

From Word-of-Mouth to Online Mass Self-Communication

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- **Two main arguments:**
 - I. Terrorists at all times recognized the importance of publicity—a “universal objective”—and made great efforts to utilize all kinds of communications to achieve that goal—from interpersonal and alternative media controlled by terrorist groups to mass communication or mass media (controlled by gatekeepers on top) to mass self-communication in the age of social media.**
 - II. Although research today is focusing on violent online extremism, rightly so, I suggest that we must not underestimate the importance of the traditional media (print, radio, television—including their online presence) in the terrorist propaganda calculus.**

Terrorists before the Invention of the Print Press: Interpersonal Communications

The Jewish Sicarii and Zealots (mid-1st century A.D.)

- The Sicarii sect attacked fellow-Jews who collaborated or tolerated Roman rule in Palestine. They stabbed their targets with short daggers in crowded places on the most holy days.
- The Zealots attacked Roman occupiers, again, when crowds were present.
- Eye witnesses would tell family members, neighbors, friends what they had seen and heard.

The Muslim Assassins (11th to 13th century)

- Members of the militant arm of an extremist Shia sect active in Persia they attacked and killed Sunni leaders and sometimes Christian crusaders with daggers in bright daylight and in front of many witnesses. Unlike Sicarii and Zealots who disappeared in the crowd after their attacks, the Assassins made no effort to flee the sites of their violence and were typically killed on the spot. They were precursors of suicide terrorists.

After the Invention of the Print Press

- **The Christian Anabaptists of Muenster (1530s)--a religious sect or cult established “The New Jerusalem.” Like ISIS more recently claiming to practice the only right Islam, this Anabaptist cult made the same claim for their version of Christian faith.**
- **For them, Martin Luther’s Reformation had not gone far enough in creating the only right Christian religion. The adult baptism was merely one of the group’s requirements to become a member.**
- **Bernard Rothman, their chief-theologian wrote,**
- **Now, probably, many are of the opinion...that God himself and his angels will come from heaven to punish the godless. No, my dear brothers, he will come, that is true. But the punishment must first be executed by God’s servants, and injustice justly punished as God has ordered.”**
- **Jan van Leyden proclaimed himself king of the New Jerusalem, introduced polygamy and enforced communal life.**
- **They forced the “godless” to leave the Anabaptist “kingdom” punishing others who stayed but refused adult baptism very harshly.**
- **It was terrorism in the name of God.**



- **They used inter-personal propaganda and utilized own printing press that was forcefully taken from established Muenster printer.**
- **The first case of a terrorist alternative press.**
- In a letter to the Anabaptists of Muenster Martin Luther, himself a gifted propagandist, condemned the sect's propaganda for "painting in brightness and color your devilish doings."
- **They did not last long; were as brutally punished as they had treated the "godless."**

The American “Sons of Liberty” (1765-1776)



- **They used all three modes of communication for their propaganda to intimidate the British and to radicalize colonists so that they supported the war of independence.**
- **Personal appeals (Sam Adams as propagandist-in-chief);**
- **Most newspapers supportive because of Stamp Act; their own newspapers**
- **Committees of Communication in all 13 colonies, all towns and counties on the same propaganda message.**
- **Their own terrorist actions were sugarcoated as heroic; those of the British subject to the worst spin.**
- **Adams—considered Father of public relations. See the Boston Tea Party**

- **How Did the pre-modern Terrorists fare with respect publicity/propaganda? (a universal goal)**
- **The Sons of Liberty were very successful in that they got a great deal of attention in newspapers all over the colonies and in their own, alternative print presses and pamphlets.**
- **In the process they intimidated the British and radicalized colonists in favor of the War of Independence—their ultimate objective.**
- **Sicarii, Zealots, and Assassins—did not further their ultimate causes but their propaganda was quite successful: They got a great deal of attention among Romans and fellow Jews.**
- **The Muenster Anabaptists' word-of-mouth and printed propaganda and their traveling recruiters were successful in getting attention of friend and foe, and recruited thousands, especially women.**

Modern Terrorist Waves (David Rapoport) and Additions

- **1. The Anarchist Wave –from ca. 1870 through first 2 decades of the 20st century)—revolutionaries/anarchists against monarchies in Russia/Europe and injustices in U.S.A.**
- **[more than a decade of fascist terrorism]**
- **2. The Anti-Colonial Wave building on right to self-determination strongest after WW II throughout the world.**
- **3. The New Left Wave—anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, pro still struggling national liberation movements in Middle East, Africa with high time late 1960s through 1980s.**
- **4. The Religious Wave (Rapoport) starting with the Iranian Revolution of 1979 reaching into present time.**
- **But parallel, the emergence of Right-Wing Violent Extremism (RVE) that only of late gets more attention.**

Comparisons between 19th/early 20th and 21. century terrorism/communication

In 1853, when Karl Heinzen, an early theorist of anarchist ideology and fierce advocate of terrorist strikes, self-published his pamphlet titled “Murder and Liberty”

he mocked the mainstream media of his time, daily and weekly newspapers, as mouthpieces of the ruling class and asked fellow-radicals to distribute his brochure “in all places, in letters, in clothes, in parcels, in warehouses...”

In 2013, when the first issue of the Al Qaeda magazine *Azan* was posted online, its editors complained about the “vicious propaganda” carried by the “satanic” international media.

“It is important that the masses of the Muslims be informed of the real nature of the contemporary battle.”

They assured readers that “*Azan* is a platform for the Muslims of the world to see the truth.”

160 years apart: same messages, different media

Anarchist Emma Goldman inspired anarchist violence



September 1901: President William McKinley is assassinated by anarchist Leon Czolgoz.

- **The perpetrator is an anarchist embracing the most extremist view of the movement: political violence is justified to create a better world.**

He was radicalized by reading anarchist newspapers and listening to anarchists' speeches. Among his idols was Emma Goldman, "the high priestess of anarchism."

- **He read Goldman's work and met her.**

Anwar al-Awlaki: Charismatic leader of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula inspired followers to carry out violence



December 2009. A passenger on Northwest Airlines Flight 253 from Amsterdam to Detroit tries to detonate plastic explosives hidden in his underwear. Fellow passenger foil the attempt.

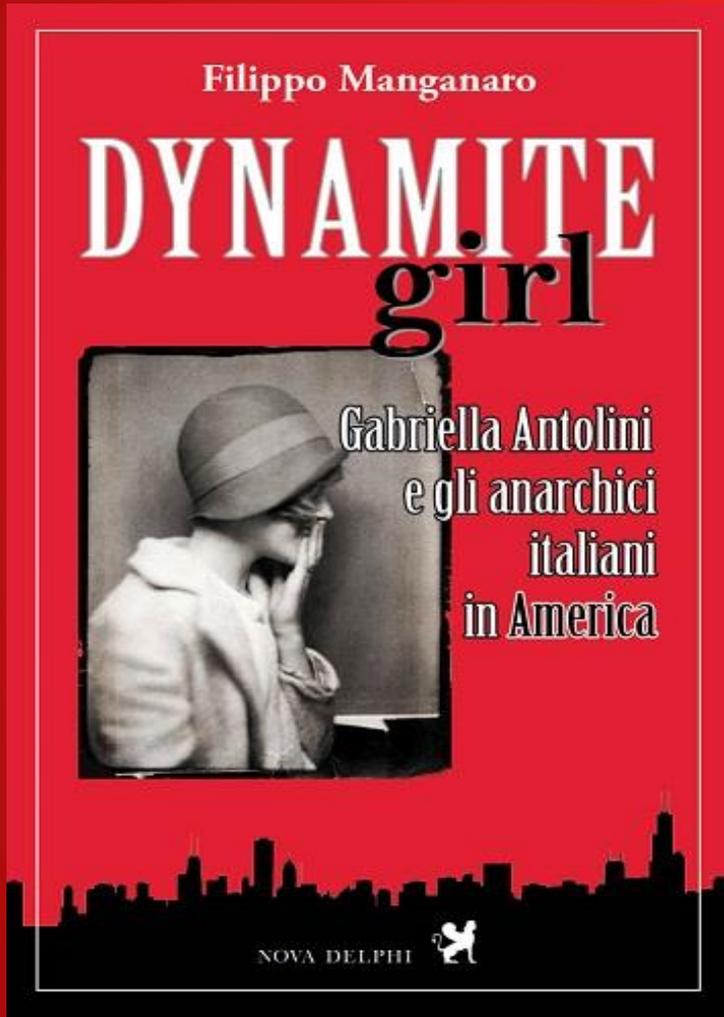
- **Omar Farooq al-Nigeri, a 23-year old Nigerian, was a graduate student in London, when he was influenced by online material, especially speeches by Anwar al-Awlaki.**

He traveled to Yemen, linked up with AQAP and met with al-Awlaki called “Bin Laden of the Internet.”

- **Although killed 2011 Awlaki remains influential online.**

Goldman and Awlaki—100 years apart—same messages—different media.

The Anarchist Dynamite Girl



In 1918, Gabriella Antolini (19) is arrested in a train from Youngstown to Chicago for assisting anarchists by transporting 36 sticks of dynamite for a planned attack in Milwaukee.

- Her family subscribed to the Galleanist newspaper Cronaca Sovversiva that advocated political violence. Also influence by family members.
- By age 17 she was a fierce anarchist leaving home and family to join the cause.

Shannon Maureen Conley, 19, of Colorado, was sentenced in 2015 to serve 48 months in federal prison for conspiracy to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization. Conley, a nurse and convert to Islam, met an ISIS fighter on social media.

The two became engaged and she prepared to travel to Syria.

Intending to fight if necessary she joined the U.S. Army Explorers (USAE) to be trained in U.S. military tactics and in firearms.

As she attempted to board the flight to Turkey, she was arrested by FBI agents.

The two girls—similar radicalization processes—only difference: types of communication

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1920 Wall Street Wagon Bombing (33 killed, more than 100 injured) with Galleanists claiming responsibility in a printed leaflet near the explosion site as newspapers prominently reported

**“Free the Political Prisoners or it Will Be Sure Death for All of You.
American Anarchist Fighters”**



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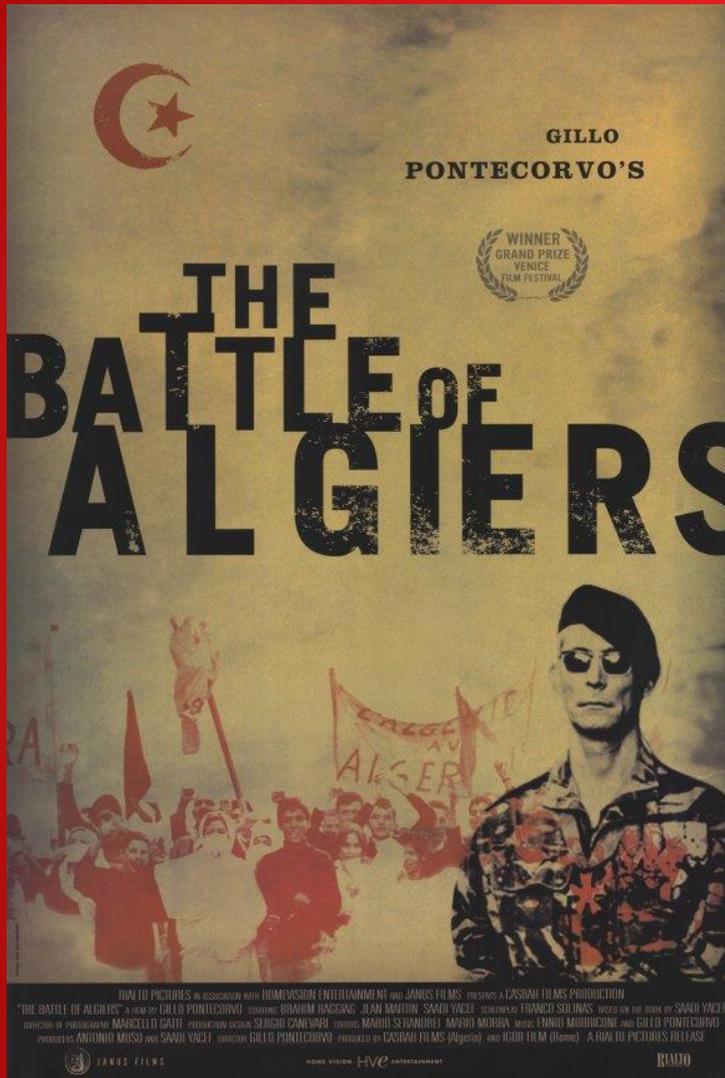
- **ISIS Claims Responsibility For Paris Attacks (headline)**
- **On Saturday ISIS claimed responsibility for Friday night's attacks in Paris that have so far left more than 120 dead. Released in French and Arabic, a[n online] statement from the Islamic State said that “soldiers of Caliphate targeted the capital of abomination and perversion...**
- **One of many thousands of mainstream media reports—print, radio, television.**

[Between Rapoport's anarchist and anti-colonial wave]

Benito Mussolini's and Adolf Hitler's post-World War I fascist movements in Germany and Italy carried out violence against political opponents before they rose to power by winning in the electoral arena. Both movements resembled modern-day terrorist organizations in that they had political and paramilitary or terrorist wings.



Anti-Colonial Wave. Example: The Algerian FLN



- **Confronted with French troops' military strength plus terrorist methods, the FLN fought both a guerrilla war and carried out terrorist attacks. See the Battle of Algiers.**

But whereas the French won the military war (including terrorist acts and torture) that lasted from 1954 to 1962, the FLN won the political war—and independence.

- **Propaganda played an important role in winning the political battle and had two target audiences:**

International audience: the United Nations, public and elite opinion in France, in in the rest of the world.

- **Domestic audience: Algerians whose support the FLN needed.**

- **International**

FLN cultivated international news organizations by

Accommodating reporters to cover conflict, accompany their mujahadeen; providing horrific images of civilian victims of French, mourning children taken by FLN fighters who carried cameras.

Leading TV networks and star anchors (in the U.S. CBS and NBC News)

Interviewed FLN leaders; covered prominently the latter's appearances at the United Nations.

The FLN, not the French government, won the international propaganda war thanks to mainstream media

- **Domestic**

Pro independence/anti-French posters and leaflets could not be disseminated openly but changed hands underground.

FLN propaganda was to a large extent a word of mouth effort. Occasionally, there were messages and images sprayed on streets and side walks.

The FLN's secret weapon was the "Voice of Algeria" or "Voice of Fighting Algeria" that began airing in 1956.

While the French managed to often jam the broadcast, more often than not Algerians received it at off hours.

Frantz Fanon
Les damnés de
la terre



Ello  actual

“Listening to the Voice of Fighting Algeria was motivated not just by eagerness to hear the news, but more particularly by the inner need to be at one with the nation in its struggle, to recapture and to assume the new national formulation, to listen to and to repeat the grandeur of the epic being accomplished up there among the rocks and on the djebels.

Every morning the Algerian would communicate the result of his hours of listening in. Every morning he would complete for the benefit of his neighbor or his comrade the things not said by the Voice and reply to the insidious questions asked by the enemy press.”

(From Fanon’s *A Dying Colonialism*)

The New Left Wave (1960s through 1980s): Example Germany's RAF

American and Western Europe's violent Marxist groups emerged at a time when television became a major news source but the leading print presses remained on top of the most important news organizations.

While their manifestos and manuals circulated among the inner circles of groups and wider, supportive audiences, the focus was on getting most extensive and most prominent coverage in the mainstream media.

The Red Army Faction was obsessed with media and differentiated between hostile and friendly press—both print and broadcast.

Leaders and rank and file members often responded to particular articles and corrected “false reporting” and “fascist material.” They wrote letters-to-the-editor to major news organizations and Deutsche Presse Agentur, the major German wire service, complaining about what they called biases against them.

Before going into the underground Ulrike Meinhof was a well-known, far-left journalist.

Thus, she knew well how the press worked.

For example, because week-end editions of newspapers tended to have the greatest advertising volume and the largest “news holes,” the RAF preferred to strike on days with the best chances of getting most extensive coverage.

But the RAF also understood the importance of self-communication which they practiced via newsletters, such as *Fizz* and *Agit*, pamphlets, and audio tapes.



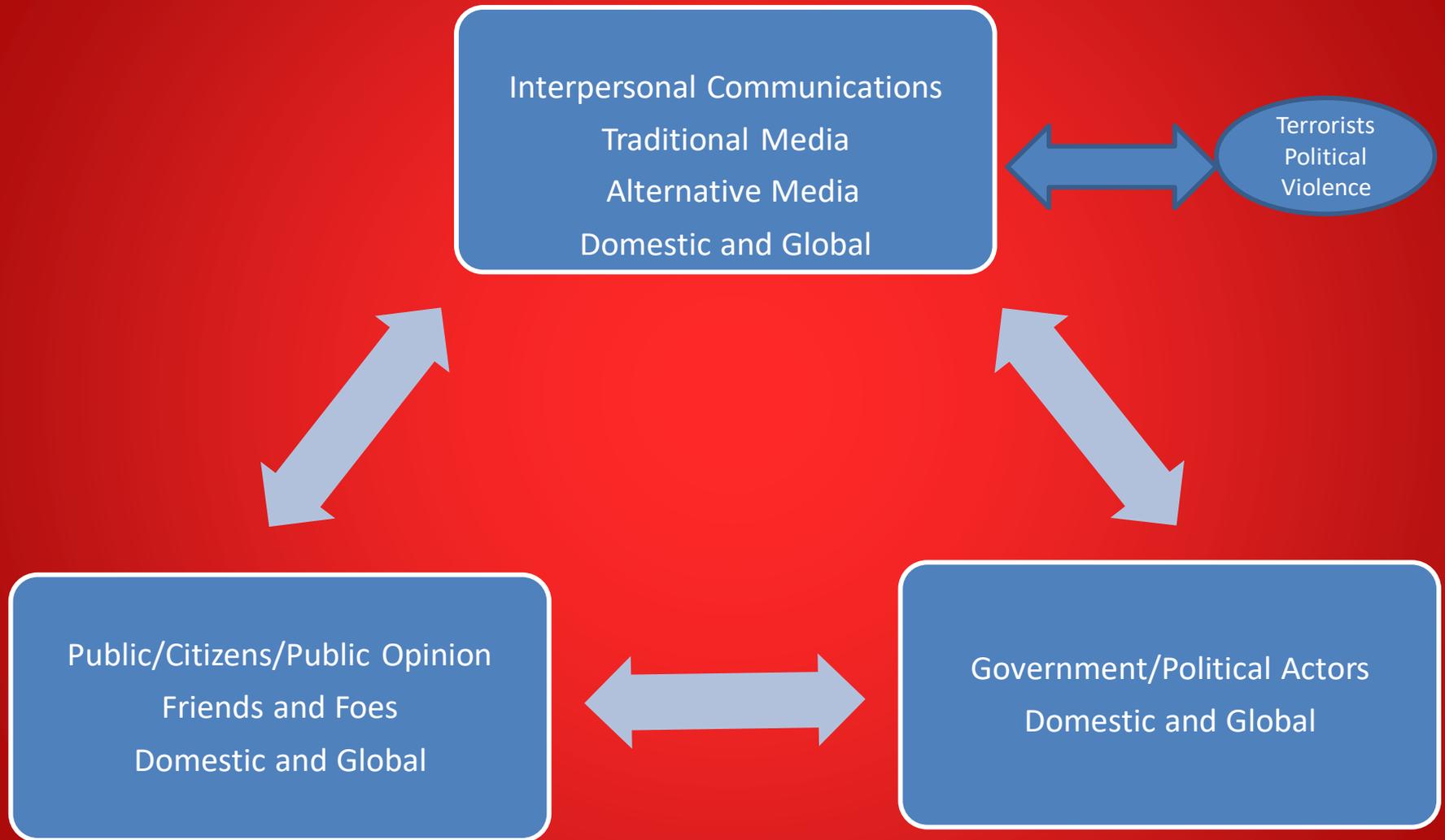
The Religious Wave (plus the Right-Extremist Wave)



What “Black September” had achieved at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games: Several days of around-the-clock global TV coverage became the model for the hostage holders during the Iranian Hostage Crisis (for and subsequent hijackings, hostage situations, during the 1980s and beyond.

Number one goal was to get television coverage.

Terrorism and Triangle of Political Communication



Why terrorists want publicity via mainstream media and via their own, alternative media-- they need ...

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(1) Attention, Awareness in attacked societies—precondition for intimidation and spreading fear and anxiety. Public pressure on governments.

(2) Recognition of Motives, Grievances, Causes, Justifications.

(3) Respect and Sympathy of those in whose name they claim to act; win supporters, even recruits.

(4) Achievement of a quasi-legitimate status—especially on the part of leaders.

From Simple Bulletin Boards to Sophisticated Social Media

- **The notorious neo-Nazi/White Supremacy group “Storm Front” was in 1990 first with establishing a bulletin board site on the Internet.**
- **Religiopolitical groups and right-extremist organizations followed the example and developed more sophisticated online sites.**
- **Advent of social media platforms (starting 2005) brought revolutionary advantages to the propaganda muscles of violent online extremism.**

Utilizing the Internet for

- 1. Mining the Internet for valuable information;**
- 2. Planning and coordinating terrorist operations;**
- 3. Radicalizing and recruiting;**
- 4. Waging psychological warfare;**
- 5. Taking group rivalries public;**
- 6. Raising funds to finance their operations;**
- 7. Providing instructions for lone wolves, cells.**



8. and most importantly:
Social media allows terrorist groups and lone actors to report their own violence in words, pictures, and even live stream their videos.

The mainstream media then report on what terrorists themselves report.

Latest Example: New Zealand mosque shooting.

Earlier extremes: Mainstream reporting on ISIS images of executions of hostages.

How should mainstream media cover terrorist attacks?

In spite of terrorists' ability to report their violence on social media, most of those they reach tend to be already visitors to their accounts.

Take the video that the New Zealand terrorist shot while killing innocents and his posted manifesto.

Relatively few people saw it during and right after the attack.

After removed by the major social media platforms, only those familiar with extreme right-wing sites that provided video and manifesto had access.

The vast majority of the public learned about terrorists' own postings via the mainstream media.



In free societies the free press has the responsibility to inform citizens.

Of course, terrorist incidents/t-groups need to be covered by the press.

The question is not whether to report but **how** to cover terrorism and **how much**.

How much coverage? Example: James Foley



Mainstream Media Reporting on ISIS before and after Foley Beheading (Articles about or mentioning ISIS)

	Month Prior to James Foley Beheading Video (July 18-August 18, 2014)	Month Following James Foley Beheading Video (August 19-September 19, 2014)
New York Times	124	375
Newsweek	3	15
CNN.com	45	296

Mainstream Media: Reporting on ISIS before and after Foley Beheading
(Number of Articles with Islamic State, ISIS, or ISIL in Headline)

	The Month Prior to James Foley Beheading Video (July 18-August 18, 2014)	The Month Following James Foley Beheading Video (August 19-September 19, 2014)
New York Times	3	99
Newsweek	1	5
CNN.com	31	95

- **Most people did not see the beheading video. On YouTube the clip was quickly blocked. Although available on some sites, most people did not want to see or could not find clip.**
- **But everyone who watched television, listened to radio, visited online news sites, or looked at the front page of a newspaper was aware of the brutal execution.**
- **ISIS propagandists got the attention they wanted.**
- **While this is an extreme example, there is plenty of research demonstrating that for decades terrorism has been over-covered at the expense of equally or more important problems and issues, such as poverty, inequality, etc.**

How to Cover Terrorism?



Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern set a good example when she refused to speak the perpetrator's name.

Regardless what terrorists write or say, they do want to be known—want their moment in the sun of national and international news coverage.

Deny them that. Deny them what McVeigh, Breivik, Roof, and others “achieved” in this respect.

Do not allow terrorists to portray themselves as victims by dwelling on their stated grievances and justifications.

Do not magnify why suicide bombers die to kill, focus on the victim(s).

There are scholars rejecting the notion that heavy news coverage of terrorist incidents can cause copy-cat strikes.

- **The strongest arguments against linking media content and copy-cat incidents are made by those who fear that such a connection could strengthen the hands of governments in efforts to curb or alter terrorism-related content and thereby interfere with freedom of the press.**

I share those concerns and oppose censorship categorically. Yet these concerns must not prevent us from considering possible connections between media content and terrorism contagion.

- **Brian Jenkins, a noted terrorism scholar, wrote, "Initial research tentatively suggests that heavy media coverage of hijackings, kidnappings and other hostile seizures carried out by terrorists increases the likelihood that similar incidents will occur in the period immediately following. A RAND analysis of embassy seizures during the 1970s showed them occurring in clusters, clearly suggesting a contagion effect."**

In the last five decades or so, there were clusters of hijackings, kidnappings, truck bomb attacks on facilities, embassy/other diplomatic mission take-overs, suicide terrorism, beheadings of hostages, and, most recently, vehicle ramming...



Period with Most Deadly Vehicle Ramming Attacks

Date	Place	Vehicle	Plus Knifing	Killed	Injured
July 2016	Nice	Truck	No	84	Hundreds
Dec. 2016	Berlin	Truck	No	12	Dozens
Jan. 2017	Jerusalem	Truck	No	4	10
March 2017	London	Car	Yes	5	10
April 2017	Stockholm	Truck	No	4	15
June 2017	London	Van	Yes	8	48
June 2017	London	Van	No	1	10
August 2017	Charlottesv ille	Car	No	1	19
October 2017	Barcelona	Van	No	13	130
October 2017	Cambrils/S pain	Car	Yes	1	6
October 2017	New York	Truck	No	8	11

- **There have been many attacks on churches, synagogues, and mosques. More recently, several “spectacular” strikes on places of worship:**
- **Christchurch mosques; perpetrator’s manifesto referred to several other killers (Anders Breivik, Dylan Roof) as inspiration.**
- **Several locations Sri Lanka: churches; the perpetrators referred same justifications for attacks that ISIS publicizes.**
- **Poway, synagogue, the perpetrator’s 8Chan post referred to Pittsburgh synagogue shooter Robert Bowers and Christchurch killer Pittsburgh mosque shooter Brenton Tarrant as inspirations.**
- **Virus of terrorist contagion does not radicalize but rather inspires extremists to copy-cat tactics.**

Summing up:

The three major forms of communication (interpersonal, mass communication, and mass self-communication) coexist today, they interact and complement each other. And just as terrorists of the past, their contemporary brethren utilize whatever technology is available.

In my view, in spite of the effectiveness of terrorist alternative online communication means, mainstream media, print, television, and radio along with their online presence, are still important terrorist publicity goals.