerics-denounce-jordanian-pilot-execution-kasasbeh> (1 June 2017).

¹⁵⁵ Jason Burke, ‘How the changing media is changing terrorism’ (version 25 February 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/25/how-changing-media-changing-terrorism> (27 June 2017).

¹⁵⁶ John Curtis Amble, ‘Combating Terrorism in the New Media Environment’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35 (2012) 342.

¹⁵⁷ Stern and Berger, *Isis: the State of Terror*, 165.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 166.

of a professional television program. A basic difference with earlier legitimisation efforts was that this predecessor of IS discarded the former key element of weakness and suffering. They tried to convince the world that the jihad was an act of self-defence, and their weakness justified asymmetrical warfare in the form of terrorist attacks on civilian targets. In contrast to their previous justifications with themes of persecution and oppression, they depicted Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) as a strong force meting out rough justice against deserving enemies.¹⁵⁹

Part 3 premiered a couple of months after the second film and was filmed with even better equipment in high definition and by experienced cameramen. This part however lacked focus and storytelling. Part 4 was released two months later and was an even more professionally made piece of propaganda in which the opening scene was filmed by a drone. The drone was nothing special; on the other hand, the message it delivered was powerful and clear. The enemy's most deadly and most feared weapon was now also part of the arsenal of ISIS.¹⁶⁰ The video continued showing the strength of ISIS as they paraded through the streets of the cities they occupied, the streets filled with apparently admiring masses gathered to watch. After minutes of brutal slaughter a public gathering was shown. There ISIS fighters offered clemency for everybody who had fought against them, but was willing to renounce their errors and they received warm embraces as they did. During the last part of the video the narrator keeps on emphasising Islamic State exists only to defend and protect the rights of the viewer: "Indeed, the Islamic State is your one true hope, after Allah".¹⁶¹

This video was extremely successful and it reached millions of views on video-sharing platforms. With it, IS created vast excitement among those who followed ISIS online and many who were vulnerable to its message.¹⁶² Their message was clear and strong and it made the viewers believe that they were convincingly winning.

In addition to the direct efforts to legitimise their cause through the spread of these kinds of videos, terrorists also used social media to resolve internal disputes. As mentioned before, the jihadist Omar, that criticised al Shabab for its corruptive ways, forced them to fire back at him over its official Twitter account because they were losing legitimacy as a consequence of his allegations.¹⁶³

The size and capabilities of the media departments of modern terrorist organisations show how important social media are for the success of their organisation. The media jihad has gained prominence and credibility as a legitimate alternative to traditional conceptions of

¹⁵⁹ Stern and Berger, *Isis: the State of Terror*, 168

¹⁶⁰ Ibidem, 170.

¹⁶¹ Ibidem, 172.

¹⁶² Ibidem, 173.

¹⁶³ Ibidem, 114.

jihad.¹⁶⁴ The online activities of a terrorist group constitute to a powerful community that had to be acknowledged by all players and it showed that to play a powerful role within the jihadi movement, social media were a must. In comparison to television, the arrival of social media offered endless new possibilities to legitimise the terrorist cause. Because of the possibility of two-way communications, terrorists are now even able to enter in online discussions with dissidents or even with terrorism analysts if they wanted. If they don't want any outside filters, the limits of editors and news reporters are easily bypassed, meaning that dissidents will not pollute their message.

3.5 Terrorist propaganda on social media

As mentioned earlier, there is some overlap between the different elements of the role of the media I use to compare television with social media. Most of the efforts by terrorists to legitimise their cause mentioned above are forms of propaganda, however terrorists use much more forms of propaganda on social media.

With carefully chosen posts on social media, terrorists can create an image in which they are always successful, that victory is inevitable and that all group members are fearsome warriors.¹⁶⁵ After ISIS took the city of Mosul, they captured U.S.-supplied military equipment from fleeing Iraqi soldiers, which they trumpeted on social media.¹⁶⁶ In the age of television, these images would most likely never reach further than the social surroundings of the makers.

Besides the fact that ISIS methodically shaped and manipulated its social media networks, it also benefitted from inspired ISIS members and supporters who took several administrative jobs upon themselves, including translating communiqués and propaganda into multiple languages and crafting armies of Twitter “bots” – codes that distributed its content and amplified its reach.¹⁶⁷ ISIS furthermore started an own outlet dedicated to disseminating material in English and other European languages to extend their reach.¹⁶⁸ By increasingly focussing on these youth-dominated, Western online communities like Facebook, MySpace and their Arabic equivalents, they reach out to the younger generation that is most vulnerable for online radicalisation.¹⁶⁹

Social media also proved to be the ideal medium for training purposes. Countless instructional materials were distributed that contributed to the training of terrorists so that they could fabricate bombs or detonators at home. Al Qaeda and ISIS both have their own online

¹⁶⁴ Conway, 'From al-Zarqawi to al-Awlaki: The Emergence and Development of an Online Radical Milieu', 6.

¹⁶⁵ Farwell, 'The Media Strategy of ISIS', 50.

¹⁶⁶ Stern and Berger, *ISIS: the State of Terror*, 87.

¹⁶⁷ Ibidem, 120.

¹⁶⁸ Ibidem, 174.

¹⁶⁹ Weimann, *Terrorism in Cyberspace: The Next Generation*, 314.

magazines, which they disseminate on social media. Al Qaeda's *Inspire* promotes individual violent jihad and reinforces al Qaeda's narratives and offers suggestions for simple attacks and practical instructions for building improvised weapons and bombs.¹⁷⁰ Al Qaeda's *Inspire*, included some instructional articles such as: "Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of your Mom".¹⁷¹ Next to instructions on how to make the bomb, the article also has a legitimising introduction, in which they emphasise the injustice that the Muslims worldwide experience and that every Muslim is required to defend his religion. Along with these instructions for terrorist attacks in the West, the magazine also issued many articles about how to join the actual jihad and what to expect.¹⁷²

ISIS has a similar magazine called *Dabiq* and it features similar articles but it is also a self-created stage where ISIS glorifies and justifies all the attacks committed in their name.¹⁷³ Moreover, next to these online magazines, the situation within the occupied territory was also staged on social media. In areas under the control of ISIS, it implemented a draconian regime of crime and punishment, which they believed to be divinely ordered. They celebrated and carefully documented the process in its propaganda, publicising everything from the destruction of cigarettes to the amputation of thieves' hands to the genocidal extermination and enslavement of Iraqi minorities.¹⁷⁴ The videos and images of atrocities distributed on both official and unofficial channels on social media seemed endless. Social media allowed terrorists to distribute as much propaganda as they could. For months ISIS uploaded five or six pieces of propaganda a day.¹⁷⁵

The online propaganda distributed by ISIS not only shows atrocities and combat footage. Their pronouncements are generally well-crafted, playing on narratives familiar with many Muslims, for example about the themes of shame and humiliation many Muslims have experienced in their lives.¹⁷⁶ Although this skilful storytelling was an important factor in the propaganda process of ISIS, the fact that they were winning the media war on all the social media platforms was the most important factor.

ISIS social media operatives liked Facebook because of rich media options on both public and private scale and they started establishing their presence. Facebook however tried to terminate the accounts of bomb-making instructors and active terrorist plotters.¹⁷⁷ Being ideal

¹⁷⁰ Brian Michael Jenkins, 'Stray Dogs and Virtual Armies, Radicalization and Recruitment to Jihadist Terrorism in the United States Since 9/11', *Occasional Paper of the RAND Corporation's Investment in People and Ideas program* (2011) 16.

¹⁷¹ The AQ Chef, 'How to make a bomb in the kitchen of your mom', *Inspire Magazine* 1 (2010) 33-40.

¹⁷² 'What to expect in Jihad', *Inspire* 2 (2010) 24-26.

¹⁷³ 'Islamic State Operations', *Dabiq* 12 (November 2015) 20-25.

¹⁷⁴ Stern and Berger, *ISIS: the State of Terror*, 177.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, 188.

¹⁷⁶ Alex P. Schmid, 'Challenging the Narrative of "Islamic State"', *ICCT Research Paper* (The Hague 2015) 3.

¹⁷⁷ Stern and Berger, *ISIS: the State of Terror*, 236.

for disseminating propaganda and for enabling internal communication, Twitter then emerged as terrorists' favourite internet service.¹⁷⁸

With the use of Twitter, terrorists can even steer the news in which they previously struggled to be portrayed, as they seem fit. News being brought through social media requires fast live coverage at the expense of validation and in-depth analysis – this process already started with the rise of satellite television. Under these conditions, mainstream media may take tweets as a legitimate news source. Terrorists have repeatedly and methodically exploited this shortcoming for propaganda purposes.¹⁷⁹

Social media made the distribution of terrorist propaganda significantly more easy and effective and it added more possibilities to spread propaganda. Again, the control terrorists gained over their own coverage made a big difference in contrast to television coverage. Modern terrorist organisations enjoy more attention because they adopted their propaganda strategy to the possibilities of social media: “the smart – if deceptive – social media strategies boosted ISIS across the board”.¹⁸⁰

3.6 Terrorist recruitment on social media

Recruitment is one of the most important purposes of terrorist organisations. Thanks to social media, enormous opportunities opened up for recruitment through media. With television coverage, terrorists could only hope to inspire radicals to find their way into a terrorist organisation or plan an attack themselves, social media offers endless possibilities for recruiters to convince radicals to join the jihad.

Firstly, most of the propaganda spread via social media is aimed at growing support and to recruit possible radicals. Recruitment for the cause, for instance, is being sold as: “means of participating in God’s project on Earth. There is a frontier-like allure to it, as uncommitted supporters are convinced to migrate and engage by the promise of being a ‘founding father or mother’ of the utopia.”¹⁸¹ Secondly, any Muslim who intends to do jihad against the enemy electronically, is considered a *mujahid*. As long as he or she meets the conditions of jihad, online preaching for jihad is seen as participating in the jihad.¹⁸²

Modern jihadist terrorist organisations also emphasise the presence of foreign fighters on social media in order to convince others to join. ISIS posted a video of foreign fighters from Britain, France, Finland, Indonesia, Morocco, Belgium, and America, and they all repeated the

¹⁷⁸ Gabriel Weimann, ‘New Terrorism and the New Media’, *Commons Lab of the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars* (Washington D.C. 2014) 8.

¹⁷⁹ Weimann, ‘New Terrorism and the New Media’, 8.

¹⁸⁰ Stern and Berger, *ISIS: the State of Terror*, 230.

¹⁸¹ Schmid, ‘Counter- and Alternative Narratives for a Comprehensive Strategy to Effectively Combat ISIS Propaganda’, 24.

¹⁸² ‘Transformatie van het jihadisme in Nederland, Zwermodynamiek en nieuwe slagkracht’, *Uitgave van Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst* (2014) 20.

same message: “I’m calling on all the Muslims living in the West, America, Europe, and everywhere else, to come, to make *hijra* with your families to the land of Khalifah”.¹⁸³ Furthermore, multiple foreign fighters posted their day-to-day experiences. One of them coined the phrase: “five-star jihad” to describe the fun he was having which caught on as a rallying cry to his countrymen, who showed up in increasing numbers.¹⁸⁴

Another strategy, in which recruiters lured people into their organisations, was through the site Ask.fm, a social media platform built around answering questions from other users. Questioners often asked how to donate to fighting groups or how they could get to Syria themselves and what then to bring or to expect; these questions were answered by members of the terrorist organisations.¹⁸⁵

Even without direct involvement of online terrorists, people whose interest was sparked by the news on certain new terrorist groups, could now follow their official Twitter account. Twitter then automatically starts introducing similar accounts, which interested people also start to follow. As J.M. Berger puts it: “as a terrorist dating service, it’s hard to beat”.¹⁸⁶ Consequently it was very easy on Twitter or Facebook to stumble onto a radical or extremist account or community, and even easier for terrorist recruiters to seek prey within mainstream society.¹⁸⁷ Through online groups, recruiters are able to maintain a list with potential recruits or sympathisers, just as marketing companies can view information about members of certain groups. Social networking sites allow terrorists to use a targeting strategy known as narrowcasting, where they aim messages at specific segments of the public defined by values, preferences, demographic attributes, or subscription.¹⁸⁸

There are even reports of ISIS using online games and the accompanying chat rooms to recruit new members by claiming that the activities in the game resemble their battlefield activities.¹⁸⁹ Terrorists are also using PlayStation 4 game consoles to communicate because its communication application is notoriously hard to monitor.¹⁹⁰ Security agencies have already implemented these digital surroundings as environments where they are gathering intelligence and tracing terrorist activities, as has been revealed by the New York Times who had access to

¹⁸³ Stern and Berger, *Isis: the State of Terror*, 124.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, 136.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, 136.

¹⁸⁶ J. M. Berger, ‘Zero Degrees of al Qaeda: How Twitter is supercharging jihadist recruitment’ (version August 14, 2013), <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/14/zero-degrees-of-al-qaeda/> (May 12, 2017).

¹⁸⁷ Stern and Berger, *Isis: the State of Terror*, 205.

¹⁸⁸ Weimann, ‘New Terrorism and the New Media’, 3.

¹⁸⁹ Ted Thornhill, ‘Isis use top videogame Grand Theft Auto 5 to recruit children and radicalise the vulnerable’ (version 22 September 2014), <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2765414/Isis-use-video-game-Grand-Theft-Auto-5-recruit-children-radicalise-vulnerable.html> (29 June 2017).

¹⁹⁰ Paul Tassi, ‘How ISIS Terrorists May Have Used PlayStation 4 To Discuss And Plan Attacks [Updated]’ (version 14 November 2014), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/insertcoin/2015/11/14/why-the-paris-isis-terrorists-used-ps4-to-plan-attacks/#646c79697055> (29 June 2017).

leaked documents of the American National Security Agency (NSA).¹⁹¹ In the leaked NSA document the online activities and possibilities of terrorists are accurately described, as well as possible countermeasures in these environments. By using different genres of games to achieve different objectives, terrorists can use games for similar purposes as social media, like: propaganda, communication, recruiting. However, games are also used for simulation, practice, team management and money laundering and fundraising.¹⁹² The fact that terrorists again have stepped into the newest developments in which they can exploit the opportunities to their best advantage and expand the possibilities of the digital world even further shows their determination to take control over their communication.

Charismatic preachers accompany online recruiters. Their role is to “awaken” potential activists to their worldview by broadcasting aims and interpreting Islamist texts in ways that make them accessible to target audiences in the West. Normally these radical imams only preached in local communities and Mosques. The new communication technologies offered by social media have further empowered charismatic preachers because they can post their sermons, lectures and other multimedia material on social media and jihadist websites.¹⁹³

After vulnerable targets are identified the most important part of online recruitment comes in play. Despite the fact that the internet is seen as an incubator for incipient radicalism and a transmission channel for jihadist and Al Qaeda propaganda, these elements do not match the importance of themes as brotherhood. The relationships jihadist recruiters forged online have led to many attempted terrorist attacks and violent radical activity.¹⁹⁴ The primary work of the recruiter is thus building relationships, and this is exactly what social media were made for. Dozens of men and women can be found working their way through Muslim social circles and providing them with connections that can lead them to Syria or to the planning of an attack in the West.¹⁹⁵

Another advantage for recruiters is that they can recruit without even leaving the frontline. Potential terrorists can follow actual fighters on Twitter, talk to them ask them questions and eventually receive guidance on how to join the battle. Recruits then might travel

¹⁹¹ Justin Elliot, ‘World of Spycraft: NSA and CIA Spied in Online Games’ (version 9 December 2013), <https://www.propublica.org/article/world-of-spycraft-intelligence-agencies-spied-in-online-games> (29 June 2017).

¹⁹² NSA documents on games and virtual worlds: ‘Games: A Look at Emerging Trends, Uses, Threats and Opportunities in Influence Activities’, (Dated: 1 December 2008) <https://www.propublica.org/documents/item/889134-games> (29 June 2017).

¹⁹³ Angela Gendron, ‘The Call to Jihad: Charismatic Preachers and the Internet’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40 (2017) 49.

¹⁹⁴ J.M. Berger, ‘Internet provides terrorists with tools – just like everyone else’ (July 31, 2011) <http://news.intelwire.com/2011/07/internet-provides-terrorists-with-tools.html> (May 12, 2017).

¹⁹⁵ Stern and Berger, *Isis: the State of Terror*, 235.

on their own initiative to Turkish-Syrian border, log on to Twitter and ask for someone to pick them up. This seems to work on a regular basis.¹⁹⁶

The element of recruitment through media revolutionised with the introduction of social media. Besides the inspirational function of news about terrorism, social media enabled terrorists to reach the biggest audience possible, to focus specifically on vulnerable targets within the mainstream society and build up a relationship with these people. Terrorists subsequently guide recruits to Syria to join the actual organisation or guide them in planning and executing an attack in their own country. The fact that terrorists can fight their adversaries and simultaneously recruit using platforms such as Twitter made social media a very effective tool for terrorists.

3.7 Government use of social media and containment efforts

As counterterrorism is also communication, its efforts found their way to social media. Next to television, governments use social media to legitimise their policy or to inform the public about the terrorist threat. However, the attitudes of social media companies and the wishes of the governments towards the use of social media by terrorists do not correspond completely, just as was the case during the seventies and eighties with television and terrorism.

The increase in the use of social media by terrorists was accompanied by increasing pressure on the companies owning these media. After years of political pressure, YouTube added an option for users to flag terrorist content.¹⁹⁷ Every social media platform hosted some number of violent extremists, but Facebook and Twitter received most criticism because they were the most popular.¹⁹⁸ Facebook and Google, cooperated fairly well because despite their favour of freedom of speech they were publicly traded companies with concerns about liability.

Twitter on the other hand, more aggressively resisted broad government requests for information and its rules for users contained few restrictions. Sometimes accounts are suspended, for issuing spam or direct threats, including some against Twitter employees. However, according to an anonymous Twitter employee, the tech firm is not interested in defining terrorism or silencing political speech.¹⁹⁹

The efforts of trying to counter terrorists on the internet has been compared to the children's arcade game, Whac-A-Mole by the concerning social media platforms. In this game toy moles pop out of holes on a table. The goal of the game is to whack the moles on their head the moment they come up, however they keep returning at different holes in a higher pace. This is a fitting metaphor for countering online terrorism, because whenever a terrorist account was

¹⁹⁶ Stern and Berger, *Isis: the State of Terror*, 234.

¹⁹⁷ Ibidem, 197.

¹⁹⁸ Ibidem, 200.

¹⁹⁹ Jenna McLaughlin, 'Twitter Is Not at War With ISIS. Here's Why' (version November 18, 2014), <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/11/twitter-isis-war-ban-speech> (May 24, 2017).

deleted, sooner or later it returned under a slightly different name. The metaphor became synonymous to the dismissal of the value of efforts to counter or suppress terrorist and extremist use of social media.²⁰⁰

A clear illustration of Twitter's unwillingness or incapability to counter the terrorist activity on their platform is the fact that the U.S. State Department opened an anti-ISIS Twitter account called: "Think Again Turn Away".²⁰¹ With this account The State Department regularly engages with ISIS accounts to react with counter-narratives and to dispute its claims in the hope of sabotaging recruitment efforts where Twitter refuses this.

In the case of government action against terrorist activity on social media, the same arguments as in the previous chapter about censorship limit the government in their fight against the use of social media by terrorists. Governments have been pressuring the companies into stricter rules and conditions. Concrete online counteractions have had a slow start. While governments commonly look at a bigger picture and try to achieve objectives on tactical and strategic level in order to counter terrorism, they have been somewhat negligent in the incorporation of new media's unique features into a comprehensive counterterrorism plan.²⁰² It is essential that government and media companies are going to cooperate to limit the terrorist opportunities without breaking any privacy laws or human rights. In chapter four these implications will be discussed more extensively.

3.8 Conclusion

With the emergence of the internet and social media, terrorists were given the possibility to bypass the limitations of television coverage. Without interference of television networks terrorists were finally able to convey their unfiltered message to a large audience. The internet offered new possibilities for every element of the role of the media used in this thesis.

Firstly, the internet and especially social media widened the stage and gave terrorists the possibility to design and maintain their own stage. Secondly, the fact that the terrorists were able to design and spread their own legitimisation efforts meant that they could more efficiently deliver their message to the target audience. Thirdly, social media were essential for the start of an unprecedented propaganda machine, due to the possibility to spread limitless pieces of propaganda for free and to a specific audience. Fourthly, the combined first three elements had as a result that potential terrorists could be reached much more easily. Perhaps even more important, recruiters could build up relationships via the same medium, not necessarily having to be in the neighbourhood of the potential recruits. Finally, the government has the same or

²⁰⁰ Stern and Berger, *Isis: the State of Terror*, 204.

²⁰¹ Jenna McLaughlin, 'Twitter Is Not at War With ISIS. Here's Why' (version November 18, 2014), <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/11/twitter-isis-war-ban-speech> (May 24, 2017).

²⁰² Amble, 'Combatting Terrorism in the New Media Environment', 345.

even more access to social media, and of course uses it in counterterrorism measures. However, arguably, governments did not use social media as well as terrorists did and continue to do.

Terrorist organisations once again demonstrated their ability to implement the newest technologies in their arsenal. The rise of social media has provided terrorists with new tools to reach and persuade audiences worldwide, while media coverage on television has not declined. Thus terrorism is more present than ever in the Western World, not necessarily in real life, however, in the people's perception it definitely is. Because terrorists use social media to represent themselves in online communities, they are able to spread their ideas to other individuals on a global scale. Furthermore, television networks all have their social media accounts on which they broadcast or publish news, thus terrorist content or news covering terrorism is most likely to reach the biggest audience possible.

The literature on the role of social media in terrorism mostly focuses on the way it is being used by terrorist organisations in order to achieve the objectives mentioned above and on how something can be done to counter the online presence of terrorists on social media. Articles about how to effectively use social media's potential for de-radicalisation are scarce and are directed at counter narratives only. Additionally, more attention to disruption of the online radicalisation efforts of terrorists and to de-radicalisation efforts would contribute significantly to the literature and debates on how to combat the use of the media by terrorists. However, the largest gap in the literature on the digital development of terrorist organisation lies in the developments of terrorist activity in games and virtual worlds. ISIS is very active in these environments, and especially in the book of Stern and Berger, this would have been a very valuable addition. This information is very valuable because these developments particularly show the ingenuity of terrorist organisations in their crusade for control over their message. The terrorists now not only can watch online behaviour on social media but also online 'combat' behaviour and recruit vulnerable people on the basis of their behaviour without any outside interference proves that they have improved their digital skills significantly.

The next chapter will summarise how the role of the media changed from the age of television to the age of the new social media. Furthermore I will look at what the implications of this shift might be and how the success of terrorism through social media could potentially be countered.

Chapter 4: Changes and Implications

“Those who surrender freedom for security will not have, nor do they deserve, either one”

*Benjamin Franklin (1755).*²⁰³

4.1 Introduction

The media have always played an important role in terrorism. This role consists of several elements that each fulfils a different part in the terrorists' objective to achieve revenge, renown and reaction. The goals of terrorists have not changed since the start of modern terrorism, the way in which they have used the media, however, changed significantly.

Social media has provided terrorists with a larger arsenal to use the media in their benefit. The shift from newspapers to television coverage ensured that people not present at the attack, the target audience, could experience the events as if they were there so it would have a longer-lasting impact. Terrorists adapted their tactics to make the most out of this new medium with protracted attacks like kidnappings and hijackings.

The limitations of television as a tool for terrorism became apparent fairly quickly. Because all actions covered by television networks were filtered by an army of reporters, editors and other altering factors, the message terrorists tried to convey did not reach its target the way the terrorists intended it to.

Eager to bypass this crucial limitation, the fourth wave radical religious terrorists immediately stepped into the technical developments that made worldwide communication significantly easier. The early days of the internet offered everyone, including terrorists, access to a network that allowed worldwide communication in groups. When Web 2.0 made its entrance, worldwide communication became a two-way network in which the media evolved into an interactive environment that allowed participation for everyone. Thus next to the known channels of television, terrorists had an extra, more extensive medium to add to their arsenal. This caused far-reaching consequences for the role of the media for terrorism because of the possibilities to gain control over their message.

4.2 Possibilities of the internet

The internet, and especially the dark web with its capacity for hiding the identity and location of its users provided terrorists with an indispensable infrastructure for internal communication.²⁰⁴ The open part of the internet, including social media, allows terrorists and their supporters to

²⁰³ Franklin Papers, 'Pennsylvania Assembly: Reply to the Governor', <http://franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp?vol=6&page=238a> (June 7, 2017).

²⁰⁴ Schmid, 'Counter- and Alternative Narratives for a Comprehensive Strategy to Effectively Combat ISIS Propaganda', 18.

glorify and legitimise their own deeds and to incite sympathisers to join their ranks while simultaneously intimidating their opponents with the spread of filmed atrocities. Furthermore, the internet allows terrorists to raise funds for their cause, to gain intelligence on their opponents, to access more information about warfare, bomb-making etcetera and it allowed terrorists to enter the online battlefield.²⁰⁵

The fact that terrorists now control their own media outlets means that the media has become a battlefield in itself. Terrorist organisations have their own media departments, where their best commanders are stationed.²⁰⁶ Furthermore, terrorists now develop their own apps; The Dawn of Glad Tidings was a Twitter app that automatically sent out links to official ISIS news releases and media, and hashtags that the ISIS social media team wanted to promote.²⁰⁷

Of the five elements introduced in this thesis, recruitment through social media has evolved the most since the use of television. While the media has always been used for recruiting purposes, spreading products on social media sites has greatly increased the recruiter's abilities to reach potential recruits. Furthermore, online approaches centred on certain products have drastically impacted time-tested techniques and made them more prolific, efficient, and effective. Consequently, the media releases have become more important than the action they are reporting, a true realisation of the concept of propaganda by the deed. The simple, consistent and comprehensive messages broadcasted in tremendous volumes from complex environments like Syria, Iraq and Libya offering stability and order contributes to the terrorist organisations gaining support.²⁰⁸ Due to the possibilities on social media with graphic videos, terrorists keep video footage of all their attacks and massacres stored in a strategic reserve to reveal when necessary.

Furthermore, the combination of the development of smartphones with social media also significantly contributed to the usability of social media for terrorists. Firstly, cheap smartphones allowed the use of social media for a large number of people who previously had no access to the internet. Secondly, when smartphones became more advanced, terrorists were able to film and transmit their deeds at the same time. Finally, some terrorists that plan attacks in the West do not need to film their deeds, because everyone in the area of their act of terrorism and every victim will have a smartphone with a camera. The terrorists rely on the prevalence of large numbers of cameras and our unashamed desire to share the images and films they

²⁰⁵ Schmid, 'Counter- and Alternative Narratives for a Comprehensive Strategy to Effectively Combat ISIS Propaganda', 19.

²⁰⁶ Craig Whiteside, 'Lighting the Path: the Evolution of the Islamic State Media Enterprise (2003-2016)', *ICCT Research Paper* (The Hague 2016) 23.

²⁰⁷ Stern and Berger, *Isis: the State of Terror*, 220.

²⁰⁸ Whiteside, 'Lighting the Path: the Evolution of the Islamic State Media Enterprise (2003-2016)', 23.

produce.²⁰⁹ Thus social media first made it possible for terrorists to take control over their coverage and messaging, and thereafter made everyone present at a terrorist attack into a possible reporter, ensuring the terrorists of all the coverage they need. This poses another problem, because this content is even harder to deny from social media because it can also be accounted as news coverage of a terroristic act. Thus the terrorists get the attention they long for.

The possibilities for terrorists in online games mentioned in last chapter are one of the environments where, for example, terrorists can recruit in the best possible conditions. These online environments are the ideal place where terrorists can scout for sympathisers while simultaneously monitor their capabilities and get into contact with them. Furthermore, without the extensive profile that other social media require, terrorists are here even harder to spot than, for instance, on Facebook. Besides these advantages, these online environments lack the controlling devices that the established social media companies are developing to trace terrorist content.

4.3 Possible countermeasures

Terrorists gained endless new possibilities with the development of the internet and social media; but how can this be countered? 'Terrorist' communication objectives can be thwarted in various ways. However, similar problems as with preventing terrorism occur. The first, and most undesirable option would be, that of censorship by governments. As with preventing terrorist acts, these measures would harm the cause of the terrorists, but it might also ban much other communications in the name of national security.²¹⁰ Furthermore, the government can use this power to silence non-terroristic forces in the opposition.

The second option is that of self-censorship by the media, which also has its drawbacks. However, when media companies would uphold their own internal guidelines in the heat of their competition for audiences this option can have the desired effects. The difficulties for this option lie in the demand for dramatic and violent news in combination with the idea that media companies supply the public in their freedom of information. However media companies should also keep in mind the dangers of supplying the public with this news and the power they have in countering these forces.²¹¹ In France several news-organisations decided in July 2016 to no longer publish photographs of people responsible for terrorist killings to keep them as

²⁰⁹ Jason Burke, 'How the changing media is changing terrorism' (version 25 February 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/25/how-changing-media-changing-terrorism> (27 June 2017).

²¹⁰ Schmid, 'Counter- and Alternative Narratives for a Comprehensive Strategy to Effectively Combat ISIS Propaganda', 20.

²¹¹ Schmid, 'Counter- and Alternative Narratives for a Comprehensive Strategy to Effectively Combat ISIS Propaganda', 21.

anonymous as possible and avoid glorification from terrorist supporters.²¹² Self-restraint of television and internet based media companies could contribute significantly to counterterrorism efforts. To aid this policy, an autonomous committee of independent experts to monitor these developments would be necessary.

When Twitter, after political and social pressure, started deleting more terrorist accounts, it proved that the 'Whacking-A-Mole-strategy' did have more effect than anticipated. The assumption that suspending terrorists temporarily would have no effect and that they would never stop popping up, did not hold up. By suspending terrorists' accounts, the group's ability to disseminate propaganda and to recruit is diminished, because they are forced to reconstruct their networks.²¹³ Furthermore, when an account is suspended and pops up under another name, the first ones that start following this new account are the most motivated. Suspending the account thus wipes out analytical noise of curiosity seekers for the intelligence services and it deprives the terrorists of an easy archive of material and a great deal of their audience.²¹⁴

The third option to stop the media-momentum of terrorist organisations with such a strong base on social media, is a strong counter-narrative that can seriously challenge and undermine the narrative of these terrorist organisations.²¹⁵ To achieve this it is necessary to invest in the development of better counter-messages and more persuasive alternative narratives, which appeal to rebellious young people on both the emotional and the intellectual level.²¹⁶ Creating a counter narrative is extremely difficult because just turning around the message of the terrorists, combined with counter-messaging, does not amount to a full counter-narrative. The themes of the narrative in ISIS propaganda are for instance, in rising order of frequency: mercy, belonging, brutality, victimhood, war, and utopia.²¹⁷ Persuasive alternative narratives should be offered to counter the strong terrorist-narratives. Counter-narratives should also include facts that dispute the claims of ISIS, for example in the form of voices of disillusioned foreign fighters who made it back home.²¹⁸

Besides efforts to counter radicalisation, it is crucial to keep the performative power of counterterrorism efforts as low as possible because performance and public mobilisation may

²¹² Julian Borger, 'French media to stop publishing photos and names of terrorists' (version 27 July 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/jul/27/french-media-to-stop-publishing-photos-and-names-of-terrorists> (1 June 2017).

²¹³ Stern and Berger, *ISIS: the State of Terror*, 212.

²¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 215.

²¹⁵ Schmid, 'Challenging the Narrative of "Islamic State"', 2.

²¹⁶ Schmid, 'Counter- and Alternative Narratives for a Comprehensive Strategy to Effectively Combat ISIS Propaganda', 7.

²¹⁷ Schmid, 'Counter- and Alternative Narratives for a Comprehensive Strategy to Effectively Combat ISIS Propaganda', 22/23.

²¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 21.

have adverse effects.²¹⁹ Tough and uncompromising performativity of counterterrorism efforts fuel the terrorist narratives of injustice, oppression and discrimination, which build a radical ideology.²²⁰ It is also crucial to identify which existing radicals and recruiters are spreading terrorist-narratives off- and online. The fact that counterterrorism is a form of communication, just as terrorism is, means that, as with recruiting possible terrorists, building up relationships is the most important factor in de-radicalising potential radicals.

For a government under threat establishing an effective counterterrorism strategy is essential. Part of that strategy should be identifying the origin of the threat and how far the authorities can go to counter it.²²¹ This means that on social media, the search for vulnerable persons could lead to the online recruiters that form the biggest threat. It is then essential that their efforts are countered without using excessive, performative and censoring measures.

The key in countering online terrorist-activities thus lies in countering the terrorist narrative and in the building of relationships with people, especially young people vulnerable for online recruiters. Ways in achieving this, considering the biggest threat comes from jihadist terrorist organisations, would be through cooperation with the Islamic community. Strengthening existing networks of local key figures in these communities, and many other local efforts, both off- and online could contribute to de-radicalisation.²²² Teams responsible for tracing online recruiters or potential radicals in the Netherlands coordinate closely with civilian hotlines and internet companies in order to detect radicalisation in early stages.²²³ Disruption and disillusion are two important ways of intervening in radicalisation processes that can be deployed online.²²⁴ By effectively disrupting the recruitment efforts and, as terrorists do, start using the social media as a tool to detect terrorists efforts as they occur and to quantify the success of the countermeasures already in action, we can counter radicalisation without measures that are in contrast with our liberties.

Fortunately, steps in the right direction are made as we speak. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Microsoft announced on 26 June 2017 that they are teaming up to fight extremism. They created the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism after continued criticism over the

²¹⁹ De Graaf, *Evaluating Counterterrorism Performance*, 248.

²²⁰ *Ibidem*, 249.

²²¹ De Graaf, *Evaluating Counterterrorism Performance*, 250.

²²² 'Actieprogramma Integrale Aanpak Jihadisme', *Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie, Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid and Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid* (August 29, 2014) 17/18.

²²³ 'Actieprogramma Integrale Aanpak Jihadisme', 23.

²²⁴ J. M. Berger, 'Making CVE Work; A Focussed Approach Based on Process Disruption', *ICCT Research Paper* (The Hague 2016).

way terrorist organisations have used their platforms for recruitment and for spreading hateful and violent messages.²²⁵

4.4 Conclusion

Terrorists have mastered all combinations of media uses until they had a tool that exactly met their desires. Social media has provided them with the capability to take control over their own coverage in the media and to mass-produce their own products and spread them endlessly.²²⁶ This combination of possibilities for media usage has given them the opportunity to overcome the limitations of the pre-internet age. In contrast with the gained possibilities that social media has brought terrorists, the problems of countering terrorists in the media are similar to those in the age of television. Increased visibility of terrorism contributes to the terrorist's wishes. At first this was achieved by sensationalistic television coverage, and later social media made it possible to cover their own actions. In both cases, highly performative counteractions that would defy our liberal democratic values as freedom of speech and privacy, was the desired reaction the terrorists longed for. With the dangers of government-induced censorship in mind, cooperation between the media and the government can make a difference in the effectiveness of countering terrorist efforts on social media. Sabotaging terrorist online presence by suspending their twitter accounts limits their reach. By simultaneously countering terrorist-narratives online and offline and by building relationships with potential radicals, terrorists' effective use of social media can be tempered. Unfortunately, also in the literature on counterterrorism and in official policy documents, possibilities to limit terrorist activity in online games and virtual worlds are very scarce. Since the game industry keeps on growing, more measures against propaganda and recruitment efforts in these environments are necessary and governments should take swift action. Because, as confirmed in this thesis, terrorists are very quickly to adapt to new developments and technologies, chances are they are already one step ahead, with their presence in virtual worlds and online games.

The changes mentioned above correspond with the expectations about the ability of terrorists to turn the new technologies in ways of communication to their advantage. This happened when they realised what the opportunities of satellite television were and they kept on adapting during the development of the internet and the new ways of communication that the internet produced.

²²⁵ Sam Levin, 'Tech giants team up to fight extremism following cries that they allow terrorism' (version 26 June 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jun/26/google-facebook-counter-terrorism-online-extremism> (29 June 2017).

²²⁶ Whiteside, 'Lighting the Path: the Evolution of the Islamic State Media Enterprise (2003-2016)', 25.

Conclusion

Summary

Terrorism is a form of communication. Therefore the role of the media in terrorism has always been essential to the success of a terrorist attack or a terrorist organisation. The instrumental nature of terrorism means that the event must reach a far wider audience than the victims and direct witnesses. The media fulfil this role for the terrorists. Terrorists were quick in learning the possibilities of satellite television when these became the centre of most living rooms. Television was valued for its far-reaching and widespread audience and the visual impact it could deliver to people at home. Especially protracted terrorist acts, such as kidnappings and hijackings, made the most out of the relationship with the media, because the live coverage of the on-going event made millions of people obsessively watch the news. Furthermore, the media have an agenda setting function. The items that make it to the news become the talk of the day. The fact that committing an act of terrorism would ensure airtime on the news caused television to be seen as the ultimate tool for terrorists. The symbiotic relationship between terrorism and the media provided terrorists with a very public stage and it ensured the television stations their audiences and thus profit.

However, television as a tool for terrorists has its limits and thus became apparent that it was not ideal tool some thought it to be. The main limitation was the lack of control the terrorists had over the coverage of their actions. This meant that they were able to take the stage offered to them by the television networks, but were unable to fully influence the way they were portrayed and covered by the TV-stations, their editors and their anchors. Terrorist attacks were generally condemned and portrayed in a way that caused more repulsion than understanding among the public, because the television networks focussed on the violence and horror instead of on the terrorists' message. Furthermore, governments, the fifth element of this analysis, have an advantage in access to the stage of television and are thereby better able to broadcast their propaganda. In other words, television proved to be an effective tool for terrorists to gain a widespread audience. However, legitimisation, recruitment and effective spread of propaganda proved to be difficult through this medium, due to the lack of control over their message. Internet-based social media platforms, proved to be more suitable for legitimisation, recruitment and the dissemination of terrorists messages. Social media has therefore significantly changed the role of the media in terrorism.

Trough social media platforms, the media evolved from a vertical one-way stream from the few to the many into a horizontal multitude of two-way streams. It created an interactive environment that allowed and stimulated participation. The role of the media has shifted from being a very public stage to attract attention to a widespread communication tool. With internet-

based social media terrorist organisations are able to post hours of video material to legitimise their cause, instruct potential radicals and they can purposefully search for sympathizers.

Social media have given terrorists the ability to control the message they are trying to convey and allow them to deliver their message to a very large, or a very specific audience. By, among other things, using techniques as narrowcasting, terrorists could find the audience they wanted for their propaganda and recruiters. Especially the possibilities for online recruitment are a worrisome development in the role of the media in terrorism. Therefore it is crucial to counter the online narratives of terrorist organisations with strong counter-narratives, to disrupt online radicalisation efforts, and attractive alternatives for vulnerable radicals.

It is safe to say that the hypothesis: that terrorists, from the seventies onwards, increasingly gained control over their coverage in the media by adapting to new technological developments in ways of communication, and thereby turned the media into an effective tool to achieve their goals, is confirmed. The lack of control terrorists had over their coverage encouraged them to find new ways of reaching their audience and spreading their message as untouched as possible.

Critical reflection and further research

Despite the wide scope of this thesis, covering the years since the seventies until 2017, and the many terrorist acts in this period, there are some areas from which further research would contemplate and strengthen these conclusions. As Schmid argues, terrorism changes as the instruments of violence and communication change. Due to contextual changes, the role of the media has become more complex; changing from a mere stage to a tool for propaganda, recruitment and other communication. It would be interesting to involve the role of newspapers in the first two waves of modern terrorism in further research. Another interesting component to include in this sort of research is the role of computer-games in online radicalisation, partly due to the claims that violent games increase violent behaviour, but especially because of the presence of terroristic propaganda and terrorist recruiters in online games and virtual worlds. These developments are the next step in the implementation of new technologies and ways of communication by terrorist organisations in order to control their media presence and reach the biggest audience possible. The largest gaps in the literature regarding developments in the role of the media in terrorism thus lies in the field of other forms of social media than Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, specifically virtual worlds and online games. Upon reflection, taking this gap in the literature as a starting point for this thesis, would have given it a more innovative character. However, an outline of the run-up to the current role of the media for terrorism was also lacking.

The most important direction for further research lies in what effective action is against online terrorist activities. Scholars, researchers and other professionals, from disciplines of communication, advertisement, psychology, terrorism, sociology, political sciences, civil rights, internet companies and government can contribute to interdisciplinary efforts of limiting terrorist use of the media. Moreover, because of the large terrorist presence on the internet, research on how to effectively disrupt their efforts, instead of preventing them, may be more effective. By tracing recruiters and intervening whenever they found their target can lead you to the vulnerable people that can thereafter be approached, and hopefully de-radicalised. This research could lead to more effective cooperation between government, internet companies as Facebook and Twitter, the community where most of the recruits come from, and intelligence services. This is essential to fight terrorism online, and thereby weakening terrorist organisations offline.

The future

The importance of the media for terrorism presents a tough challenge for democratic societies. The changes in the media's role in terrorism have resulted in a need for stricter self-regulation by social media companies. It is crucial to limit the online possibilities for terrorists, but it is also undesirable to allow governments the power to take far-reaching censorship measures that they can use to whomever they seem fit. Keeping Schmid's vision in mind that terrorism is a form of violent communication, limiting terrorists' online flexibility is crucial to restrain their reach. Achieving this without limiting the essential aspects of a liberal democracy like freedom of speech is a very challenging objective. What terrorists want according to Richardson is: revenge, renown and reaction. With a successful terrorist attack, they achieve revenge. Sensationalistic media coverage could give them renown if the terrorist attack was dramatic enough for the news reporters. The rise of social media ensured that terrorists organisations gained control over the attention they achieved and made their reach independent from television stations. The fact that the reach of terrorist acts increased dramatically ensured a bigger reaction from the target audience. Sacrificing our values regarding freedom and privacy in return for security is exactly the reaction the terrorists want. However, with close cooperation between social media companies like Twitter, Google and Facebook and governments, big gains on this field still can be achieved without large scale, performative reactions that degrade the values of our society.

Governments can constructively contribute to the online battle by actively searching for online recruiters and neutralising them. As it seems, the Whack-A-Mole-tactic worked better than expected. Furthermore, because violent measures incite violent actions, it is crucial for the government actions that they are executed with low performative power to avoid further revenge-feelings. Furthermore, next to these active ways in countering terrorism, better

cooperation between government and the media is essential. Whereas Crelinsten sees every form of government involvement as dangerous, I think that clear agreements and guidelines on how to cover terrorism can disrupt a terrorist's quest for the attention they long for and simultaneously temper the fear within a society.

All five elements of the media's role in terrorism underwent serious changes in the last forty years. Technological developments caused every role to grow in terms of possibilities, functionalities, effectiveness, reach, and availability. By swiftly adapting to these technological developments, fourth wave terrorist organisations were able to fully exploit the effectiveness of social media for their cause. The use of drones, high definition camera's, cyber terrorism, etcetera, illustrates that modern terrorist organisations mastered all new technological developments almost as fast as advanced armies. Therefore it is crucial that counterterrorism efforts keep this shift in mind and destroy or at least damage the tools terrorists made out of social media. By limiting their online range and possibilities, it will be harder for them to get close enough to potential targets to build up a relationship and convince them to join the organisation.

The increase in the terrorist's reach due to the use of social media, from the most public to the most private scale of communication, allowed online radical milieus to grow and to thrive. To effectively counter terrorism, this development must and can be neutralised. Media companies have the obligation to contribute to the efforts against online terrorism because they offer a medium that appeared an extremely efficient tool for terrorists. It is crucial to limit the terrorist's online freedom of movement and to simultaneously offer counter-narratives against the terrorist's propaganda. At all times it is essential that societies do not surrender freedom for security by allowing the governments to introduce extensive counter-terrorism legislation that conflicts with civil rights laws. If this does happen, governments can shift towards the repressive state that terrorist organisations claim it already was. Cooperation between experts in psychology, terrorism, social sciences, media, etcetera is necessary to counter terrorists' online efforts. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that due to the still ever-present television coverage of terrorist-attacks, in combination with the terrorist representation on social media, we might experience the terrorist-threat much more serious than it really is.

The role of the media changed from it being an old rusty pocketknife, perfectly able of executing a couple tasks for its user, to a brand-new multitool, which can help its user to accomplish a large quantity of different goals.

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