Chapter 17
Questioning Media Responsibility during Terrorism

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ABSTRACT
The media's dual role during times of terrorism can be as useful as the most effective security and political counterterrorism measures and can be as harmful as exacerbating terrorist events to the worst humanitarian disasters. Media decision-making processes, therefore, are integral to achieving more desired outcomes. This chapter questions the effectiveness of media performance during times of terrorism through the examination of their decision-making processes in terms of rationality and responsibility. The numerous media decisions that are usually made under severe stress during times of terrorism require adherence to both ethical standards and rational thinking. Strategic and goal-directed decision-making that is based on rational choice approach and game theory can help enhance the quality of media decisions. Ethical and socially responsible media performance is fundamental for effective communication. Interwoven, responsible and rational media decision-making are integral to the effectiveness of media decision-making during times of terrorism towards achieving more desired outcomes.

INTRODUCTION
In any terrorist attack, the media may cover what happens, the actors involved, whether anything could have been done to prevent the event, and the people or institutions held accountable, to the extent that “[p]olitical leaders, government officials and first responders would find themselves under siege by the media” (Bergin & Khosa, 2007, p. 1). Media reactions to terrorist acts are not less influential than political counterterrorism measures in de-escalating threats to public safety. However, the media’s role during the terrorist events can be considered a double-edged sword through which the terrorist event may be contained or exacerbated into more violence and destruction. In fact, “[w]hat the news media do cover may well contribute to the problem of political violence rather than to its decrease” (Held, 1997, p. 195). The media can either help overcome the state of uncertainty, misunderstanding, and miscalculation that prevail in a terrorist event or provoke violence. For example, while “[c]lear, rapid and accurate information provided by the media can...
Several theorists have investigated decision-making performances under conditions of stress or uncertainty (e.g., Eid & Fyfe, 2009; Eilon, 1979; Nicholson, 1997; Snyder & Diesing, 1977; Williams, 1976). However, there are significant gaps in research on effective decision-making regarding counterterrorism (e.g., George, 2003; Lebow, 1987) and its impact on the public (Lee & Lemyre, 2009). The research on terrorism tends to study immediate issues: “a great deal about the manifest symptoms of terrorism without ever really delving directly into the roots of the problem” (Silke, 2004, p. 210). This problem is amplified with the global reach a terrorist can achieve when the roots and motivations of terrorism include international goals. Terrorism becomes transnational when “an incident in one country involves perpetrators, victims, targets, institutions, governments, or citizens of another country” (Enders & Sandler, 2004, p. 121) and when “terrorist groups either want to achieve international goals, such as fighting ‘American imperialism’ all over the world, or are groups that see a greater chance of attaining their national goals by moving beyond their own frontiers” (Frey, 2004, p. 6). Therefore, terrorist threats require effective responses. This can be achieved through effective decision-making that is both ethical and rational (Eid, 2008a). This chapter questions the effectiveness of media performance during times of terrorism through the examination of their decision-making processes in terms of rationality and responsibility.

**MEDIA AND COUNTERTERRORISM DECISION-MAKING**

Communication, in general, is a decision-making process (Eid, 2008a). In any conflict situation, including terrorist attacks, communication can help define the structure of a conflict so that adversaries can perceive accurately the relative values of the interests at stake when making a decision: “Communication helps to establish the ‘rules’ of the game in a confrontation, so that the adversaries share common assumptions about the kinds of actions that are legitimate and those that are tacitly, if not formally, prohibited . . . Communication may minimize the likelihood of miscalculation” (Williams, 1976, p. 182).

The media, in particular, play a fundamental role in the decision-making process by communicating messages and information about/to the involved actors (terrorists, policymakers, and publics). The media decision-making during terrorist events occurs under conditions of high tension and severe stress, which may negatively affect the functioning of the media and consequently their decisions. Therefore, it is important to look into these decisions and search for ways to enhance the decision-making process.

Journalistic decisions, for example, by writers, presenters, editors, and producers shape news-writing and determine the nature of the final product. Personnel are faced with various choices at various junctures of news production and make numerous decisions in this process (e.g., Dennis & Ismach, 1981; Zinsser, 1998). These decisions are often made under the constraints of time and space, and also economic and political considerations (Zelizer & Allan, 2011), and they vary with circumstances (Wittebols, 1991).

Primarily, knowing what the decision is helps to introduce the process of decision-making as a whole. A decision is “a choice of action—of what to do or not do” (Baron, 2000, p. 6). While many scholars have defined the term “decision,” the clearest definition in relation to the process of decision-making is Ofstad’s. “To say that a person has made a decision may mean (1) that he has started a series of behavioral reactions in favor of something, or it may mean (2) that he has made up his mind to do a certain action, which he has no doubt that he ought to do. But perhaps the