

Chapter 6

The Old Media, Terrorism, and Public Opinion

The goals and motivations of terrorists, as we have seen in previous chapters, vary widely, from such grand schemes as the total remaking of society along fundamentalist religious or doctrinaire ideological lines, and even the fulfillment of some divinely inspired millenarian imperative, to comparatively more distinct aims such as the reestablishment of a national homeland or the unification of a divided nation. Still other terrorists are motivated by very issue-specific causes, such as the banning of abortion, animal rights, or environmental concerns, and seek to apply direct pressure on both the public and its representatives in government to either enact or repeal legislation directly affecting their particular interest. Despite these many differences, however, all terrorist groups have one trait in common: they do not commit actions randomly or senselessly. Each wants maximum publicity to be generated by its actions and, moreover, aims at intimidation and subjection to attain its objectives. In the words of the late Dr. Frederick Hacker, a psychiatrist and noted authority on terrorism, terrorists seek to “frighten and, by frightening, to dominate and control. They want to impress. They play to and for an audience, and solicit audience participation.”¹

Terrorism, therefore, may be seen as a violent act that is conceived specifically to attract attention and then, through the publicity it generates,

to communicate a message. “There is no other way for us,” a leader of the United Red Army (the “parent group” of the Japanese Red Army) terrorist group once explained. “Violent actions . . . are shocking. We *want* to shock people, everywhere. . . . It is our way of communicating with the people.”² The modern news media, as the principal conduit of information about such acts, thus play a vital part in the terrorists’ calculus. Indeed, without the media’s coverage the act’s impact is arguably wasted, remaining narrowly confined to the immediate victim(s) of the attack rather than reaching the wider “target audience” at whom the terrorists’ violence is actually aimed. Only by spreading the terror and outrage to a much larger audience can the terrorists gain the maximum potential leverage that they need to effect fundamental political change. “Terrorism is theatre,” Brian Jenkins famously declared in his seminal 1974 paper, explaining how “terrorist attacks are often carefully choreographed to attract the attention of the electronic media and the international press.”³

Just as often, the media respond to these overtures with almost unbridled alacrity, proving unable to ignore what has been accurately described as “an event . . . fashioned specifically for their needs.”⁴ The American media coverage of the hijacking of TWA Flight 847 by Lebanese Shi’a terrorists in 1985 amply confirms that observation. Three terrorists belonging to Hezbollah had hijacked the aircraft en route from Rome to Cairo on June 14. The hijackers originally demanded the release of 776 Shi’a held in Israeli jails, although they later reduced that number. The commandeered aircraft was flown first to Beirut, then to Algiers, then back to Beirut. At each stop passengers who were not U.S. citizens, along with the women and children on board, were released, until only thirty-nine American men remained. After the aircraft landed in Beirut for the second time, the hostages were spirited into hiding and scattered throughout the city to thwart any attempted rescue operation by U.S. military forces. During the seventeen-day crisis, while the Americans were held hostage in Beirut, nearly 500 news segments—an average of 28.8 per day⁵—were broadcast by the three major U.S. television networks (ABC, the American Broadcasting Corporation; NBC, the National Broadcasting Corporation; and CBS, the Columbia Broadcasting System). Indeed, on average, two-thirds of their daily early-evening “flagship” news shows (fourteen out of twenty-one minutes) focused on the hostage story,⁶ and their regularly scheduled programs were interrupted at least eighty times over those seventeen days with special reports or news bulletins.⁷ This intense coverage was made possible by the small army of reporters, field producers, editors, camera crews, and sound technicians that the three networks rushed to the scene of the breaking story: within

days, a total of eighty-five people representing the three networks were in Beirut.⁸ The message that they imparted to their viewers was clear: no news of any significance was occurring anywhere except that which concerned the hostages and their anxious families back home.

More disconcerting, perhaps, was the tenor of the coverage. As the hostage crisis dragged on day after day, at times with seemingly little or no progress toward a resolution, the vast media resources deployed for just this one story had to find or create “news” to justify the expense and continued presence of the media personnel, even if no “real news” was occurring. A gross imbalance therefore emerged: “soft,” human-interest feature stories predominated (mostly interviews with the hostages and their families), accounting for slightly more than a third of all reports, with fewer than half as many stories addressing “real” issues, such as the U.S. government’s reactions to various developments in the crisis or the Reagan administration’s persistent efforts to reach a resolution.⁹ The cloying and meretricious content of the reporting was clearly revealed in a contemporary *Washington Post* article. “In the race for on-the-air scoops, which ABC-TV News seems to have won to date,” it began, “the interview Friday morning between anchorman [news presenter] Dan Rather of ‘CBS Evening News’ and TWA flight 847’s hostage media star, Allyn Conwell, was distinctive.”¹⁰ In possibly the most egregious perversion of news reporting during this episode, the “news presenters” rather than the “news makers” had become the story!

However, the most pernicious effect of the crisis was its validation of terrorism as a tactic. The Reagan administration, driven by intense domestic pressure generated by the hostages’ plight, in turn compelled Israel to accede to the hijackers’ demands and release 756 imprisoned Shi’a. The terrorists, in return, duly freed their thirty-nine American captives. The line of distraught hostage family members that paraded before the three networks’ cameras ensured that there was no letup of pressure. “Should the Reagan administration press Israel to release its Shi’a prisoners?” the son of one hostage was asked on a morning news show. “That’s what I’d like to see,” came the reply.¹¹ The networks professed little or no concern that they had moved beyond reporting the news to actively helping to determine policy. At times, presenters assumed for themselves the responsibility of negotiating with the terrorists. “Any final words to President Reagan this morning?” the congenial host of ABC’s *Good Morning America* asked the leader of one Lebanese group.¹² Justifying this type of active intervention in a story, CBS White House correspondent Lesley Stahl explained, “We are an instrument for the hostages. . . . We force the Administration to put their lives above policy.”¹³

Those responsible for determining and implementing that policy understandably took a very different view. Reflecting on a state of affairs where public emotions were seen to determine government policy, Congressman Tom Lantos lamented that “focusing on individual tragedies, interviewing the families of people in anguish, in horror, in nightmare, completely debilitates national policymakers from making rational decisions in the national interest.”¹⁴ His complaint was echoed by former U.S. secretary of state Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter’s national security adviser during the Tehran hostage crisis. Both agreed that there was little doubt that the febrile television coverage afforded to hijackings and hostage situations involving American citizens complicates and undermines governmental efforts to obtain their release.¹⁵

That terrorism had indeed become a perverted form of show business is borne out by the experiences of other journalists who dealt with the hostage-takers’ “spin doctors” and therefore witnessed at first hand the terrorists’ polished PR campaign. “These guys are so sophisticated about the way they are getting through to the American viewer,” a senior Associated Press editor marveled. “These guys are street fighters [yet] they’re making ground rules for the media.”¹⁶ According to John Bullock, a British journalist who covered the story, throughout the crisis the terrorists knew exactly what they were doing. Their deft manipulation of the U.S. networks, he recalls, “was done quite consciously. There were graduates of media studies from American colleges at meetings at Nabih Berri’s house in West Beirut while [‘spin doctoring’] tactics were being worked out.”¹⁷

The fruit of the hijackers’ labors may be seen in the abject capitulation of the American TV networks to the terrorists’ point of view. On-air commentary repeatedly and unthinkingly equated the wanton kidnapping of entirely innocent airline passengers (who were singled out only because of the nationality of the passport they carried) with Shi’a militiamen and suspected terrorists detained by Israeli troops during fighting in southern Lebanon. These invidious and inaccurate comparisons were all the more odious considering that one of the hostages, a U.S. Navy diver named Robert Dean Stethem, had been mercilessly beaten to death on board the aircraft shortly after the hijacking began. As one critic noted, “It’s a cliché now that the Shi’ites got the networks to carry their political message back to America. When the TV coverage is replayed, it’s clear just how well the Shi’ite line was delivered.” Indeed, so obvious was this perceived bias on the part of some reporters that it was said to be a standing joke among journalists in Beirut that the initials “ABC” stood for the “Amal Broadcasting Company” (in recognition of the attention it showed on one of the Lebanese militias purportedly helping to effect the hos-

tages' release), while "NBC" denoted the "Nabih Berri Company" (the name of that militia's leader).¹⁸ While the American networks' response to the TWA Flight 847 crisis is doubtless the most glaring example of terrorism's ability to capture media attention and manipulate and exploit it in ways amenable to the terrorists' cause, the problem is endemic to all democratic countries with open and unrestricted press reporting. So pervasive was the influence exerted by West German terrorists over coverage of the 1972 deal that freed a kidnapped West Berlin politician, Peter Lorenz, in exchange for five imprisoned terrorists, that one executive was driven to admit that "for seventy-two hours we lost control of our medium."¹⁹ In 1978 the same blanket coverage, to the exclusion of almost all other news, that would later be afforded the TWA hijacking was evident in Italy throughout the fifty-five-day state crisis engendered by the Red Brigades' kidnapping of former prime minister Aldo Moro. According to one analysis, during that time only two articles appeared on the front pages of that country's newspapers that did not have to do with the Moro case.²⁰ During the 1990s, complaints were voiced in Britain over the stranglehold exercised by Sinn Fein spin doctors on behalf of their IRA masters over reporting in Northern Ireland. Henry McDonald, BBC Northern Ireland security correspondent between 1994 and 1996, contends that the terrorists and their apologists orchestrated a public relations campaign that imposed a "politically correct culture" on the reporting of both British and Irish print and electronic media. "It is a culture," McDonald claims, "where the commentators and opinion-formers blame [then British prime minister] John Major for resumed IRA violence, rather than the IRA itself."²¹

Given that terrorism is inherently about attracting attention and publicity, and that in even its earliest manifestations centuries ago the Zealots and the Assassins deliberately played to an audience far beyond the immediate victims of their attacks, why is it only comparatively recently that the media have been blamed for serving as the terrorists' willing apologists? The answer may be found in two technological advances in mass communication that occurred nearly one hundred years apart, respectively altering the way that news is transmitted and making it accessible to exponentially larger audiences. These developments, in turn, have been ruthlessly and successfully exploited by terrorists.

Terrorism and the Transformation of Reporting

The invention of the steam-powered printing press in 1830 began the modern era of mass media and communication: within three years the first mass-

circulation newspaper was being produced in the United States. Subsequent technological refinements led to the introduction of the even more efficient rotary press the following decade. News became more timely (because of the speed with which newspapers could now be printed) and more accessible (as the economics of technological innovation created a more widely affordable product). By the 1870s the newspaper business had been completely transformed by the advent of electric power coupled with the development of curved stereotype printing plates, together resulting in the automatic rotary cylinder press—and the capability to print on both sides of a continuous roll of paper. The revolution in mass communication, begun less than fifty years earlier, was now complete, offering abundant new opportunities to communicate on a vaster scale than ever before. I have already noted that terrorists were quick to recognize the potential of this new mass communications technology. It suffices simply to add here that the symbiotic relationship between terrorism and the media was forged during this era by both the Russian constitutionalists in the *Narodnaya Volya* and their anarchist contemporaries who, through “propaganda by deed,” deliberately sought to communicate their revolutionary message to a wide audience.

The second great revolution in mass communication that directly affected terrorism occurred in 1968. That year marked not only, as previously noted, the birth of international terrorism—when Palestinian terrorists began to hijack airliners in Europe—but also the launching by the United States of the first television satellite. Now stories could be transmitted from local studios back to network news headquarters for editing and broadcast far more rapidly than was previously possible. It is perhaps not entirely coincidental that from this time forward, the United States became the number one target of terrorists throughout the world. Throughout the following thirty years, terrorists attacked American citizens and interests more than those of any other country.²² While there are various reasons why terrorists find American targets so attractive,²³ a salient consideration has always been the unparalleled opportunities for publicity and exposure that terrorists the world over know they will get from the extensive U.S. news media. This was made especially clear during the TWA Flight 847 crisis when a British correspondent assigned to the story discovered that the hostage-takers paid no attention to “non-American and non-television journalists.”²⁴ In retrospect, therefore, the U.S. satellite launch was the first, critical step in facilitating the American news media’s worldwide predominance through its ability to reach a numerically vast audience. Ironically, it was also this development that made the same audience exponentially more attractive to terrorists than that of any other nation.

By the early 1970s the effect of this technological leap was further enhanced by the availability of three critical pieces of television equipment that made possible the reporting of events in “real time.” These were the Minicam (the portable, lightweight video camera), the equally portable battery-powered video recorder, and the time-base corrector (which converts video footage into transmittable output that in turn can be broadcast over the airwaves). With this combination of technologies, live television transmissions could now be made directly from remote locations throughout the world and beamed instantaneously into the homes of viewers everywhere.²⁵ The dramatic potential of this breakthrough was, as previously described, spectacularly demonstrated at the 1972 Munich Olympics when Palestinian terrorists were able to monopolize the attention of a global television audience who had tuned in expecting to watch the Games.

The emergence of these broadcast technologies has had equally profound consequences for the content of the news and its impact on government. The ability to transmit a breaking story live spawned intense competition among rival networks to “scoop” one another (as was illustrated by the *Washington Post* article that commented on the network news organizations during the TWA Flight 847 hostage situation). This could be accomplished basically in one of two ways: by being the first on the scene or by being the first to report some hitherto undisclosed information. The main problem with the former is that even though it is the most sought-after prize of TV journalism, it is also an inherently evanescent advantage. Hence, having broken the story and captured viewers’ attention, the priority becomes to hold that attention with equally gripping follow-on reports. Accordingly, for the duration of an important story’s life, the media’s focus invariably shifts from the reporting of the limited and often dwindling quantity of “hard” news to more human-interest-type “feature” stories, mostly involving exclusive interviews (e.g., the aforementioned Rather-Conwell exchange) or the breathless revelation of some previously unknown or undocumented item of related news—no matter how trivial or irrelevant.

For the media-savvy terrorist, these conditions are ripe for exploitation. The networks’ capability to broadcast instantaneously, coupled with the intense pressure to scoop competitors, has meant that the responsibilities once exercised by a studio editor—with the attendant opportunities for sober reflection or considered judgment—have long since passed in the rush to “go live on air.”²⁶ The television medium thus presents itself as a vacuum waiting to be filled; a void of rolling cameras and open mikes susceptible to terrorist exploitation and manipulation. Indeed, in this key respect, the terrorists’ and the networks’ interests are identical: having created the story,

both are resolved to ensure its longevity. The overriding objective for the terrorists is to wring every last drop of exposure, publicity, and coercive power from the incident, while the networks' goal is to squeeze from the story every additional ratings point that their coverage can provide. "Capturing the audience's attention may be easy," political psychologists Jeffrey Z. Rubin and Nehemia Friedland note, "but terrorist organizations need a flair for the dramatic to sustain that interest."²⁷ Precisely the same can be said of television correspondents and field producers.

The quest to keep a story alive leads inevitably to a disproportionate fixation on the "human-interest angle": most often, the grief and anguish of family and friends of terrorist victims and/or hostages. In this manner, the vicarious dimension of a terrorist incident—the stimulation of thoughts in the minds of millions of television viewers and newspaper readers everywhere that "there but for the grace of God go I"—is effectively and efficiently mined by terrorist and journalist alike. Beyond any doubt, the American networks during the TWA crisis served this diet on a platter to a waiting and watching public at home, made hungry both for every scrap of information on the hostages themselves and for each morsel doled out on the plight of their worried loved ones back home. This sort of coverage dovetailed perfectly with the terrorists' wish to apply the maximum pressure possible on the Reagan administration to force Israel to accede to the hijackers' demands. Day in and day out, as the hostages' uncertain fate was played out in the glare of the camera's lens, the administration was progressively compelled to abandon its publicly stated policy of refusing to negotiate with terrorists, undermine its relations with a close regional ally, embrace the recovery of the hostages as its only goal, and believe that its sole option was the safe return of the thirty-nine American hostages in exchange for the release of the more than seven hundred Shi'a imprisoned in Israel. "What the Shi'ite terrorists in Beirut achieved is spin control beyond the wildest dreams of any politician," the American columnist Fred Barnes wrote in the wake of the crisis. "How did this happen?" he asked rhetorically. "Easy," came the reply:

The terrorists exploited the normal lust of the media—particularly TV—for breaking events of international impact, and for high drama and a human dimension to the news. . . . Media competition, always brutal, is especially fierce in this atmosphere, partly because the public is more attentive, partly because media stardom may be at stake for some.²⁸

It will be recalled that the leading late-night American television news show *Nightline* grew out of the need to report at the end of each day, as

viewers prepared for sleep, some new tidbit of information from Tehran during the previous 444-day hostage crisis of 1979–80. This approach not only made the show's presenter, Ted Koppel, a media star²⁹ but also spawned dozens of imitators in other countries.

One additional, even paramount, consideration influencing television news coverage that has emerged in recent years is its cost. A once finite number of privately owned or state-run broadcasting corporations now must contend with heightened competition not only from their traditional network rivals but also from a virtually unlimited array of upstart cable and satellite channels. Moreover, news is now broadcast over such diverse media as the Internet, e-mail, and faxes, and via local telephone servers. Therefore today, on top of increasingly constrained news budgets (an issue that was emerging more than a decade ago), foreign network news coverage, especially, must increasingly justify itself and its vast expense by winning larger audience shares. According to one veteran network foreign correspondent writing in the late 1990s, the daily cost of the typical international television news team "begins at around \$3,000 a day. Air fare and excess baggage charges can easily reach \$12,000"—in addition to the costs of satellite uplinks and transmittal time.³⁰ Accordingly, network executives exhibit a discernible proclivity to look more to the "bottom line" than to journalistic priorities for guidance and hence to emphasize entertainment value over good reporting. "They've got us putting more fuzz and wuzz on the air," Dan Rather lamented in a 1993 speech, "cop show stuff, so as to compete not with other news programs but with entertainment programs—including those posing as news programs—for dead bodies, mayhem and lurid tales."³¹ This view was reiterated by one of Rather's colleagues, Garrick Utley, the chief foreign correspondent for NBC and ABC TV news and a contributor to CNN, in a lead article in the prestigious American journal *Foreign Affairs*.³² Immediacy, exclusivity, and drama (the more violent or life-threatening, the better) thus become the essential "hooks" with which to reel in viewers and ensure a flow of advertising revenue. Terrorist incidents, inherently dramatic, replete with human interest, and often of prolonged duration (whether the wrenching daily ordeal of hostages or reports on post-attack cleanup and repercussions in the aftermath of bombings), thus occupy center stage in network television's entertainment/news calculations. The result is a trivialization of television news that inevitably emphasizes aspects of the story that the wider viewing audience can "relate to,"³³ rather than genuine analysis or probing to gain an understanding of the background to a particular issue. The camera becomes tightly focused on the human drama at the expense of the "bigger picture" that is what

the story is really about. In essence, what is broadcast is the “big picture” writ so small that the average television viewer can understand it, the story deliberately “packaged” to suit the typical audience’s short attention span.³⁴ “Mindless gaga and emotional gush seem the mainstays of the moment,” the *Washington Post’s* television critic, Tom Shales, opined in the midst of the TWA crisis, bemoaning the debasement of broadcast news.³⁵

This trend in American television news is by no means an inconsequential development, given that by 1978 television had become the primary source of news information for a majority (67 percent) of Americans and the *only* source of news for 34 percent.³⁶ The emphasis on entertainment and, in turn, the violence and “blood and guts” aspects of news stories were demonstrated in a study of the three major American networks’ reporting on Armenian terrorism between 1975 and 1983. It concluded that while the coverage had indeed (as noted in chapter 3) provided unparalleled exposure to the terrorists and their cause, the “networks tended to reduce Armenians to terrorists (not freedom fighters) shooting an American woman in the back as she tried to flee, taunting the police by holding a small child at gun point, and killing a young French boy with a gasoline bomb.” In this respect, virtually no attention was paid to the historical background, political context, or attendant wider issues that would have shed light on the terrorists’ reasoning and motivations.³⁷

Unfortunately, the approach to terrorism coverage embraced by broadcast journalists is often emulated by their print counterparts. “As the television media trivialise the news,” James Adams, former CEO of United Press International and past *Sunday Times* Washington Bureau chief, foreign editor, and defense editor, argues, “so newspapers have to seek ways of presenting their information in a lively and exciting way to their audience. That has meant not just a narrowing of the focus but a concentration on the trivial, the marginal and the irrelevant in the search for excitement.”³⁸ Color photos, lurid images, and sensational headlines splashed across the front pages of tabloids and their more serious counterparts are what now sells newspapers (and advertising copy) as much as commercial airtime. Accordingly, there is often the same abandonment in print as over the airwaves of any effort to understand the “bigger picture.” Instead, an obsession with voyeuristic detail now predominates in many newspapers. It is an outcome dictated by the same financial pressures and declining revenues that have ravaged network television news, even while the broadcast media continue to erode the news-reading public. Adams, for example, draws a comparison between his stint at the *Sunday Times* as foreign manager during the 1980s and that of one his predecessors, Ian Fleming (the creator of the fictional

spy James Bond), in the 1950s. While Fleming could call on the services of 150 correspondents throughout the world, thirty years later Adams had only 8 at his disposal. "What that means today," he writes, "is that media coverage is highly selective and driven not necessarily by the importance of a story, but by the cost of covering it, or even by something as simple as who happens to be in the area at the time."³⁹

Under these circumstances, news reporting is driven primarily by the imperative of speed in getting on air or into print and subsequently by the search for additional material to justify the initial expense and attention and thereby to continue to fill a broadcast slot or a printed page. This situation is, however unwittingly, tailor-made for terrorist manipulation and contrivance. "Don't shoot, Abdul! We're not on prime time!" is how terrorism expert J. Bowyer Bell described the conscious efforts of terrorists to play to the modern media and the media's eagerness to respond. Sadly, this jocular observation is closer to reality than exaggeration. During the 1975 seizure of OPEC headquarters in Vienna and kidnapping of the oil ministers, for example, Carlos "the Jackal" obligingly waited for the arrival of the television camera crews before dramatically fleeing the building with his hostages.⁴⁰ Four years later, a sullen mob outside the American embassy in Tehran, where the fifty-two hostages were being held, suddenly came to life when a Canadian Broadcasting Company camera team showed up, turned on its klieg lights, and began filming. As A. P. Schmid recounts, "As soon as the cameras were on, the demonstrators began shouting 'Death to Carter,' raised their fists, looked angry and burned American flags. After two minutes, the cameraman signalled the end of the 'take.' Then the same scene was done once more for the French-speaking Canadians, with the crowd shouting 'Mort a Carter.'"⁴¹

Cause and Effect? Terrorism, the Media, and Public Opinion

Clearly, terrorism and the media are bound together in an inherently symbiotic relationship, each feeding off and exploiting the other for its own purposes. The real issue, however, is not so much the relationship itself, which is widely acknowledged to exist, but whether it actually affects public opinion and government decision making, as the media's critics claim, in a manner that favors or assists terrorists. The answer is far more complex and ambiguous than the conventional wisdom on this subject suggests.

In the view most commonly, if somewhat reflexively, advanced by statesmen,⁴² scholars,⁴³ and other critics the media are either "the terrorists' best friends"⁴⁴ or, in former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher's well-worn

metaphor, supplying “the oxygen of publicity on which [terrorists] depend.”⁴⁵ The media are condemned for having “made the terrorists’ task all too easy”⁴⁶ or accused of having “become the unwilling—and in some cases, willing—amplifier of the terrorists’ publicity campaign.”⁴⁷ Indeed, Benjamin Netanyahu, a former Israeli prime minister who subsequently became that country’s finance minister, maintains that “unreported, terrorist acts would be like the proverbial tree falling in the silent forest.”⁴⁸ The obvious implication being made in all these assertions is that if the terrorists could somehow be “starved” of the publicity on which they “thrive,”⁴⁹ both their malignant influence and the frequency with which they act would be greatly reduced.⁵⁰

This argument, while seductive in its simplicity, nonetheless ignores the fact that, for all the attention and sensationalist coverage that the media lavish on terrorism, rarely is it positive. “I have seen no evidence,” Lawrence K. Grossman, the president of NBC News, wrote in an article defending the media’s coverage of the TWA hostage crisis, “that audiences are ever taken in by the propaganda of terrorists who have blackmailed their way on to the television screen.”⁵¹ However self-serving or self-exculpatory Grossman’s argument may be, it is not without foundation. Even scholars like Walter Laqueur, who in one breath criticize the media for its unstinting coverage of terrorism, concede in the next that this has not led to more favorable public attitudes toward either terrorists or their causes.⁵²

A study conducted during 1988 and 1989 by the renowned American think tank, the RAND Corporation, reached precisely the same conclusion. By surveying a nationally representative sample, it sought to identify empirically public perceptions of both terrorism and terrorists and analyze how public opinion is affected by terrorist acts. The timing of the survey was particularly significant: it immediately followed a prolonged period of heightened international terrorist activity, characterized by repeated attacks on American targets abroad. These incidents (including the 1985 TWA hijacking) had also been heavily reported by the American press and broadcast media. Public awareness of the issue was therefore high. Indeed, terrorism had been a major news item throughout the five years preceding the study, and it had already been cited in a 1986 CBS News/*New York Times* opinion poll as the most important problem facing the United States by a margin of 15 percentage points above any other problem, domestic or international. Despite the media’s continual and often intense attention to terrorist activities over a period of years, however, the RAND study found that public approval for terrorists “*was effectively zero* [emphasis added].”⁵³

At the same time, the study also revealed that even though the vast majority of Americans have little sympathy toward groups that sponsor or

commit terrorist acts,⁵⁴ they nonetheless evince a profound and abiding fascination with both terrorists and terrorism. As Konrad Kellen explained, “People [may not] approve of terrorists any more than they approve of murderers. . . . But people are clearly intrigued by them.”⁵⁵ This was made abundantly clear on May 5, 1986, when NBC’s *Nightly News* broadcast an in-depth interview with Abul Abbas, the leader of the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF). Just seven months earlier, the PLF had shocked the world when it had seized an Italian cruise ship, the *Achille Lauro*, and then attempted to trade the vacationing passengers on board for fifty Palestinian terrorists imprisoned in Israel. In the course of the hijacking, the terrorists brutally murdered an American tourist confined to a wheelchair, Leon Klinghoffer, and cast his body into the Mediterranean. Eventually, the head of the PLO, Yasir Arafat, intervened and brokered a deal whereby the terrorists would allow the ship to dock at Alexandria and would release their hostages in return for receiving safe passage back to the PLF’s base in Tunisia. U.S. Navy fighters, however, intercepted the EgyptAir plane carrying the four hijackers and forced it to land at a NATO air base in Sicily, where the terrorists were arrested by Italian police officers. The U.S. State Department subsequently announced a \$250,000 reward for Abbas’s capture and launched an international manhunt. In tracking down the fugitive terrorist leader and obtaining an “exclusive interview” with him, NBC had therefore succeeded where the U.S. government hitherto had failed. More to the point, the network disingenuously implied that its news staff had accomplished this feat entirely on their own and without Abbas’s encouragement or assistance.⁵⁶ The extent of the media’s symbiotic relationship with terrorism, no less than the public fascination to which both media and terrorists actively cater, could hardly have been more blatant. What was particularly striking about the NBC interview, however, was not simply the “statesmanlike” status that the network promiscuously accorded to a man whose hands, as the hijacking’s mastermind, were arguably drenched in Klinghoffer’s blood, but the preening self-importance that attended NBC’s broadcast of this spectacle. “We like to interview all leaders,” Grossman boasted. “I think it is important for the American people to understand, be informed and make their own judgements.”⁵⁷ Yet by no stretch of the imagination could (or should) Abbas be ranked with those world “leaders” whose views merit the most coveted prize on American television—a dedicated slot on a major prime-time news show. Abbas, in fact, was one of the least successful PLO commanders; his group’s previous operations had featured episodes reminiscent of the Keystone Kops, with terrorists flying hot-air balloons and hang gliders, all of which had failed as miserably as the attempt to free the fifty

prisoners through hijacking a luxury liner. Nevertheless, while Abbas may have been a failure as a terrorist, he certainly had a flair for a form of macabre showmanship that suited NBC and its audience's interests perfectly. In the incandescent glare of the camera's lights, the public and media fascination with terrorism transformed Abbas into the "media star of the moment" rather than the kidnapper and murderer that he really was.⁵⁸ Indeed, so far as many—perhaps most—viewers were concerned, the interview was doubtless more "entertainment" than news. Tasteless or inappropriate as the NBC broadcast may have been, then, it probably had little or no impact on most viewers' attitudes toward terrorists or terrorism, except perhaps to reaffirm their overwhelming negative impressions.

The phenomenon of public fascination with terrorism is by no means confined to American news audiences only. A Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) divisional commander quoted at a conference on terrorism and the media by his boss at the time, Chief Constable Sir John Hermon, rhetorically asked whether "a rapist in Hampshire or a burglar in Berkshire [would] be accorded the freedom through the [British] media to justify rape and burglary and be allowed to threaten more of the same."⁵⁹ The answer, as we all know, is obviously that he would not. However, the point is less the publicity "showered" on terrorism by the media than that terrorism patently *is* "news"—often in an international as well as a national context—in a way that these other crimes, mostly, are not. Perhaps we should feel grateful that even after nearly forty years of violence and strife in Northern Ireland, terrorism remains so—relatively—infrequent an occurrence that it is indeed still "news." But there is also an undeniably inherent element of drama in terrorism that seems to enable it genuinely to transcend the mundane and stimulate among audiences an almost insatiable interest, which the media of course actively encourage and feed. Thus, while the media may be guilty of constantly—perhaps at times even shamelessly—scrambling to fill a vacuum created by twenty-four-hour news channels, rolling news shows, and intense competition, the media neither exist nor function in a vacuum, and, like any business, they respond naturally to "consumer demand." Whether this makes for good reporting or sound professional behavior on the part of print and broadcast journalists is another question. On this issue, too, the opinions of critics and audiences differ considerably.

As the lightning rod for much of the criticism directed at the media over its coverage of terrorism, the TWA crisis epitomizes for many the corrosive effect of terrorism on journalistic standards.⁶⁰ Reagan administration officials railed against the "media extravaganza" in Beirut that one senior political appointee claimed "gave irresponsibility and tastelessness a new mean-

ing.”⁶¹ Even veteran newsmen, like NBC’s Roger Mudd, cringed at what they too regarded as something of a “media circus.”⁶² Yet the American public disagreed completely. An ABC News/*Washington Post* poll conducted shortly after the TWA hostage crisis ended, for instance, found that more than two-thirds of Americans approved of the way television had reported the story,⁶³ while a Gallup poll from the same period revealed an even higher proportion in favor: 89 percent.⁶⁴ Nor were these strongly positive ratings ephemeral aberrations of opinion. Three-quarters of Americans surveyed a year later in a poll conducted by Gallup and the Times Mirror Corporation (which publishes the *Los Angeles Times*, among other newspapers) similarly expressed satisfaction with both television and the print media’s reporting of terrorist incidents. Moreover, 71 percent of respondents regarded their country’s news organizations as “highly professional.”⁶⁵ These unequivocal responses, flying in the face of mostly genuinely deserved, if sometimes overheated, criticism, seem to confirm viewers’ interest in terrorism stories primarily for their entertainment value—and their lack of interest in the terrorists or their broader “message.”

The media were further excoriated by both senior government officials and distinguished elder statesmen for the excessive attention focused on individual hostages and their families. “TV is probably going to cost the lives of a number of people in a dangerous situation like this sometime in the future,”⁶⁶ one unidentified presidential aide declared, echoing the frequently heard criticism that the intense coverage compromised administration efforts to free the hostages. However, nearly half of those surveyed in the Gallup/Times Mirror poll regarded the unrelenting attention devoted to the hostages as a positive development that ensured the hostages’ safety and eventual release. As the wife of one hostage explained on a morning news show, “If we like it or not, television is a way . . . to put pressure where pressure needs to be put.”⁶⁷ More than a few hostages wholeheartedly agreed. “Thank the Lord we’re on our way,” one declared as he boarded the flight that was to take him back to the United States, flashing the thumbs-up sign to a CNN camera crew filming his departure, and “thanks for all the coverage.”⁶⁸ The American CNN reporter Jeremy Levin, who himself was kidnapped in Beirut by Hezbollah terrorists in March 1984, has made the exact same point. Levin maintains that the extensive media attention focused on his plight during the eleven months he was held captive actually deterred his captors from killing him.⁶⁹ He also makes the discomfiting argument that the longest hostage crisis—that of the Americans and other Western nationals (including Terry Waite, the Archbishop of Canterbury’s special envoy) kidnapped by terrorists in

Lebanon between 1984 and 1992—was also the one that had the least sustained media coverage.⁷⁰

Seen in the light of the above discussion, the accepted wisdom about the symbiotic relationship between terrorism and the media appears far less self-evident than is commonly assumed. While most terrorists certainly crave the attention that the media eagerly provide, the publicity that they receive cuts both ways. On the one hand, terrorists are indeed assured of the notoriety that their actions are designed to achieve, but, on the other, the public attitudes and reactions that they hope to shape by their violent actions are both less predictable and less malleable than either the terrorists or the pundits believe. For example, one of the IRA's main aims in abandoning its cease-fire in February 1996 was to convince the British public that the government was to blame for the breakdown of negotiations and thereby to put pressure on the prime minister to grant concessions to the nationalist position that the government was hitherto unwilling or unable to make. The result was equivocal—in large measure, perhaps, because of the unanimous condemnation heaped on the IRA and Sinn Fein by the British (and, arguably, the world) press for the Friday evening blast at London's Canary Wharf, which killed two people and injured hundreds of others. While 63 percent of people polled a week later thought that the government should still be willing to talk with Sinn Fein in order to find a way to restore the cease-fire, 89 percent nonetheless "overwhelmingly blamed" the IRA for wrecking the peace process. Sinn Fein and the IRA's well-oiled public relations machine in Northern Ireland were eventually able to put their spin (as noted above) on the reporting of this issue in the province. Their failure to achieve the same result on the mainland, however, was notable. As one analysis noted, "In isolation, those figures suggest television appearances since last weekend of [Gerry] Adams and other prominent Sinn Fein leaders have had little success in deflecting criticism."⁷¹ This may also explain why the IRA was driven to escalate its bombing campaign throughout England during the weeks and months following the cease-fire's collapse. Indeed, until the change of government in May 1997, the IRA was resorting to the naked use of terrorism as a means to coerce the government back to the negotiating table, rather than to manipulate public attitudes in a manner usefully sympathetic to the nationalists' frustrations.

There are two areas in particular, however, where a clear causal relationship between terrorism and the attention it receives from the media has a negative effect on public and governmental behavior. The first is the public's perception of personal risk from terrorism, and the consequent effect on

willingness to travel; the second is the time pressure imposed by the media, under which governments confronted with terrorist-created crises labor.

Action and Reaction: The Impact on Travel and Government Decision Making

When the RAND survey asked members of the public how likely they thought it that they might be involved in several low-probability events, the results on terrorism were revealing. Although the majority of respondents were able accurately to gauge the relative risk involved—realizing that they were more likely to be involved in an automobile accident than a terrorist incident—the perceived difference in the likelihood of the two eventualities was far smaller than the actual difference in probabilities. For example, 71 percent thought it likely that they would be involved in a car crash—although the estimated actual probability is just 19.2 per 100,000 people. By comparison, while only 14 percent thought that they were likely to be flying on a plane that is hijacked or the victim of a terrorist bombing, the actual chances of being hijacked are fewer than one in 100,000 (no similar statistics for bombings were available). Viewed from another perspective, 47,087 persons were killed in automobile accidents in the United States during 1988 and 45,582 during 1989 (the two years during which the RAND study was conducted), while 203 Americans were killed in terrorist incidents throughout the world in 1988 (93 percent of them perishing in a single incident, the December in-flight bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie), and 23 in 1989. Indeed, an American was just as likely to be killed by a dog as by a terrorist in 1989; yet nearly a third of those surveyed that year stated that they would refuse the opportunity to travel abroad because of the threat of terrorism. There is no statistical evidence whether an identical percentage had similarly concluded that it was now equally dangerous to keep dogs as pets.⁷²

The distortion in perception that results in higher probabilities' being accorded to terrorism than to other life-threatening acts is in large measure doubtless a direct reflection of the disproportionate coverage accorded terrorism by the American media. Indeed, at one time during the 1980s the American television networks were devoting more attention to terrorism than to poverty, unemployment, and crime combined—despite the fact that these were arguably more important political issues since they had a far greater and more immediate impact on the daily lives of most Americans.⁷³ The role of media coverage in fueling viewing and reading audiences'

irrational fears of terrorism was dramatically demonstrated by the wave of cancellations of travel plans by Americans immediately following the TWA hijacking. Some 850,000 people canceled their travel and holiday reservations—both foreign and domestic—because of fears of becoming enmeshed in some terrorist incident (much as, in the wake of the November 1997 terrorist attack on foreign tourists at Luxor, many travelers were reported to be canceling planned trips to Egypt). An additional 200,000 Americans rebooked their foreign holidays to U.S. destinations, on the assumption that their own country, at least, was still safe from terrorism.⁷⁴ The attack also had severe secondary consequences for local economies in foreign countries that were dependent on the tourist trade; for example, 50 percent of American bookings to Italy and 30 percent to Greece were lost. While the reluctance of Americans to visit the country from which the ill-fated TWA flight had departed (Italy) is understandable, as, perhaps, are their reservations about traveling to and from a nearby country whose airports at the time were widely criticized for their poor security (Greece), it is more difficult to explain why the peaceful Netherlands experienced an only slightly less startling drop in the number of American visitors (20 percent).⁷⁵

To put the actual terrorist threat to Americans during 1985 into perspective: 6.5 million U.S. citizens traveled abroad that year, of whom 6,000 died from a variety of natural causes, accidents, and violence. Only 17 of these 6,000 people perished as a result of terrorist-related acts.⁷⁶ The chances of dying abroad were thus only one in 150,000 to begin with, and an almost infinitesimally small number so far as the risk from terrorism was concerned. Yet despite these overwhelmingly low probabilities, by February 1986 a total of 1.8 million Americans had changed their plans to go on vacation outside the United States.⁷⁷ Cancellations of Greek holidays booked by Americans more than doubled from the previous year⁷⁸—even while British and Scandinavian tourism to Greece increased by 22 percent and 25 percent, respectively.⁷⁹ The number of American visitors to Britain itself fell by an astonishing 40 percent compared to the previous year's figure.⁸⁰ Indeed, 76 percent of Americans surveyed in April 1986 (following the in-flight bombing of a TWA passenger aircraft en route from Rome to Athens and the bombing of a West Berlin discotheque by Libyan agents) stated that the threat of terrorism had made it too dangerous to travel overseas that year—compared with 67 percent who had felt that way the previous July.⁸¹ By the end of 1986, some 80 percent of Americans who had planned to travel abroad that year had canceled⁸²—despite the fact that the fears generated by the threat of terrorism were grossly divergent from the real risk.

The effects of the nexus between the news media and terrorism on decision making go far beyond the question of U.S. citizens' overseas travel plans. A third revolution in the communication of news unfolded throughout the closing decades of the twentieth century to transform not only the way the world now gets its news but also the manner in which political leaders make decisions. This revolution has been less dependent than its two predecessors upon some new major technological breakthrough, deriving more from a concatenation of technological advances that have cumulatively changed the style rather than the mechanics of news presentation. The "CNN Syndrome"—a catchphrase coined in recognition of the Atlanta-based Cable News Network—has revolutionized news broadcasting through the emergence of dedicated round-the-clock "all the news all the time" television stations on both satellite and cable. More recently, these have spawned a myriad of attendant, often connected, communications outlets—Internet news providers (e.g., CNN interactive), automated e-mail and fax news services, and so on—that feed a worldwide audience with an insatiable appetite for information transmitted in real time and furnish immediate access to the actual locations and the people on the spot making the news.

The power of this latest expansion of the communications mass media is attested to by the multitude of television sets that can now be found in the office of virtually every functionary and politician in official Washington, D.C.—from mid-ranking civil servants to Pentagon flag officers, CIA spymasters to Commerce Department officials, congressmen to the president—their screens glowing silently throughout the day until some event of sufficient magnitude occurs to warrant both the attention of their owners and the adjustment of the volume knob upward. "Our best intelligence is invariably the media," confessed Noel Koch, the deputy assistant secretary of defense responsible for counterterrorism during the Reagan administration, even as long ago as the mid-1980s. The ultimate accolade, however, was offered by Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, the former National Security Council aide made famous for his pivotal role in the 1986 arms-for-hostages deal, who said that "CNN runs ten minutes ahead of NSA"—comparing the privately owned cable company to the National Security Agency, America's super-secret electronic- and signals-gathering intelligence agency.⁸³

The effects of this immediacy, however, are such that television becomes not just an opinion shaper but a policy driver, its presenters and on-air analysts racing to define the range of options at a government's disposal or to interpret likely public reaction—and its repercussions. As the late Lloyd Cutler, adviser to President Carter during the 1979–80 Iran hostage crisis, once explained, "If an ominous foreign event is featured on TV news, the

President and his advisers feel bound to make a response in time for the next evening news program.”⁸⁴ Debate is not just precipitously joined, but abruptly rushed and then quickly truncated, depriving policymakers, government officials, and military commanders of the time needed to analyze critical issues thoroughly, reach well-thought-out decisions, craft coherent responses, and act with confidence based on exhaustive deliberation.⁸⁵ Governments are consequently increasingly pressured to respond to events before they can be evaluated fully, taking their cue from the “spin” that the media give them rather than working toward decisions made on the basis of all the available information. When asked in a 1993 interview specifically about the impact of the “CNN Syndrome” on government decision making, Prime Minister John Major replied: “I think it is bad for government. I think the idea that you automatically have to have a policy for everything before it happens and respond to things before you have had a chance to evaluate them isn’t sensible.”⁸⁶

The Clinton administration’s experience during the last months of America’s involvement in Somalia is a salutary reminder of both the overpowering influence of images flashed across the television screen and the hazards of decisions made on the basis of initial impressions and incomplete information. On October 3, 1993, a U.S. military operation to arrest Somali warlord General Mohammed Farah Aideed’s paymaster and chief lieutenants went disastrously awry. Fifteen U.S. Rangers were killed and seventy-seven others wounded. In some of the most gripping footage broadcast on American television, an injured U.S. army helicopter pilot was seen being paraded through the streets of Mogadishu by a chanting, gun-wielding Somali mob. Reacting quickly to the incident—while scrambling to preempt criticism by Congress, the media, and the American public—President Clinton announced within days the immediate dispatch of military reinforcements to Somalia, but set March 31, 1994, as the firm date for the withdrawal of all American forces there—regardless of whether the multinational UN-led humanitarian aid mission to that country had in fact been successfully completed by that date. A *USA Today*/CNN/Gallup poll taken shortly after the incident validated the president’s fears that a majority of Americans would hold him and his administration responsible for pursuing an ill-conceived humanitarian aid mission that had now cost the lives of more than a dozen troops. Fifty-two percent of those polled thought it was a mistake to have become involved in Somalia in the first place (a decision, in fact, made by the outgoing Bush administration), with 57 percent opposing Clinton’s decision to send reinforcements.⁸⁷ An ABC News poll revealed similar results.⁸⁸

However, upon closer—and more sober—inspection, many of these “results” appear less conclusive. For example, according to the *USA Today*/CNN/Gallup poll, 50 percent of those questioned in their survey who stated that they wanted U.S. troops immediately withdrawn had watched the television coverage of the injured helicopter pilot being led by Somali militiamen past jeering crowds and had been particularly incensed by the spectacle. But among those polled who hadn’t seen the broadcasts, only 33 percent favored withdrawal.⁸⁹ In addition, 49 percent of Americans surveyed in a subsequent ABC-TV poll actually disapproved of the president’s decision to set a withdrawal date, compared with 45 percent who approved it,⁹⁰ while a poll conducted later that same week by the University of Maryland’s Program on International Policy Attitudes found that only 28 percent of its nationwide sample favored immediate withdrawal, with 43 percent stating that they thought U.S. forces should remain in Somalia “until we have stabilized the country”—even, if necessary, beyond the stated withdrawal deadline.⁹¹ Accordingly, in retrospect it appears that because of the raw emotions generated by the widely televised scenes depicting the brutal treatment of the captive helicopter pilot, the president may well have been stampeded into a decision that did not necessarily reflect public opinion. John Chancellor, senior commentator on NBC News and doyen of American network news, tried to distinguish between television’s perennial search for dramatic footage and the responsibilities incumbent upon reporters. “You have journalism, which is thoughtful and considered,” Chancellor observed, “and you have what I call ‘electronics,’ which is the use of our facilities to transmit pictures and words, but does not have a lot to do with journalism.”⁹² It is the convergence of the two that has fundamentally altered the context and content of the news today and has also at times exercised a distorted influence over both public opinion and official decision making. In this new era of mass media, where the “information revolution” has transformed communication worldwide as a result of breakthroughs in real-time, rapid communication, the rush to meet airtime and print deadlines, and the attendant inevitably hurried judgments and immediate decisions, may present still further opportunities for manipulation and influence by terrorists than have hitherto existed.

Conclusion

We live today in an age of sound bites and “spin,” in which arresting footage or pithy phrases are valued above considered analysis and detailed

exegesis—and are frequently mistaken for good journalism. One of the enduring axioms of terrorism is that it is designed to generate publicity and attract attention to the terrorists and their cause. It is, accordingly, an activity custom-tailored to mass media communication in the twenty-first century. Terrorist acts are only too easily transformed into major international media events—precisely because they are often staged specifically with this goal in mind. Their dramatic characteristics of sudden acts of violence exploding across the screen or the printed page, rapidly unfolding into crises and pitting enigmatic adversaries against the forces of law and order make these episodes as ideal for television as they are irresistible for broadsheet and tabloid journalist alike.

In Britain, the media (and public) fascination with terrorists is second perhaps only to that with the country's royal family. How else can one explain the small article that was featured on page 4 of the London *Times* on September 3, 1997, as part of its coverage of the Princess of Wales's tragic death, and the repetition of its content the following day as part of a larger article on page 6? Both described how Leila Khaled—the Palestinian terrorist who gained international notoriety as a result of her involvement in the in-flight hijacking of a TWA flight in 1969 and of an El Al passenger jet the following year—had been touched by the princess, to whom she dedicated a poem that she sent to the princess's two sons.⁹³ Apart from the fact that there could be no two people more different than a former terrorist, whose actions on those two occasions deliberately endangered the lives of hundreds of innocent airline passengers, and a woman who is remembered in part for ameliorating the suffering of the innocent and infirm, that Khaled and her thoughts should be considered newsworthy is testimony to the powerful magnetic attraction exercised by terrorists and terrorism for the media in even the most unlikely (and absurd) circumstances.

For terrorists, media coverage of their activities is, as we have seen, something of a double-edged sword, providing them with the attention and publicity that they invariably seek, but not always in a particularly useful or even helpful manner. In this respect, while the 1985 TWA hostage crisis provides a clear lesson of how terrorists exploit and prompt the media for their own advantage, the denouement of the so-called Unabomber's seventeen-year terrorist campaign arguably demonstrates the opposite. The anonymous Unabomber—the name coined by the FBI in reference to his targeting of people associated with either universities or the airline industry—who killed three people and wounded twenty-three others using simple yet ingeniously constructed homemade bombs sent through the post, had promised in June 1995 to restrict his lethal terrorist campaign provided that

either the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* printed his entire manuscript and three annual follow-up messages. As a result of the publication in September of his 35,000-word diatribe against technology, modernity, and the destruction of the environment in the *Washington Post*,⁹⁴ information subsequently came to light that led directly to the arrest of Theodore Kaczynski, a former University of California at Berkeley mathematician, who was charged with the bombings. Had the alleged “Unabomber” not been as obsessed with publicity as he was, he might never have been unmasked and arrested. As David Rapoport has observed,

The relationship between publicity and terror is indeed paradoxical and complicated. Publicity focuses attention on a group, strengthening its morale and helping to attract recruits and sympathizers. But publicity is pernicious to the terrorist groups too. It helps an outraged public to mobilize its vast resources and produces information that the public needs to pierce the veil of secrecy all terrorist groups require.⁹⁵

While that bizarre case was not terrorism as most commonly understood, in that the Unabomber was a lone individual acting from a frustration and animus so profound that no other person could share them, it nonetheless demonstrates the complexity of terrorism’s symbiotic relationship with the media. Moreover, it poses yet another formidable challenge to the almost unthinkingly accepted conventional wisdom about this relationship and underscores the need for critical, but subtle, distinctions to be made in this area.

Chapter 7

The New Media, Terrorism, and the Shaping of Global Opinion

Bin Laden's dramatic television appearance on October 7, 2001, as recounted in chapter 4, provided stunning confirmation of just how sophisticated terrorist communications in the twenty-first century have become. In contrast to the jerky, often amateurish videos or the older Super 8 film recordings typical of even the more communications-savvy terrorists of the past, bin Laden's pre-recorded statement was remarkable for both its excellent quality and its masterful timing. Professionally produced, shot, and edited, the clip was masterfully packaged and queued to go on air as soon as the anticipated U.S. air strikes commenced that fateful Sunday.¹

For bin Laden and his followers—and no less for other terrorists around the globe—the weapons of terrorism are no longer simply the guns and bombs that they always have used. Now those weapons include the Minicam and videotape; editing suite and attendant production facilities; professionally produced and mass-marketed CD-ROMs and DVDs; and, most critically, the laptop and desktop computers, CD burners and e-mail accounts, and Internet and World Wide Web access that have defined the information revolution today. Indeed, in recent years, the art of terrorist communication has evolved to a point at which the terrorists themselves can now control the entire production process: determining the content, context, and

medium over which their message is projected and targeting precisely the audience (or multiple audiences) they seek to reach. The implications of this development are enormous, challenging the monopoly on mass communication of the terrorist message that has long been exercised by commercial and state-owned broadcasting outlets. Hence, much like previous information revolutions—such as the invention of the rotary press in the mid-nineteenth century and the advances in television equipment that made possible the reporting of events in “real time” in the 1960s—that also profoundly affected terrorist and insurgent external communications, a new information revolution has occurred to empower these movements with the ability to shape and disseminate their own message in their own way, enabling them to completely bypass traditional, established media outlets. As Tina Brown, the doyenne of postmodern media, has pointed out, the “conjunction of 21st-century Internet speed and 12th-century fanaticism has turned our world into a tinderbox.”²

Violence as Communication

One of the enduring axioms of terrorism is that it is designed to generate publicity and attract attention to the terrorists and their cause. Terrorism, as was discussed in chapter 6, is widely seen as a violent act that is conceived specifically to attract attention and then, through the publicity it generates, to communicate a message.³ The terrorist must parlay this illumination (e.g., publicity) into a more effective vehicle of elucidation (propaganda). The centrality of propaganda⁴ to this communications process and its importance to the terrorist are self-evident.⁵ As a 1991 RAND study on this subject observed,

Propaganda grants authority to its makers. In the first place, simply by demonstrating its ability to disseminate information that the government has banned, a guerrilla group proves that it is a viable force. Second, once a group has the people’s ears and eyes it can manipulate their minds, causing them to act as they might not otherwise; or if it does not work as effectively as this, its messages at least command the attention of those who read, hear or see them. In words and pictures, those whose plans are hidden from public view can portray themselves any way they please. Furthermore, if appearing to play a particular role can win support, propaganda will help these guerrillas to become in fact the powerful forces that they claim to be.⁶

Through propaganda, terrorists seek to communicate a particular message to a particular target audience. The exact purpose of these communications can vary, depending upon the message and the target audience(s) to whom it is directed. It can be didactic—designed to inform, educate, solicit support (whether material, financial, or spiritual), and ultimately rally the masses behind the insurgents or terrorists. It can be a vehicle for recruitment—meant to win new converts to the cause or replenish the ranks of depleted fighters. But it can also be deliberately coercive—conceived to promote or ensure compliance through threat or blandishment. Further, its intents can transcend mere tactical coercion and seek to intimidate strategically—that is, to undermine popular confidence in government and leadership and thereby attempt to paralyze opponents with fear by trumpeting the terrorists’ ability to strike at will and the inability of the government and security forces to provide effective defense or protection. Finally, it can serve an entirely internal function—what has been termed “auto propaganda”—when it is directed toward members of the terrorist group in order to strengthen morale, dampen dissent, or justify and legitimate or explain particularly controversial decisions or operations.⁷

In sum, propaganda is directed toward a committed audience to strengthen resolve or toward an uncommitted audience to win sympathy and support. It can be variously focused on the terrorists’ or insurgents’ actual or would-be constituents, the public at large, the enemy government and its bureaucratic minions and security forces, or even inwardly on the underground fighters themselves as a means to promote and enhance internal cohesion and morale.

The terrorist of the past used three principal means of facilitating this communications process:

- clandestine, rebel radio stations
- underground newspapers, posters, flyers, and other publications
- conventional, commercial, or state-owned mass media (e.g., television, radio, and the press)

Each of the above had its own attractions and limitations, dependent primarily on the degree of direct control and influence it provided the terrorist or insurgent group over a particular audience. For instance, the two means over which terrorists had the most control—their own clandestine radio stations and newspapers and other periodicals and publications—also generally had the most limited impact. They had either inherent technical and geographical constraints that inhibited reception and restricted the

listening audience or publication problems that made mass production and wide distribution difficult, if not impossible.

The now totally anachronistic multimedia efforts of one of the cold war era's more sophisticated Marxist-Leninist insurgent-cum-terrorist movements of the time, El Salvador's FMLN (Farabundo Marti Liberation Front) is a case in point. Its flagship newspaper, *Venceremos* (We will win) had a limited press run and thus a fairly narrow readership. Its usefulness, accordingly, was confined to reinforcing or guiding the political activities of already committed FMLN activists and supporters.⁸ Its clandestine radio station of the same name was hardly more technically sophisticated or expansive in audience reach. Broadcasting over standard shortwave band radio transmission, with varying audio quality and mostly only to a loyal, nearby listening audience, ensured that the impact of Radio Venceremos was perennially both localized and limited.⁹ Even less impressive were the external communications capabilities of the FMLN's U.S.-backed, anti-communist counterparts in neighboring Nicaragua. Radio Quince de Septiembre (Radio Fifteenth of September), the putative "voice" of the United States-backed Nicaraguan Contras (Nicaraguan Democratic Front), for example, was then bluntly described by one contemporary U.S. government observer as a "joke because of its basic broadcasting technology, amateurish copy, and numerically inconsequential listening audience."¹⁰

Given the constrained communications resources available to terrorists only a generation ago, it is not surprising that emphasis was often given to exploiting traditional mass media. But because of the limitations over control discussed in chapter 6, this was always at best a Hobson's choice: gaining exposure but only partially serving the terrorists' wider communication needs. By the mid-1980s, moreover, the latent romanticism of the underground fighter that at times had surfaced in some reporting was rapidly ebbing. In addition, the opportunities for terrorist exploitation were diminishing as new guidelines were imposed and more-stringent self-policing was practiced in response to the wave of criticism leveled at the media.¹¹ Finally, for many terrorist and insurgent groups there was no escaping the fundamental bias toward the status quo evidenced by most commercial and especially Western and state-owned media. So long as editorial power was vested ultimately in the pro-establishment, capitalist elite, many revolutionaries concluded, their message would always be diluted, misconstrued, or seized upon for its "entertainment" value rather than its didactic purposes.¹²

Then, in the 1990s, the advent of three new technological developments afforded terrorists the opportunity to break the stranglehold over mass communications hitherto enjoyed by commercial and state-owned media. These were

- the Internet,
- affordable, if not extraordinarily cheap, video production and duplication processes, and
- private, terrorist-owned television stations.

Terrorist and Insurgent Use of the Internet

Few technological innovations have had the impact of the Internet and the World Wide Web. Beyond any doubt, in a comparatively short span of time, they have revolutionized communications, enabling the rapid (often in real time), pervasive, and—most important—inexpensive exchange of information worldwide. In terms of political activism, they have been something of a godsend, providing an effective way for groups to promote what some observers call a “global dialectic,” a situation in which awakening, awareness, activism, and radicalism can be stimulated at a local level and then mobilized into a wider process of dissent and protest.¹³ “Groups of any size, from two to millions,” Dorothy E. Denning, of the Naval Postgraduate School, points out, “can reach each other and use the Net to promote an agenda. Their members and followers can come from any geographical region on the Net, and they can attempt to influence foreign policy anywhere in the world.”¹⁴ That sort of reach is one dramatic advantage that the Internet provides; speed is another. As a human rights activist working for an East Timor refugee NGO explained in a 1996 interview:

Using “old” communications, vital information could take weeks before it reached us. Often we had to wait for the first refugees to arrive. Then their accounts were written down and sent by mail. It could take days and weeks before they reached Australia or the USA. So, when the “news” of a massacre finally arrived at the newsdesk, the so called news was already old. With the arrival of new media and in particular, the Internet, this whole process might take just a few hours.¹⁵

Indeed, as is described below, a variety of terrorist and insurgent groups were quick to exploit this feature as a means of mobilizing international support and pressure and actively enlisting international humanitarian relief organizations and other NGOs on their behalf.

In addition to ubiquity and timeliness, the Internet has other advantages. It can circumvent government censorship, messages can be sent anonymously and also quickly and almost effortlessly, and it is an especially

cost-effective means of mass communication.¹⁶ It also enables terrorists to undertake what Denning has termed “perception management”¹⁷: in other words, they can use it to portray themselves and their actions in precisely the light and context they wish—unencumbered by the filter, screening, and spin of established media.¹⁸ The Internet also facilitates their engagement in what has been referred to as “information laundering,” taking an interesting or provocative video clip and/or sound bite, and featuring it and focusing on it and creating an “Internet buzz” about it in the hope that it will move into the mainstream press.¹⁹ Finally, the Internet carries with it new and significantly enhanced fund-raising capabilities for otherwise illegal or underground entities. Financial contributions, in essence, are now “just a click away,” with many sites providing banking details for cash transfers.²⁰ In this respect, the Internet has proved to be an especially beneficial communications medium for terrorists—a key means for both external (propaganda) and internal (command and control and information) purposes.

The first group to successfully harness the power of the Internet was arguably the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), known more familiarly simply as the Zapatistas.²¹ The group, it should be emphasized, is *not* a terrorist organization but an insurgent movement. Nonetheless, its effective exploitation of the Internet at the beginning of the 1990s was subsequently emulated by other insurgent movements and terrorist groups alike. As the Zapatistas themselves boast in a Web posting accessed in June 2005:

The international circulation through the Net of the struggles of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico has become one of the most successful examples of the use of computer communications by grassroots social movements. That circulation has not only brought support to the Zapatistas from throughout Mexico and the rest of the World, but it has sparked a world wide discussion of the meaning and implications of the Zapatista rebellion for many other confrontations with contemporary capitalist economic and political policies.²²

The EZLN’s insurrection commenced on New Year’s Day 1994 in Mexico’s rural and southernmost state, Chiapas. The government responded as it had countless times in the past: deploying military and police force to suppress the rebellion and hunt down the EZLN guerrillas. And, like countless peasant uprisings before it, the Zapatistas’ revolt was likely to go mostly unnoticed by a world preoccupied with more pressing matters than the grievances of a couple of hundred landless indigenous Indians and mestizos in a long-impoorished and largely inconsequential corner of the country. As it turned

out, the Zapatistas were not to be so easily brushed aside.²³ In addition to repulsing initial government efforts to dislodge them from the five towns and one city they occupied, the Zapatistas quickly demonstrated an unusual flair for external communications.²⁴ In Subcomandante Marcos, the articulate and charismatic, ski-mask-clad, pipe-smoking spokesman for the group, the EZLN pursued a novel tactic. Rather than calling only on the support, solidarity, and armed assistance of revolutionaries and guerrillas elsewhere, they appealed directly to Mexican civil society and specifically to peace activists, human rights groups, international humanitarian relief organizations, and other nongovernment organizations to join the Zapatistas' struggle by lobbying the Mexican government to implement the socioeconomic and political changes that the group demanded and to travel to Chiapas to observe and monitor the conflict. As David E. Ronfeldt and colleagues note, "This was not at all a conventional way to mount an insurrection."²⁵

Over the next fifteen months or so, the Zapatistas' mobilization strategy proved pivotal in halting government efforts to defeat the rebellion. Legend has it that, using a laptop computer that he carried in a backpack, Subcomandante Marcos plugged into the cigarette lighter socket of a Jeep or a truck and simply dialed up to log on to the Internet, enabling him to dispatch messages in real time to activists and supporters in Mexico City, the United States, Canada, and Europe. Although, as Thomas Olesen notes in his authoritative work on the Zapatistas, "there is no evidence as such that either the EZLN or Subcomandante Marcos [had] direct access to the Internet through modem or cellular phones,"²⁶ Marcos, however *indirectly*, was nonetheless able to communicate quickly and effectively to reach a larger national and international audience than pre-Internet era insurgents could ever have hoped.²⁷ Indeed the group's communication strategy was critical in blunting a major 1995 government offensive. "Information flooded out of the conflict zone," one account of the information counteroffensive reported. "The smallest of details, the slightest harassment of the civilian population, was spread to thousands of sympathisers and journalists all over the world. The result saw demonstrations and protests against the army offensive and concerned reports from human rights groups."²⁸

Through both their pioneering use of the "floodgate" tool and other denial-of-service measures²⁹ and the forging of effective connections with their peaceful activist supporters and sympathizers around the world, the Zapatistas were able to orchestrate a campaign of e-mail and fax bombardment directly to Mexican president Ernesto Zedillo and the minister of the interior, Esteban Moctezuma, that resulted in the suspension of the offensive. "Before, we used faxes and telephones," one peace activist rallied by the

group gushed, “and it took forever. Now the information arrives [with the snap of a finger]. The feedback is instantaneous.”³⁰ So successful were the Zapatistas’ mobilization efforts that in January 1995, President Zedillo proclaimed a truce and agreed to enter negotiations with the EZLN. As Mexico’s foreign minister, Jose Angel Gurria, later reflected: “Chiapas . . . is a place where there has not been a shot fired in the last fifteen months. . . . The shots lasted ten days and ever since the war has been a war of ink, of written word, a war on the Internet.”³¹ Indeed, when Mexican security forces raided a series of EZLN safe houses in Mexico City and Veracruz they reportedly discovered “as many computer diskettes as bullets.”³² For Marcos the message and significance of the Zapatistas’ Internet strategy was clear. “This is a new type of warfare,” he declared in an interview published in a British Internet magazine in 1996.³³ Since that time, the Zapatistas have regularly used Internet-based “collective manifestations” that they themselves variously call or describe as “electronic civil disobedience,” “net strikes,” and “mail bombs.” As one observer of the EZLN’s networking phenomenon explains, “The idea of these computer-mediated actions is to go beyond the sending of emails to figures such as politicians. The purpose, instead, is disruptive: for example, to flood mailboxes and overwork websites to the extent that they break down or become defunct for periods of time.”³⁴ A 1998 Internet posting by the “New York Zapatistas” advocated “electronic civil disobedience,” describing it as

applying the principles and tactics of traditional civil disobedience—like trespass and blockade—to the electronic systems of communication upon which Mexican government officials and their supporters depend. . . . We therefore urge that the following tactics be used against governmental, financial, and corporate sites responsible for the ongoing genocide in Chiapas. 1) Phone Zaps: Repeated calling to disrupt normal operations. 2) Fax Jams: Repeated faxing to overload fax machines. 3) Email Jams: Massive emailing to overload email inboxes and servers. 4) Virtual Sit-Ins: trespassing and blocking of web sites.³⁵

Although it is impossible to detect a direct causal connection between the Zapatistas’ success and the spread of Internet usage to other insurgent and terrorist groups throughout the world, it is clear that around this time other groups began rapidly to awake to the power of electronic external communications and the distinct advantages that they offered over other, older propaganda vehicles. Among the first were the LTTE (Tamil Tigers). The group established TamilNet.com in 1995,³⁶ and its success has since spawned

several additional sites, including www.eelam.com,³⁷ www.eelam.net, www.eelamweb.com, www.tamiltigers.net, www.cantam.com, and www.canadatamil.net.³⁸ These servers are based in India, the United Kingdom, Norway, Canada, and Australia, among other places—that is, often in countries with sizable existing Tamil émigré communities. Like the Zapatistas, the Tigers' initial presence on the Internet was motivated by a desire to present an alternative news and information source to the Sri Lankan state-controlled media.³⁹ The Sri Lankan government's imposition of press censorship coupled with the announcement of a major new military offensive was what had specifically prompted the creation of TamilNet. As a Tiger spokesperson explained: "We all knew what would happen if the government started a large scale offensive in the heavily populated Jaffna region. At the same time, the Sri Lankan government and its media were engaged in a massive stream of propaganda trying to justify the war against the People of Tamil Eelam."⁴⁰

The site's purpose was conceived (and remains) to mobilize the support of the 450,000-member Tamil diaspora by providing them with breaking news from Eelam, the historical Tamil homeland in the north and north-east of Sri Lanka, where the fighting between the rebels and Sri Lanka Armed Forces has mostly been confined.⁴¹ Like the Zapatistas, the Tiger site also sought to link up with international humanitarian relief organizations and various Tamil and non-Tamil NGOs. A recent look at www.eelam.com's home page, for example, shows links to topics such as the tsunami that devastated parts of Sri Lanka's coast in December 2004 and attendant LTTE-sponsored relief efforts ("Tsunami Disaster Relief: please contact your nearest Tamils Rehabilitation Organisations office").⁴² Home pages for other Tiger sites encourage readers to "link to us" and provide instructions on how to do so. Like that of most other terrorist and insurgent organization's sites, the Tiger's Web presence is primarily information-oriented,⁴³ with navigational bars that provide background and history about the Tamil people and the LTTE's struggle. These sites often also contain a map of the historical Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka; a history tab with further information on the Tamil people's long struggle for self-determination; a biography of the Tiger's founder and leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran; audio buttons through which recordings of "VOT: Voice of the Tigers" can be downloaded and listened to; LTTE press releases; daily news clips and links to other news sources; and a gallery of photographs of alleged atrocities inflicted by the Sri Lankan military on Tamil civilians. Features include profiles of the LTTE's feared women fighters, "freedom poems," and even an "online quiz." Finally, as on many other sites, merchandising—serving the dual purposes

of fund-raising and morale boosting cum solidarity building—occupies a prominent place on the site. A variety of terrorist kitsch, including flags, calendars, videos, books, pamphlets, is available for sale.⁴⁴

TamilNet scored a huge public relations coup in the summer of 1996 when it convincingly refuted Sri Lankan army claims of having repulsed a Tiger attack on an important base at Mullaitivu at the cost of only about seventy government casualties. With credible reports from LTTE cadres coming directly from the scene via satellite telephones, TamilNet posted dispatches and stories that painted a totally different picture. Not only had the camp *not* been captured, but more than a thousand Sri Lankan soldiers had been killed in the failed assault. As one observer noted,

It's not unusual that two parties in a war have vastly differing stories. As it turned out, the Tamil Tigers were more accurate. A week later, the Sri Lankan Army admitted to losing the camp. Twelve hundred soldiers were also lost. This was a major breakthrough for TamilNet and the alternative news channels. Newspapers such as the *Washington Post* and the *International Herald Tribune* began quoting bulletins from the LTTE statements and were extremely suspicious of the official Sri Lankan Army news dispatches.⁴⁵

Not surprisingly, the success of the Tiger Web sites prompted determined government attempts to shut them down.⁴⁶ One such effort in November 1997, however, backfired completely and resulted instead in denial-of-service attacks launched against Sri Lankan diplomatic facilities worldwide.⁴⁷ The embassies in Seoul, Ottawa, and Washington, D.C., were reportedly the worst affected, with e-mail unavailable in each for at least a week.⁴⁸

Today, almost without exception, all major (and many minor) terrorist and insurgent groups have Web sites.⁴⁹ As a researcher at the U.S. government's Foreign Broadcast and Information Service (FBIS) who focuses on the Internet has observed, "These days, if you're not on the web, you don't exist."⁵⁰ Indeed, according to perhaps the preeminent expert in the field of terrorist communication and the Internet, Gabriel Weimann, "the story of the presence of terrorist groups in cyberspace has barely begun to be told." He notes that in 1998 fewer than half of the thirty groups that the U.S. State Department designates as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) had Web sites, but by the end of 1999 nearly all of them did.⁵¹

Despite the multiplicity and diversity of terrorist Web sites, they share a number of key characteristics. These sites are often notable for their colorful, well-designed, and visually arresting graphic content. In this respect,

they seem intended particularly to appeal to a computer-savvy, media-saturated, video-game-addicted generation. Most of the sites chart the terrorist group's history, its aims and objectives, and the depredations inflicted by an enemy state(s) or people(s) upon the constituency it purports to represent. The sites also often contain biographies of the group's leadership, its founders, and key personalities; up-to-date news and accompanying feature stories; speeches, ideological treatises, and especially the organization's communiqués and other important statements. Ethno-nationalist/separatist movements will also generally have maps of the contested territory they claim to represent or be fighting for. Virtually without exception, all sites studiously avoid focusing on or drawing any attention to either violence or death and destruction that they are responsible for. Instead, issues such as freedom of expression and the plight of imprisoned comrades are highlighted.⁵² In the case of the more sophisticated organizations, such as the LTTE and Hezbollah, multiple sites are maintained in different languages. Arab and Islamic groups, Basque and Irish national-separatist movements, religious cults, Marxist-Leninist and Maoist movements, European neo-Nazi groups, and even al Qaeda can all be found on the Web.⁵³ Nonetheless, Arab and Islamic groups are regarded by knowledgeable observers to have the largest presence there.⁵⁴ According to one,

That Internet usage by Islamists is growing is obvious. What is also obvious is that they will use it to promote their views, advance the strategies of the "global Islamic movement" and organize their activities, which experience has shown are sometimes inimical to western security, and in a wider sense might also seek to subvert the security of the state.⁵⁵

Middle East Arab terrorist organizations in particular are seen as being on the "cutting edge of organizational networking," having demonstrated an ability to harness information technology for offensive operations, as well as using the more typical propaganda, fund-raising, and recruiting purposes of other groups.⁵⁶

Perhaps the preeminent group in this respect, and one of the first to harness fully the communications power of the Web, is Hezbollah. The group has often maintained as many as twenty different sites,⁵⁷ in three different languages: English, French, and Arabic.⁵⁸ Each site has a different purpose, orientation, and intended audience. The movement's Central Press Office and main Web page site, for instance, in the past could be accessed directly at www.hizbollah.org.⁵⁹ It had the requisite background account of the struggle and history of the organization that is found on other terrorist

and insurgent sites, as well as tabs presenting “statements on the resistance,” “political declarations,” press clips and releases, special focuses on the “occupied zone” (e.g., Israel) and on “hostages and wounded,” as well as “speeches of the S.G.”—that is, the movement’s secretary general and spiritual leader, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah.⁶⁰ Nasrallah, in fact, also maintains his own dedicated site containing postings in French,⁶¹ English, and Arabic.⁶² Readers were encouraged to contact the Web site and post their own views and opinions on the anti-Zionist struggle and alleged crimes committed by Israel and its armed forces.⁶³ This feature is apparently especially valued by Hezbollah. According to a group spokesman, “The service is very important for the morale of the resistance fighters. They are always very happy to know that people around the world are backing them.”⁶⁴ Hezbollah in 2001 claimed that it was receiving forty thousand visitors to its sites per month.⁶⁵

A more circuitous route is required to find the current Hezbollah Central Press Office site, at <http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/300/320/324/324.2/hizballah>.⁶⁶ While it is not dissimilar to the previous iteration, it does more obviously reflect the movement’s redoubled bid for political legitimacy outside Lebanon.⁶⁷ For instance, the home page features a long statement titled “Hizballah—*social radicals* [my emphasis],” which describes the group’s background and history with an emphasis on its social-welfare and political activities. Resistance, much less the movement’s terrorist legacy and continuing armed operations, is prominently absent. The series of links to other Hezbollah documents, institutions, and sites that it offers includes such ostensibly benign topics as

- the movement’s 1996 electoral platform,
- a 1997 message Hezbollah received from Pope John Paul II,
- the Emdad Committee for Islamic Charity,
- Al Manar TV, and
- the Al Jarha Association (“Getting by with a little help from a friend: Beirut’s al-Jarha Association helps wounded resistance fighters build themselves”).

The “Hizbullah: Views and Concepts” section is similarly anodyne, addressing issues like “Hizbullah and Dialogue,” “Hizbullah and the Political System in Lebanon,” and, of course, “Hizbullah and Human Rights,” among other subjects.

Other prominent Hezbollah Web sites include www.moqawama.org, which specifically focuses on attacks against Israeli targets, and www.

almanar.com.lb (*manar* is Arabic for “the Beacon”), the movement’s television and radio station, which contains news reports, access to video clips, and other information.⁶⁸ Hezbollah also uses the Internet and its television station, as well as other media outlets to promote and sell a video game called *Special Force* that its Central Internet Bureau labored for “two long years” to create.⁶⁹ “Pursue your enemy from position to position,” one spot on al-Manar beckoned prospective purchasers. “Take part in making victory.”⁷⁰ That Hezbollah intuitively understood the market for such a game is evidenced by the claim that some ten thousand copies were reportedly sold in Lebanon, Syria, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Canada, Germany, and Australia during the eight weeks following its release in March 2003.⁷¹ An advertisement for the game, easily located on the Internet in June 2005, explains:

“SPECIAL FORCE” IS BASED ON REALITY, MEANING THAT THE GAME IS BASED ON EVENTS THAT TOOK PLACE IN A LAND CALLED LEBANON. LEBANON WAS INVADED BY “ISRAEL” IN 1978 & 1982, AND WAS FORCED TO WITHDRAW AND DID WITHDRAW IN THE YEAR 2000. AFTER THAT WE DECIDED TO PRODUCE A GAME THAT WILL BE EDUCATIONAL FOR OUR FUTURE GENERATIONS AND FOR ALL FREEDOM LOVERS OF THIS WORLD OF OURS.

“Special Force game,” it concludes, “will render you a partner of the resistance.”⁷² Features include a training simulation, where players can hone their shooting skills by firing at targets of Israeli prime minister Sharon and minister of defense and former IDF chief of staff Shaul Mofaz. The qualification medal for excellent marksmanship that follows is then awarded by a simulated Sheikh Nasrallah. The game’s main attraction, however, is doubtless the assaults on IDF positions and tanks that test a player’s skill at avoiding land mines and snipers and shooting down attack helicopters to accomplish the mission. “Thank you,” states the registration card that comes with *Special Force*. “The Designers of ‘Special Force’ are very Proud to provide you with this special product which embodies objectively the defeat of the Israeli enemy and the heroic actions taken by the heroes of the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon.”⁷³ As Bilal Zain, a member of the game’s design team, explained, through the medium of entertainment *Special Force* seeks to convey Hezbollah’s “values, concepts and ideas.”⁷⁴ Accordingly, instructions for play are available in Arabic, English, French, and Farsi. “Be A Partner In The Victory . . .,” the liner notes on the video case state. “Fight, Resist, Destroy Your Enemy In The Game Of Force And Victory.”⁷⁵

The Palestinian group Hamas has had a similarly strong presence on the Internet. Although its original Web site did refer to the group by name (www.hammas.org), like Hezbollah, in recent years Hamas has also relied on another, more generic, moniker—in this case, “Palestinian Information Center.”⁷⁶ Additional links have in the past been provided through such general Muslim information sites as the Ohio-based MSANews (originating at Ohio State University) and from groups such as the Islamic Association for Palestine.⁷⁷ Observers often cite the professionalism, excellent content, and clean and fluid English and Arabic prose found on the site. Indeed, for these reasons, Israeli authorities reportedly consider the Web site to be a very effective communications vehicle for the group.⁷⁸ In the past, the site has very adroitly featured interviews with the father of Muhammad al-Dura, the twelve-year-old Palestinian boy who was allegedly shot to death shortly after the al-Aqsa Intifada began in October 2000 at an Israeli-Palestinian border crossing as the father vainly attempted to shelter him from the bullets flying around them,⁷⁹ along with photographs of wounded Palestinian babies in hospital and other depictions of IDF mistreatment of Palestinian youths.⁸⁰ The site also posted copies of the Hamas Covenant in what was reported to be an excellent, verbatim English translation, various communiqués of attacks and messages from Hamas’s military wing, the Iss al-Din al-Kassam brigades, and a daily account or running diary of the wing’s operations.⁸¹ A more nefarious purpose has also been reported by observers of terrorist Internet usage: the reported communication of operational instructions through steganography (the clandestine concealment of messages and other information embedded in images and other visual displays)⁸² and other activities meant to facilitate terrorist endeavors, fund-raising, and further logistical and support endeavors.⁸³

Today, Hamas’s presence on the Web is maintained through sites such as IntifadaOnline.com,⁸⁴ which has been active since 1988⁸⁵ and “brings you the Palestinian side of the story. We also advise you on how to help.” Its home page formerly contained the familiar image of Muhammad al-Dura, wounded Palestinian babies in the hospital, Palestinian children being beaten and dragged through the street by IDF soldiers, IDF troops restraining a Palestinian teenager in a choke hold, and the ubiquitous image of a youthful Palestinian demonstrator facing an Israeli tank. Scrolling farther down the page revealed photographs of Palestinian martyrs (including suicide bombers) and additional images of Palestinian babies injured in Israeli violence.⁸⁶ The site now features the no less familiar but still compelling image of a Palestinian youth hurling a stone at an IDF tank, thus deliberately evoking the enduring memory of the lone Chinese pro-democracy

demonstrator who faced down a Chinese tank at Tiananmen Square in 1989. Under the headline “Justice, Freedom, and Peace,” alongside banners the color of the Palestinian national flag, additional links are provided to translations in twenty-two languages—including Arabic, Danish, Dutch, English, Farsi French, German, Greek, Japanese, Korean, Malay, Norwegian, Russian, Spanish, Turkish, and Urdu.⁸⁷ Links are provided to Web sites providing additional news and information on the Palestinian struggle, poetry, and the Web sites of mainstream established news media, such as the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) and CNN. Navigational bars also direct viewers to

- stories and pictures,
- explanations such as “Why Intifada?”
- other news items about the Intifada,
- a discussion of the nefarious “silencing of the Intifada,” and
- information on how to “be part of Intifada.”

The last link encouraged visitors to participate in demonstrations, write letters to their elected officials and newspapers, and boycott Israeli goods. Instructions were also given on how to add Hamas links and banners to one’s own site.⁸⁸

Until the summer of 2002, an affiliated Hamas site, www.qassam.net, actively solicited donations for the explicit purpose of purchasing AK-47 assault rifles, dynamite, and bullets with which “to assist the cause of jihad and resistance until the [Israeli] occupation is eliminated and Muslim Palestine is liberated.” Donations in the amount of US\$3 for bullets, US\$100 per kilogram of dynamite, US\$2,000 for an AK-47, and US\$12,000 for a rocket-propelled grenade launcher were reportedly suggested. Prospective donors were invited to contact an address on a Web site that provided instructions for transferring money to a Gaza-based bank account. The name on the account and the account number were said to change every forty-eight to seventy-two hours. A message addressed to the would-be donor stated: “Dear Donor: Please tell us the field in which you prefer your money to be spent on such as: martyrdom attacks; buying weapons for the mujahadeen; training the youth; or inventing and developing missiles, mortars [and] explosives.”⁸⁹

Hamas reportedly maintained some twenty active sites at the end of 2004.⁹⁰ Among them was a site in Arabic, www.sabiroon.net, extolling terrorist operations, including suicide bombings; another for a radio station associated with Hamas (al-Aqsa Voice), at www.aqsavoice.com; and one

featuring the movement's children's magazine, *al-Fateh*, at www.al-fateh-net.net.⁹¹ Like Hezbollah, for a time Hamas also maintained a dedicated site for its leader, Abd al Aziz al Rantisi (www.rantisi.net), who succeeded Sheikh Yasin following his assassination in March 2004. The site for Rantisi, who was killed shortly after Yasin, was hosted by an American server.⁹² It could not be accessed as of June 2005. The PIJ, Hamas's counterpart, has a considerably less extensive presence on the Internet—but nonetheless still maintains six sites.⁹³

In addition, Muslim—but non-Arabic and non-Middle Eastern—sites have also had an active presence on the Internet. The most sophisticated have been Web sites of various radical Pakistani organizations such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (Army of the Pure), Harakat ul Mujahideen (Movement of Warriors), Harakat al-Ansar (Movement of the Partisans), and the London-based Hizb ut Tahrir (Party of Liberation),⁹⁴ which itself has maintained upwards of twenty different sites. According to the aforementioned FBIS analysts, Hizb ut Tahrir has a “bigger presence on the Web than in life.” Nonetheless, the multiplicity of its sites and the sophistication of its Web design and content have made it an important resource on radical Islamic ideology. Although the majority of the Pakistani-based groups have had relatively anemic and poorly designed sites (e.g., Hizb ul Mujahideen, Harakat al-Ansar), Lashkar-e-Taiba was an exception. Its Web designers were not only proficient but also capable of posting content in multiple languages—English, Arabic, and Urdu.⁹⁵ Audio links on the site provided connections to Radio al-Jihad and Mercuz al-Dawa.⁹⁶ Fund-raising was a prominent feature on the Web for Lashkar and other groups, with banking details and instructions provided for direct deposits into the group's account.⁹⁷ An entreaty on the site described how the group's holy warriors were engaged in fighting the “oppressive Hindu Army in the snow covered valleys, mountains and jungles of Kashmir. These Mujahideen best deserve your charity.”⁹⁸ The site was visceral in its enmity toward what its authors defined as Islam's triumvirate of most-hated opponents: India, the United States, and Israel.⁹⁹ According to Jessica Stern, in the past one of Lashkar's sites included a “list of purported Jews working for the Clinton administration,” listing staff such as Robert Nash, who was then director of presidential personnel (a non-Jewish African American), and George Tenet, the former director of the Central Intelligence Agency (a Greek American).¹⁰⁰

Finally, the generic Web sites for radical Islamic ideology maintained in past years out of London and other places in the United Kingdom provided an additional vehicle for the dissemination of propaganda and solicitation of philanthropic contributions. Principal among these were the now dif-

difficult to find www.azzam.com and www.kawkaz.com (now www.kavkaz.com or www.kavkazcenter.com). Azzam.com's real sponsor is unknown. It was posted in the name of Azzam Publications, a reference to Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian who was among the first Arabs to go fight in Afghanistan against the Soviet occupation in the early 1980s and who later achieved fame as a colleague and patron of Osama bin Laden and with bin Laden, as the cofounder of the entity that eventually became known as al Qaeda. Azzam was assassinated in Peshawar in 1989.¹⁰¹ The [azzam.com](http://www.azzam.com) site was essentially dedicated to global jihad and actively solicited contributions for the Taliban and Chechen guerrillas fighting against Russian forces. A message in early 2001 stated how an "Appeal for cash donations" to the Taliban "is especially urgent." It suggested a minimum US\$20,000 contribution and provided advice on how to deliver it personally to the Taliban consul general in Karachi, Pakistan.¹⁰² This site also had long served as a mouthpiece for bin Laden and al Qaeda.¹⁰³ Indeed, [azzam.com](http://www.azzam.com) postings in 2002 urged Muslims to come to Pakistan and Afghanistan to fight against the "Jewish-backed American Crusaders" (e.g., U.S. soldiers). It also provided these would-be recruits with useful practical travel information on how to unobtrusively leave one's job and how to avoid arousing suspicion from employers, diplomats issuing visas, and inquisitive border and immigration officials.¹⁰⁴

The [kawkaz](http://www.kawkaz.com) web site was similarly devoted to fund-raising for both the Taliban and the Chechens—as well as encouraging volunteers to travel to Afghanistan and Chechnya to fight for Islam. The goal of raising US\$10 million per month for the Taliban was once trumpeted. As large sums had already been successfully raised for the Chechens, the aforementioned FBIS analysts did not regard this pretension as entirely "unrealistic." The site contained translations in some sixteen different languages and was sophisticated in design and message. According to the FBIS analysts, the Chechen site provided an "example par excellence of where we are in a new era of propaganda."¹⁰⁵ Today, it operates as www.kavkaz.org.uk, under the banner "News—Facts—Analysis," with postings in three languages (Russian, English, and Turkish). In addition to its focus on Chechnya and Chechen mujahideen issues, the new site also presents information and news about the insurgency in Iraq. Other tabs link to a photo gallery, videos, sections titled "Analysis," "Talking Points," "Chat," and opportunities for cooperation. Among the recent postings on its home page were articles such as "Russians turn Chechen orphans into zombies" and "21 invaders, collaborators eliminated in Chechnya." Online polls also ask readers whether the alleged energy crisis in Moscow is the result of: (a) an "Act of sabotage," (b) "Technical

problems,” or (c) “Human error.” In addition, there are links to six other sites, including www.kavkaz.tv, www.kavkazcenter.com, www.kavkazcenter.net, and www.kavkazcenter.info.¹⁰⁶ As one U.S. government observer of the terrorism Internet phenomenon has noted in the context of the kavkaz sites, “Never in history has there been an opportunity where propaganda is so effective.”¹⁰⁷

Al Qaeda, in fact, is unique among all terrorist groups in this respect: from the start its leadership seems to have intuitively grasped the enormous communicative potential of the Internet and sought to harness this power both to further the movement’s strategic aims and to facilitate its tactical operations. The priority that al Qaeda accorded to external communications is evidenced by its pre-9/11 organizational structure. One of the original four al Qaeda operational committees was specifically charged with media and publicity (the others were responsible for military operations, finance and business, and fatwa and Islamic study).¹⁰⁸ Egyptian computer experts who had fought alongside bin Laden in Afghanistan against the Red Army during the 1980s were reportedly specifically recruited to create the extensive network of Web sites, e-mail capabilities, and electronic bulletin boards¹⁰⁹ that continues to function today despite al Qaeda’s expulsion from Afghanistan, the destruction of its operational base in that country, and the ongoing prosecution of the United States–led global war on terrorism.

The Internet has long facilitated three critical functions for al Qaeda:

1. propaganda for recruitment and fund-raising and to shape public opinion in the Muslim world,
2. terrorist training and instruction,
3. operational planning for attacks through both e-mail communication and the access it provides to an array of useful open source information.

Each has assumed even great importance in the post-9/11 era and since the loss of Afghanistan as a physical sanctuary. For al Qaeda, the Internet therefore has become something of a virtual sanctuary, providing an effective, expeditious, and anonymous means through which the movement can continue to communicate with its fighters, followers, sympathizers, and supporters worldwide. For example, before 9/11, al Qaeda had only one Web site: www.alneda.com. Today, the movement is present on more than fifty different sites.¹¹⁰ “The more Web sites, the better it is for us,” a jihadist statement posted on azzam.com in 2002 proclaimed. “We must make the Internet our tool.”¹¹¹

Initially, as already stated, www.alneda.com fulfilled this requirement.¹¹² The site, which was published in the Arabic language only (as indeed are all the hardcore jihadist sites), emphasized three core messages that remain the basic staple of al Qaeda and other jihadist Web sites today:

- first, that the West is implacably hostile to Islam;
- second, that the only way to address this threat and the only language that the West understands is violence;
- third, that jihad, therefore, is the only option.¹¹³

In support of these arguments, the theory of jihad was elaborated upon in great theological and legalistic detail. The obligation of all Muslims both to protect and to spread Islam by the sword was a particular focus of online treatises. In addition, summaries of news affecting the Islamic struggle against the West, al Qaeda's own accounts of ongoing fighting and skirmishing with American and allied forces both in Afghanistan and in Pakistan, and suggested readings—including books by authors approved by al Qaeda theoreticians—could be found on the site.¹¹⁴ Lengthy justifications for the 9/11 attacks were also posted. Video clips and other messages extolling the operation were featured, accompanied by Islamic juridical arguments sanctioning the killing of innocents. Like other terrorist sites, poems glorified the sacrifices of al Qaeda martyrs and waxed eloquent on the unrelenting defensive struggle being fought against Islam's enemies. During the period immediately following the 9/11 attacks, when al Qaeda suffered a series of stunning reverses, culminating in the loss of Afghanistan as a base, alneda.com also performed an invaluable morale-boosting purpose by trying to lift the spirits of al Qaeda fighters and shore up support among its sympathizers. According to British journalist Paul Eedle, a February 2002 Internet posting contained the names and home phone numbers of eighty-four al Qaeda fighters being held by Pakistani authorities “presumably with the aim that sympathizers would contact their families and let them know that they were alive.”¹¹⁵

The alneda.com site was also used to call Muslims' attention to the alleged control, suppression, and censorship of information about the jihadist struggle by the West and established media outlets. “The U.S. enemy, unable to gain the upper hand over the mujahadeen on the battlefield,” one June 2002 statement explained, “has since Sept. 11 been trying to gag the world media. The more the United States tries to stifle freedom of expression, the more determined we will become to break the silence. America will lose the media war, too.”¹¹⁶ Another, titled “America Nears the Abyss,”

compared the damage wrought to the U.S. economy by the 9/11 attacks to the struggle prosecuted by the mujahideen in Afghanistan during the 1980s that, it maintained, had set in motion the chain of events that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of communism. The same fate, it predicted, would befall the United States, and it cited the weakening American dollar, the parlous state of the U.S. stock market, and the erosion of confidence both at home and abroad in the American economy.¹¹⁷ Indeed, as previously noted, bin Laden has long argued that the United States is poised on the verge of financial ruin and total collapse much as the USSR once was—with the force of Islam ensuring America’s demise much as it achieved that of the Soviet Union more than a decade ago. Indeed, when bin Laden addressed his fighters as they fled Afghanistan in December 2001, he struck the same defiant note. “America is in retreat by the grace of God Almighty and economic attrition is continuing up to today,” he declared. “But it needs further blows. The young men need to seek out the nodes of the American economy and strike the enemy’s nodes.”¹¹⁸

The *alned.com* site continued to function sporadically throughout 2002, repeatedly moving from one Internet service provider to another to circumvent the efforts of the United States and other governments to shut it down completely. In its death throes that summer, it shifted during one eight-week period from a provider in Malaysia to one in Texas and then to one in Michigan before disappearing completely.¹¹⁹ Since then, a variety of online magazines have maintained al Qaeda’s presence on the Net. The first appeared shortly after 9/11 and featured a series of articles titled “In the Shadow of the Lances.” Initially written by the movement’s putative spokesman, Suleimain Abu Ghaith, the first five issues were mostly theological or ideological treatises. Typical were discussions reiterating how “America does not understand dialogue. Nor peaceful coexistence. Nor appeals, nor condemnation, nor criticism. America,” Abu Ghaith argued, “will only be stopped by blood.”¹²⁰ In February 2003, however, as the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq loomed imminent, authorship of the series abruptly changed from Abu Ghaith, the theoretician and philosopher, to Saif al-Adel, the warrior. Al-Adl, one of the movement’s most senior operational commanders and a former Egyptian Army Special Forces officer who joined al Qaeda as a result of the 1998 merger with Ayman Zawahiri’s Egyptian Islamic Jihad, implored jihadists to descend upon Iraq—not to support Saddam Hussein but to defend Muslims against this latest instance of U.S. and Western aggression. He also dispensed detailed, practical advice on guerrilla operations and urban warfare tactics with which to engage—and ultimately defeat—the invading American and British forces in Iraq.¹²¹ The virtues of guerrilla warfare were

again lavishly extolled in a posting that appeared on *alned.com* on April 9, 2003. Clearly written sometime after American forces had entered Baghdad, it cited prominent historical cases where numerically smaller and less powerful forces using guerrilla tactics had successfully challenged larger, better-equipped adversaries. Under the caption “Guerrilla Warfare Is the most Powerful Weapon Muslims have, and It is The Best Method to Continue the Conflict with the Crusader Enemy,” the statement foreshadowed the current insurgency in Iraq, presciently explaining how

with guerilla warfare, the Americans were defeated in Vietnam and the Soviets were defeated in Afghanistan. This is the method that expelled the direct Crusader colonialism from most of the Muslim lands, with Algeria the most well known. We still see how this method stopped Jewish immigration to Palestine, and caused reverse immigration of Jews from Palestine. The successful attempts of dealing defeat to invaders using guerilla warfare were many, and we will not expound on them. However, these attempts have proven that the most effective method for the materially weak against the strong is guerrilla warfare.¹²²

This mixture of ideology and propaganda alongside practical guidance on guerrilla warfare and related terrorist operations has come to typify al Qaeda’s current Internet profile.¹²³ With respect to the former, a new Internet magazine named *Sawt al-Jihad* (Voice of Jihad) appeared in February 2004, published by al Qaeda’s Saudi organization. Its message was less one of attacking U.S. and other Western targets than the importance of mobilizing Muslim public opinion and support of jihad.¹²⁴ Nonetheless, according to Reuven Paz, an editorial titled “Belief First: They Are the Heretics, the Blood of Each of Them Is the Blood of a Dog” implicitly justified the slaughter of Americans. “My fighting brother,” its author, Sheikh Naser al-Najdi, wrote,

kill the heretic; kill whoever his blood is the blood of a dog; kill those that Almighty Allah has ordered you to kill. . . .

Bush son of Bush. . . a dog son of a dog . . . his blood is that of a dog. . . .

Shut your mouth and speak with your other mouth—the mouth of the defender against his attacker.¹²⁵

In Islam, dogs are considered to be among the most impure creatures, and true believers are forbidden to even touch one. Thus, the equating of President Bush with a dog is meant to be especially damning.

With respect to practical guidance, another new online publication, also published by the al Qaeda organization in Saudi Arabia, *Mu'askar al-Battar* (Camp of the Sword) seeks to provide operational information. Its first issue, published in January 2004, explained how "in order to join the great training camps you don't have to travel to other lands. Alone, in your home or with a group of your brothers, you too can begin to execute the training program. You can all join the Al-Battar Training Camp."¹²⁶ The power of this particular communications vehicle appears to have been demonstrated by the influence that the March 2004 edition had on subsequent patterns of terrorist activities in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Reportedly written by Abdul Azziz al-Moqrin,¹²⁷ the reputed commander of al Qaeda's operations on the Arabian Peninsula until he was killed by Saudi security forces in May 2005, it singled out economic targets, especially those connected with the region's oil industry, as priorities for attack. "The purpose of these targets," Moqrin wrote,

is to destabilize the situation and not allow the economic recovery such as hitting oil wells and pipelines that will scare foreign companies from working there and stealing Muslim treasures. Another purpose is to have foreign investment withdrawn from local markets. Some of the benefits of those operations are the effect it has on the economic powers like the one that had happened recently in Madrid where the whole European economy was affected.¹²⁸

In the weeks that followed, al-Moqrin's strategy seemed to bear fruit. The U.S. State Department, for instance, advised American citizens to leave Saudi Arabia. After the murder in April 2004 of five expatriate workers at a petrochemical complex in the Saudi industrial city of Yanbu, foreign companies there were reported to have evacuated employees from the country.¹²⁹ These fears acquired new urgency with the attack in May on a housing complex in Khobar, where twenty-two foreigners were killed, and the execution by beheading in June of an American defense contractor, Paul M. Johnson Jr.¹³⁰

This same targeting guidance also explains the spate of kidnappings and tragically similar executions of foreign contractors, diplomats, and aid workers in Iraq that commenced within a week of its release. The first victim was Mohammed Rifat, a Canadian, who was seized on April 8. During the following three months, more than sixty others were kidnapped. Although the majority were eventually released, five hostages were brutally murdered—most often by beheading, with the act itself filmed and posted

on jihadist Web sites.¹³¹ Among the dead was a young Jewish American businessman, Nicholas Berg. Al-Moqrin had deemed as a special priority “assassinating Jewish businessmen and teach lessons to those who cooperate with them [*sic*].” Indeed, al-Moqrin provided additional “practical examples” of how his targeting guidance should be implemented. The preferred hierarchy of targets were:

- “American and Israeli Jews first, the British Jews and then French Jews and so on.”
- “Christians: Their importance is as follows: Americans, British, Spanish, Australians, Canadians, Italians.”

Within these categories there were further distinctions:

- “Businessmen, bankers, and economists, because money is very important in this age”
- “Diplomats, politicians, scholars, analysts, and diplomatic missions”
- “Scientists, associates and experts”; “Military commander and soldiers”; and
- “Tourists and entertainment missions and anybody that was warned by mujahideen not to go to step in the lands of Moslems.”¹³²

Finally, along with propaganda and training, al Qaeda has also made extensive use of the Internet for intelligence-gathering purposes and targeting. The so-called Manchester Manual, the compendium of terrorist tradecraft assembled by al Qaeda sometime during the 1990s, advises explicitly that “openly and without resorting to illegal means, it is possible to gather at least 80% of information about the enemy.”¹³³ Indeed, *The 9/11 Commission Report* cites four specific instances in which KSM and the nineteen hijackers accessed information from the Internet to plan or facilitate the 9/11 attacks.¹³⁴ An al Qaeda computer found by American military forces in Afghanistan contained architectural models of a dam in the United States and software with which to simulate various catastrophic failures, as well as programming instructions for the digital switches that operate American power, water, transport, and communications grids.¹³⁵ And more recently, in March 2005, three British al Qaeda operatives were indicted by a U.S. federal court on charges of having carried out detailed reconnaissance of financial targets in lower Manhattan, Newark, New Jersey, and Washington, D.C. In addition to videotaping the Citigroup Center and the New York Stock Exchange in New York City, the Prudential Financial building in

Newark, and the headquarters of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in Washington, D.C., the men were alleged to have amassed more than five hundred photographs of the sites—many of which had simply been downloaded from the Internet.¹³⁶

Video Production and Duplication Processes

Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups have also made use of a variety of contemporary technologies to project their message—including computer CD-ROMs, DVDs, and the professionally produced video clips cited at the beginning of this chapter. Indeed, a two-hour al Qaeda recruitment video that bin Laden had circulated throughout the Middle East during the summer of 2001—and that Peter Bergen argues subtly presaged the September 11 attacks—is just such an example.¹³⁷ The video, with its graphic footage of infidels attacking Muslims in Chechnya, Kashmir, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Indonesia, and Egypt; children starving under the yoke of United Nations economic sanctions in Iraq; and, most vexatiously, the accursed presence of “Crusader” military forces in the holy land of Arabia was subsequently converted to CD-ROM and DVD formats for ease in copying onto computers and loading onto the World Wide Web for still wider, global dissemination. Titled *The Destruction of the American Destroyer USS Cole*, the DVD version, except for the misspellings, choppy English translation, and tendentious message, has a color jacket sleeve and liner notes that appear little different from the commercial videos one rents or purchases at the local video store.¹³⁸ “This tape are real life scenes that potray [*sic*],” the liner notes state, “with blood and tears, the sorry state of the Muslim Nation. after [*sic*] revealing the illness, it goes on to discribe [*sic*] the cure, whils [*sic*] giving the glad tiding and hopes for the future as a means of encouragement to remain firm and be steadfast for the sake of the future generation.”¹³⁹

Other video productions that either al Qaeda or its affiliated groups have distributed evidence the same sophisticated production capabilities and accomplished editing. A particularly revealing sign of their professionalism is the way that videos depicting scenes such as the repugnant execution of the journalist Daniel Pearl¹⁴⁰ or the last will and testament of Ahmed Ibrahim A. al-Haznawi, one of the September 11 hijackers, are all shot with a blue background. This technique enables an editor to insert contemporary news footage or evocative images at a later time and thereby enhance or put in a particularly powerful context the video’s message.¹⁴¹ The video clip of Daniel Pearl’s brutal execution, for example, is intercut simultane-

ously with footage in the left and right corners of the screen depicting the widely televised alleged shooting death in October 2000 of the Palestinian child Muhammad al-Dura, as well as similar scenes of Israeli Defense Force operations involving Palestinian civilians. The tape of al-Haznawi, one of the hijackers aboard the American Airlines flight that crashed into the Pentagon on September 11, contained a date and place name beside his reproduced signature indicating that it was recorded in Khandahar, Afghanistan, around March 2001. Broadcast first by the Qatar-based Arab language news network al-Jazeera in mid-April, the clip was similarly interspersed with contemporary footage showing Ayman Zawahiri, bin Laden's chief lieutenant, lauding the 9/11 attacks as a "gift from God" with additional voice-over referring to the Arab League summit in Beirut that had been held two weeks earlier.¹⁴² Both videos—like much al Qaeda propaganda—are noteworthy for the repeated references to, and depictions of, the suffering of Muslim children, whether in Palestine, Iraq, or elsewhere. It is hard to imagine a more potent propaganda tool, recruiting vehicle, or means to justify and legitimate violence than to focus on the maltreatment and abject condition of children.

It was not surprising, therefore, to find another professionally produced al Qaeda recruitment video circulating around the Middle East in the spring of 2002 in an effort to attract new martyrs to bin Laden's cause. The seven-minute tape, seized from an al Qaeda member by American authorities, reportedly opens with the image of a spinning globe with still pictures of dead men floating by and the words in Arabic:

They are the ones that say, (of their brethren slain), while they themselves sit (at ease:) "If only they had listened to us, they would not have been slain." Say: "Avert death from your own selves if you speak the truth." Think not of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead. Nay, they live, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord.

This is then followed by footage of mujahideen in battle, with depictions of the fighters' death and beneath it text reading: "Say not the martyr had died, for he is alive and happy lodged in eternal paradise." The video goes on to show more combat scenes, followed by the images of twenty-seven martyrs shown in rapid succession with the name of each listed, where he or she is from, and where he or she died. The narrator explains that they hailed from Algeria, Chechnya, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Mecca (Saudi), Medina (Saudi), Morocco, Najd (presumably Saudi), Pakistan, Palestine, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen and that they perished while fighting in Afghanistan,

Bosnia, Chechnya, Dagestan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan, circa the early and mid-1990s. Twelve of the martyrs are then featured in a special segment accompanied by a voice-over saying, “They rejoice in the bounty provided by Allah: And with regard to those left behind who have not yet joined them (in their bliss), the martyrs glory in the fact that on them is no fear, nor have they (cause to) grieve.” The video concludes with a message of greeting from the “Black Banner Center for Islamic Information” along with accompanying contact details and the Qur’anic invocation “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is Allah’s messenger.”¹⁴³

Al Qaeda, however, cannot claim credit for having pioneered the filming of jihadist attacks for propaganda, recruitment, and marketing purposes. That distinction is credited by one source to the infamous Jordanian-born commander of Chechen fighters known by the nom de guerre Khattab. Khattab reportedly began to film his group’s attack on Russian military forces under the assumption that “if they killed a few Russian soldiers in an ambush along a road the impact of the strike was limited, however if the operation was filmed and then shown to the Russian people that impact was multiplied manifold.” Khattab and his men thus videotaped any assault—whether involving ambushes, roadside bombings, kidnappings, or rocket attacks—and soon had enough footage to produce a forty-minute video titled *Russian Hell 1*.¹⁴⁴ Khattab’s successors have continued this policy. During the August 2005 siege of a school in Beslan, Ossetia, by Chechen terrorists, one of the attackers was reported by a hostage to have “constantly filmed us.”¹⁴⁵

Insurgent Television

Perhaps the most startling advance in terrorist communications over the past decade, however, has been the emergence of the terrorists’ own television stations. In this respect, the video production and duplication capabilities already cited that have facilitated the customization of sophisticated messages on the Internet are a product of a growing sophistication among terrorists in the television studio and the editing booth as well. Among the pioneers in this process has been Hezbollah, whose al-Manar television station along with its news Web site on the Internet, have afforded this movement an unprecedented ability to shape and tailor its external communications. In this way terrorist groups have been able to assume complete control over the content, context, footage, and voice-overs depicting their organization and its activities.

Al-Manar began broadcasting as a small terrestrial station in 1991 with limited on-air time and programming content.¹⁴⁶ Within a decade, however, it was transmitting via satellite on a 24/7 basis.¹⁴⁷ Today, al-Manar provides eight news bulletins daily in Arabic and one each in English and French. In addition to its headquarters operations in Beirut, the station has bureaus in Egypt, Iran, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and correspondents stationed in Belgium, France, Iraq, Kosovo, Kuwait, Morocco, the Occupied Territories (Palestine), Russia, Sweden, Syria, Turkey, and, until recently, even the United States.¹⁴⁸ Al-Manar's Web site describes the station's mission as

motivated by the ambitions of participation in building a better future for the Arab and Muslim generations by focusing on the tolerant values of Islam and promoting the culture of dialogue and cooperation among the followers of the Heavenly religions and human civilizations. It focuses on highlighting the value of the human being as the center of the Godly messages which endeavor to save his dignity and freedom and develop the spiritual and moral dimensions of his personality [*sic*].

Al-Manar avoids cheap incitement in dealing with developments and activities, and it stresses objectivity on the adoption of the fair and just causes of the whole nation [*sic*].¹⁴⁹

However, according to Avi Jorisch, the author of a detailed study of the station and its programming content,

Today, Hizballah [*sic*] continues to use al-Manar as a means of publicly offering its services to Palestinians fighting for the destruction of Israel and the total liberation of historic Palestine (e.g., all territory west of the Jordan River). . . . Accordingly, one of al-Manar's major objectives is to inspire resistance. . . .

With regard to the United States, al-Manar has broadcast anti-American propaganda since its inception, often using the same propaganda methods it employs against Israel. Various programs have focused on distorting U.S. history, lambasting U.S. Middle East policy, propagating conspiracy theories about the September 11 attacks, and demonizing the relationship between Washington and the "Zionist entity," Israel. With the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, both Hizballah and al-Manar renewed their vitriol toward their old, reliable foe, the "Great Satan."¹⁵⁰

The station's primetime programming clearly reflects its biases. Shows such as *The Spider's House* (see the previous allusion to the significance of

this Qur'anic verse with respect to Israel, in chapter 5) detail Israel's inherent weaknesses and its inevitable defeat through the use of suicide attacks and other terrorist tactics. More recently, the same attributes and eventuality have been ascribed to the United States as a result of its occupation of Iraq. *What's Next* is a talk show that hosts guests with particularly "vitriolic anti-American views." Another show, called *Terrorists*, details the alleged depredations inflicted throughout history by Israel on the Arab world, while *My Blood and the Rifle* is a panegyric to Hezbollah's fighters, extolling their victory over Israel in south Lebanon and their heroic sacrifices.¹⁵¹ That this format is tremendously appealing is indisputable. A Gallup poll of Middle Eastern audience viewing preferences for news taken in March 2002 revealed that al-Manar was the fifth most popular station watched in the past week and was ranked as the third most popular station to which viewers turn to first to catch up on current world affairs.¹⁵² It is reportedly one of the most watched stations in the Palestine territories.¹⁵³ Lebanese television officials boast that al-Manar is the third most popular station in that country, and at times of crisis with Israel it is often the first.¹⁵⁴

During the 1990s Hezbollah created field units of combat camera crews that accompanied the organization's operational units into battle in order to provide al-Manar with the compelling footage it required.¹⁵⁵ Footage of Hezbollah fighters, attired in fatigues, with body armor and helmets, carrying out textbook military assaults on Israeli positions in South Lebanon and those of their South Lebanon Army (SLA) allies were a regular feature of al-Manar's television broadcasts and Internet Web site from the mid-1990s until the Israeli withdrawal in May 2000.¹⁵⁶ As one United Nations official explained, "For Hezbollah, 60 per cent of the success of an operation depends on getting some good footage."¹⁵⁷ Indeed, Hezbollah propaganda efforts, directed at Israeli audiences back home—and specifically at the mothers of IDF troops serving in southern Lebanon—are widely regarded as having been influential in generating public pressure on the Israeli government to withdraw from Lebanon.¹⁵⁸ "By means of the Internet," Ibrahim Nasser al-Din, a Hezbollah military leader, claimed, "Hezbollah has succeeded in entering the homes of Israelis, creating an important psychological breakthrough."¹⁵⁹ This quote appeared in an article published in a leading Israeli newspaper, which further reported how parents of IDF soldiers serving in Lebanon regularly visited the Hezbollah site to get a version of the news unvarnished by Israeli military censors. "I regard these sites as a legitimate source of information," one father was quoted as saying.¹⁶⁰ Much as the efforts of Sri Lankan authorities to suppress news of military defeats backfired disastrously in public relations terms, the same occurred with

Israel in 1999. Contradicting IDF reports that Hezbollah had returned the body of only one member of a team of Israeli marine commandos killed in a Hezbollah ambush, the group publicized on its Web site that the coffin contained the body parts of other soldiers as well. The statement generated a nasty confrontation between the commando's families and the IDF, with accusations of cover-up and duplicity undermining trust and confidence among the Israelis in its armed forces.¹⁶¹

Hezbollah, however, is not the only terrorist group to use its own television for propaganda and mobilization purposes. The widespread protests unleashed throughout Europe immediately following the arrest by Turkish authorities of the Kurdish terrorist leader Abdullah Ocalan, in February 1999, provides further proof of the reach and rapidity with which modern communications technology can rally the masses. Within hours of the announcement of his arrest, demonstrators swarmed onto the streets of Paris, Moscow, London, Frankfurt, Milan, Bern, Sydney, and more than a dozen other cities in response to pleas issued by the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) over both its Internet site and its London-based television station, Med-TV.¹⁶² The television station, founded in 1995, mirrors the ambitions of terrorists and insurgents throughout the globe today. "Our aim," in the words of the station manager, Sami Abdurahman, "is to present our Kurdish brothers across the world with the objective facts."¹⁶³ Or, as the American statesman Hiram W. Johnson, would have said: "The first casualty when war comes is truth."

Conclusion

In the final analysis, a terrorist movement's longevity ultimately depends upon its ability to recruit new members as well as appeal to an expanding pool of both active supporters and passive sympathizers. The role of effective communication in this process is pivotal: ensuring the continued flow of fighters into the movement, binding supporters more tightly to it, and drawing sympathizers more deeply into its orbit. "Without communication," Schmid and de Graaf presciently argued more than twenty years ago, "there can be no terrorism."¹⁶⁴ The revolution in terrorist communications described in this chapter has facilitated this process in hitherto unimaginable ways. Virtually every terrorist group in the world today, as previously noted, now has its own Internet Web site and, in many instances, maintains multiple sites in different languages with different messages tailored to specific audiences. The ability to communicate in real time via the Internet, using a variety of compelling electronic media—including dramatic video footage, digital photographs,

and audio clips accompanied by visually arresting along with savvy and visually appealing Web design—has enabled terrorists to reach a potentially vast audience faster, more pervasively, and more effectively than ever before. Indeed, the changing face of terrorism in the twenty-first century is perhaps best exemplified by the items recovered by Saudi security forces during a raid on an al Qaeda safe house in Riyadh in late spring 2004. In addition to the traditional terrorist arsenal of AK-47 assault rifles, explosives, rocket-propelled grenades, hand grenades, and thousands of rounds of ammunition that the authorities expected to find, they also discovered an array of electronic consumer goods, including video cameras, laptop computers, CD burners, and the requisite high-speed Internet connection. According to CNN investigative journalist Henry Schuster, the videos

had been part of an al Qaeda media blitz on the Web that also included two online magazines full of editorials and news digests, along with advice on how to handle a kidnapping or field-strip an AK-47 assault rifle. The videos mixed old appearances by bin Laden with slick graphics and suicide bombers' on-camera last wills and testaments. They premiered on the Internet, one after the other, and were aimed at recruiting Saudi youth.¹⁶⁵

The widespread availability of these sophisticated but inexpensive communications technologies, as this chapter also argued, has effectively shattered the monopoly on readily accessible information formerly wielded by conventional commercial and state-owned television and radio broadcasting outlets and the print media. The extent of the transformation is evidenced by the fact that today terrorist Web sites are as regularly consulted as they are cited (and publicized) by the mainstream press.¹⁶⁶ For some audiences, moreover, the sites maintained by terrorist movements and their sympathizers alarmingly present an increasingly compelling and indeed accepted alternative point of view. This was of course al Qaeda's purpose in creating its first Web site, www.alneda.com, and in maintaining a variety of successor sites since: to provide an alternative source for news and information over which the movement itself could exert total control. Identical arguments—claiming distortion and censorship by Western and other mainstream media—have also been voiced by sites either created by the Iraqi insurgent groups themselves or entities sympathetic to them.¹⁶⁷ “Western Propaganda Media Try to Shut Down albasrah.net! [*sic*],” the banner on one such site, www.albasrah.net, asserts. “Once again,” it argued, “the propaganda media have begun to spew stupid accusations against al-Basrah, the true aim of which is to smother the voice of Iraqi people and smother one

of the few sources of information on the unprecedented massacres that are taking place inside occupied Iraq in the name of ‘international law.’”¹⁶⁸

Indeed, the insurgency in Iraq has arguably emerged as the cynosure of contemporary, cutting-edge terrorist communications. For instance, according to analysts at the Alexandria, Virginia–based IntelCenter, to date, more than a dozen terrorist groups have produced their own videos.¹⁶⁹ At least half, however, are either indigenous Iraqi insurgent organizations or foreign jihadists fighting there. Since late 2003, a growing number of “mujahideen films” have been marketed for sale (mostly in DVD format) at souks and bazaars in Iraq and posted either in part or in whole on the Internet. The films variously

- depict scenes of insurgents using roadside bombs to ambush U.S. military forces on patrol in Humvees or firing handheld surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) at U.S. military aircraft flying overhead;
- impart practical, tactical advice to insurgents (for example: advising insurgents “to vacate the area no later than 10 minutes after launching an attack, before US forces zero in on their position”) and instruction in the use of weaponry and the planning and execution of attacks;
- transmit the last words of kidnapped Iraqis and foreigners about to be executed¹⁷⁰ and, in many instances, display gory footage of the executions themselves;¹⁷¹
- appeal for financial contributions;¹⁷² and
- perhaps most important, solicit recruits from the Middle East, South and Central Asia, North Africa, Europe, and even North America to come to Iraq to become “lions from the martyr’s brigade.”¹⁷³

These mujahideen films are but one manifestation of a much broader and highly sophisticated communications strategy. The more prominent insurgent organizations fighting in Iraq, for instance, have themselves established dedicated information offices that in essence function as “online press agencies,” issuing communiqués, developing and posting new content for their Web sites (often several times a day), and generally updating and regularly replenishing news and other features. “The Iraqi armed opposition appear to make a priority of communication,” two particularly knowledgeable observers of the insurgency in that country have written,

in ways that go far beyond the unique intention of terrorising the adversary. Combatant groups produce an astonishingly large and varied range of texts and images, which it would be wrong to reduce to their most

brutal types. Besides the threatening tracts there is an impressive body of strategic analysis, cold-blooded, lucid and detailed. Similarly, the most monstrous video sequences eclipse a wealth of films, sometimes of professional quality, extending from “lectures” in classical Arabic on the manufacture of explosives to “advertising” material put out by new groups making their first public appearance.

The insurgents’ intent is to explain and legitimate their use of violence (employing theological arguments and treatises, for example, to differentiate between “illicit terrorism” and “licit terrorism” and thereby justify their attacks); drive a wedge between the Iraqi people and the so-called collaboration authorities (e.g., the Iraqi interim government); undermine popular confidence in the ability of the Iraqi government and Iraqi security forces and the U.S. and coalition militaries to maintain order throughout the country; and, last, to facilitate communications between and among various groups in order to forge new alliances and cooperative arrangements, however tactical or short-lived.¹⁷⁴

Indeed, the IntelCenter analysts who both collect and study the aforementioned mujahideen films and also monitor the Internet for Iraqi insurgent communications believe that we are on the cusp of an emergent and potentially even more extensive phenomenon. “As video editing software, video compression, computer power, camera technology and Internet bandwidth continue to improve,” they argue,

the speed, sophistication and quantity of jihadi videos will continue to increase. This is also currently being driven by the sheer volume of jihadi operations in Iraq, which are providing an ample supply of material for new releases.¹⁷⁵

Thus the revolution in terrorist communications that has rapidly unfolded within the past few years is certain to continue. Its capabilities and products will likely also become increasingly more sophisticated in quality, content, and transmission capacity—and more numerous and pervasive than ever. The implications of this phenomenon are perhaps only now beginning to be understood. What is clear, though, is that as terrorist communications continue to change and evolve, so will the nature of terrorism itself. While one cannot predict what new forms and dimensions terrorism will assume during the rest of the twenty-first century, this evolutionary process will continue and will doubtless be abetted—and accelerated—by new communications technologies—as has been the case over the past decade.