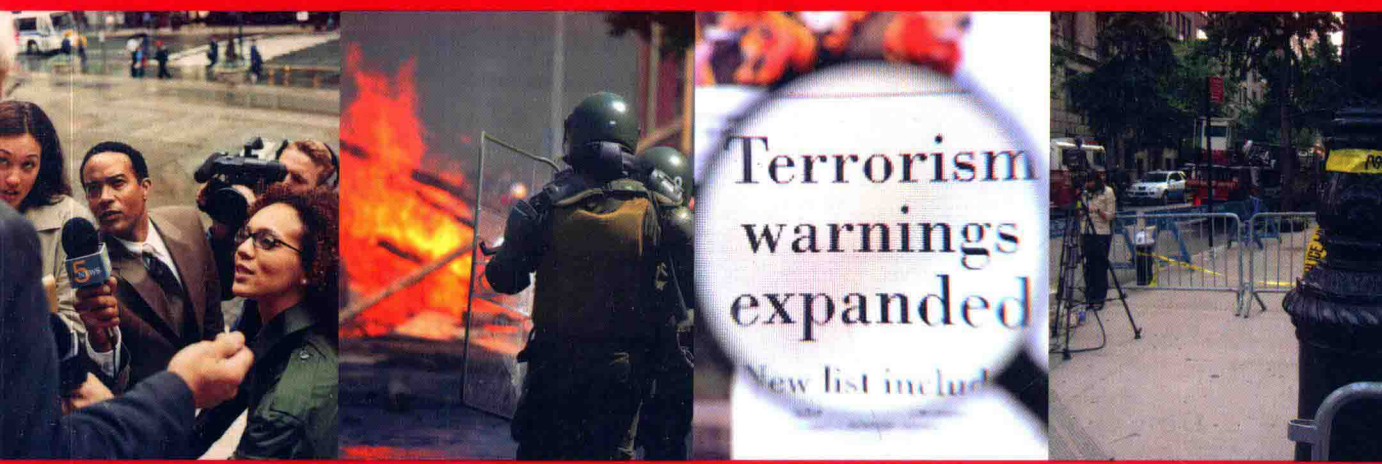
TERRORISM & COMMUNICATION

A Critical Introduction



JONATHAN MATUSITZ

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A Critical Introduction

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TERRORISM & COMMUNICATION

Preface

OVERVIEW OF THE TEXTBOOK

Terrorism and Communication provides a conceptual look at terrorism from a deeply communicative perspective. This is the first textbook to examine terrorism in relation to all major aspects of communication.

An important premise of this textbook is that terrorism is essentially a message. Communication is indispensable for a terrorist cause, not just to garner attention, but also to ensure its longevity and very survival. The victims' identities are not necessarily important to the terrorists, as long as the victims are members of a large group and the attack sends the intended message to the much larger population (i.e., an entire nation and possibly the entire world). Each chapter isolates a particular dimension of terrorism and communication, exposes the contexts and processes involving the main participants in terrorism (i.e., terrorists, targets, media, and audience), and examines the ways in which terrorism has, and will always have, the same objective: to send a message to cause change. Throughout all chapters, about twenty areas of communication are covered: two-way communication (i.e., David Berlo's Model of Communication), mass communications, media theory, visual communication, semiotics, intercultural communication, social constructionism, political communication, rhetoric, persuasion, linguistics (e.g., euphemisms, etc.), group dynamics, organizational communication, globalization, international communication, new media, interpersonal communication, nonverbal communication, conflict management, and crisis communication. Definitions of key terms, examples, data, facts from experts, theories, case studies, topic coverage, speech excerpts, and models and tables are provided to enhance and enrich understanding of how terrorism functions within communication contexts.

Another important premise of this book is that a symbiotic relationship exists between terrorism and the media. Without established methods of communication, terrorists depend on the media to communicate their objectives and interpret their signals. The media are considered tools for terrorists, providing the familiar "oxygen for publicity." After all, the media become very instrumental in forming interpretations of events. As terrorism scholar Walter Laqueur (1976) explains it, "[T]he media are the terrorist's best friend. The terrorist act by itself is nothing; publicity is all" (p. 104). On the other hand, media outlets can boost their ratings by covering terrorist incidents.

A third important premise is that globalization, which allows international communication channels to be exploited to the fullest, has given terrorism unprecedented

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ubiquity. The Internet, in particular, enables terrorism to travel with just a few mouse clicks away. And thanks to borders becoming increasingly porous, GTT (global transnational terrorism) offers non-state actors weapons and organization structures never used before. One organizational tactic is the use of autonomous sleeper cells, which require practically no leadership or vertical structure.

PREVIEW OF ALL CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 introduces the complex definition of terrorism. At best, there is a "most universally accepted" definition of it, which is the following: *terrorism* is the use of violence to create fear (i.e., terror; psychic fear) for (1) political, (2) religious, or (3) ideological reasons. This chapter also compares old and new terrorism: while old terrorism strikes only selected targets, new terrorism is indiscriminate; it causes as many casualties as possible. In Chapter 2, terrorism is described as a dynamic, two-way communication process between a sender (the terrorist) and a receiver (the audience). The chapter argues that the real objective of terrorism is persuasion. To understand how the communication process works and creates terrorism for the audience, three forms of communication of terrorism are analyzed: social noise, the signature method, and the conduit metaphor. Chapter 3 highlights the symbiotic relationship between terrorism and the media. Terrorists need the media or else their cause would be less known. Conversely, a terrorist act that just happened or that is going to happen may be a major scoop for the media; the audience ratings will likely increase. In fact, government officials have a tendency to associate the media with terrorists' success or failure. Because the media select events that are newsworthy, terrorists select targets and locations that will be given high priority by news organizations. Examples of this are the Munich massacre and the Oklahoma City bombing.

In Chapter 4, terrorists are described as participating in a dialogue with various audiences beyond their immediate target. Terrorism is a spectacle, like a form of drama or theater. The audience is the public character of terrorism: it is both the second party (immediate target of the message) and the third party (target beyond the immediate target of the message) of terrorism. Chapter 5 explores how terrorism is framed by the media and examines the ways in which conventional frames about terrorism can influence public opinion. Framing gives priority to facts, images, or developments over others. Media interpretations of terrorism have become one-sided: terrorism has increasingly come to refer to acts associated with agents and supporters of foreign-based terrorist movements such as Al Qaeda, rather than with the violence of homegrown activists and radicals. Also part of the framing strategy is censorship. For example, in the Afghan War, there have been instances of military-imposed censorship on reporters.

Chapter 6 discusses terrorism as a social construct. The construction of terrorism is what people agree on through consensus. Language is essential to the social construction of reality. A striking response to 9/11 was the upsurge of symbolism across the U.S. (e.g., patriotic slogans), which led to an American collective identity: patriotism, memorialization, and celebration. This chapter also explores the pivotal role that culture plays in shaping how terrorism is perceived.

Chapter 7 looks at the use of stereotypes in response to terrorism. There are diverse ways for stereotyping the enemy: guilt by association, linguistic profiling, and so on. A direct consequence is stigmatization (an invisible sign of condemnation) of the "Other"; Arabs and Muslims have been stigmatized as a result of guilt by association. This chapter also explores related issues including discursive imperialism (a type of discourse that berates the enemy's culture), racism, and stereotyping in Hollywood movies.

In Chapter 8, terrorism is interpreted through rhetoric. This chapter examines rhetorical appeals used in both the Global War on Terror (GWOT) and the Iraq War, and explores rhetorical strategies used in response to terrorism such as Othering, enemification, evilification, Orientalism, Occidentalism, or the "us vs. them" dichotomy. The chapter offers in-depth analysis of the rhetorical strategies of the Bush and Obama administrations' counterterrorism efforts, as well as rhetorical strategies used by terrorists themselves.

Chapter 9 describes the use of euphemisms for terrorism and how they play an active role in the lives of many Americans. Euphemisms, in place of natural language, can be used to obscure issues through deliberate deception or to provide tactful language. For example, the act of bombing has been romanticized with nicer language. Ultimate consequences of euphemisms are obscurantism (intentionally keeping the facts from becoming known, which has a direct effect on our thinking process) and glossocracy (government or ruling through distorted language).

In Chapter 10, terrorism is described from the perspective of group dynamics. Many people become terrorists through indoctrination techniques, which are very efficient in small groups and Communities of Practice (CoPs). The role of Social Identity Theory (SIT) fits well to organizations like Al Qaeda, where new members are taught to hate the out-group (i.e., America and the West) and to avenge humiliations against the ummah (the global Muslim community). In addition, terrorist groups tend to rely heavily on symbols to solidify their in-group cohesion. For example, for Hamas, key symbols have contributed to Palestinian identity. These symbols include Zionist presence, the rise of Islamic awakening, and the signing of the Oslo Accords.

In Chapter 11, terrorist organizations are described through an organizational communication perspective. For instance, in the pyramidal (or hierarchical) structure, leaders are at the top and passive supporters at the bottom. In the horizontal structure, where there is no pyramid of command, the organization is divided according to particular tasks and loosely organized cells. With respect to leadership, two leadership types are described: authoritarian leadership and charismatic leadership. The important role of terrorist cells is something to behold. The clandestine cell structure has vague leadership and organizational configurations. It protects the cell and gives a group certain secretiveness. Likewise, a sleeper cell lies dormant until it wakes up or decides to conduct missions.

In Chapter 12, Diffusion of Innovations (DoI) theory explains how innovations (i.e., ideas or movements) are diffused through certain channels over time across society and diverse cultures. Opinion leaders and change agents are diffusers of ideas: they sway people's attitudes or behavior in a desired fashion and, in the process, infuse innovative extremist ideologies into entire populations. Put simply, most of the jihad problem today can be traced back to Iran, beginning in 1979. The urge to change the world was diffused across all Muslim and Arab nations. A more extreme version of DoI is mimetism, the theory

explaining the capacity of imitation (to mimic), which one mind diffuses to another mind. A meme can be disseminated through vertical transmission or horizontal transmission.

Chapter 13 looks at the impact of globalization and the Global Village of cyberspace on terrorism. Global transnational terrorism (GTT), along with its violent non-state actors (VNSAs), is analyzed. Globalization, thanks to international trade and transportation, has given new opportunities for terrorist groups to obtain and use better and deadlier weapons. Modern-day technologies diffuse power and level the playing field for terrorists. Terrorism also plays a huge role in cyberspace. Terrorism exploits the Global Village. Terrorists also communicate via predetermined codes that are generally transmitted through old personal messenger systems. Such a method is steganography (an ancient practice of concealing messages within texts, pictures, and objects). Lastly, terrorists can turn into cyberterrorists. *Cyberterrorism* is the use of information technology (e.g., the Internet or computer systems) as a method to mount attacks.

Chapter 14 examines interpersonal communication in terrorism, beginning with an exploration of hostage negotiation. One psychological and communicative method for solving a hostage crisis is relational development, the idea that relationships evolve into stages as a result of interpersonal dialogue. Because relational development was used during the Moluccans' hijacking in the Netherlands in 1975, the remaining hostages were safely released. Negotiation is discourse. The second part of the chapter is about the role of interpersonal communication in interrogation of suspected terrorists. In any case where interrogation has the objective of extracting reliable information, a rapport-based method is first recommended, using an approach of personal appearance (including appropriate age), good conduct, and tactful communication.

In Chapter 15, both international communication and international dialogue are important when facing terrorists one-on-one. Negotiating with terrorists is difficult as parties may have different objectives and cultural backgrounds. Various tactics and strategies in negotiation are listed and described. The concept of third-party intervention can be useful in that an individual (or team of people) can help the conflicting parties manage or resolve it. Another important method is diplomacy. A specific type of diplomacy is multi-track diplomacy, the combination of five track diplomacies: Track I, Track II, Track III, Track IV, and Track V. For instance, Track II diplomacy is celebrity diplomacy, in which a rock star like Bono will step in to improve inter-civilizational diplomacy.

Chapter 16 explores how crisis communication responds to terrorism, and how it may be used to improve terrorism preparedness. Crisis response through the web and movable phones is also discussed in this chapter. The chapter also examines intelligence about terrorism, and the ways in which intelligence may be thwarted by both misinformation (inaccurate information that is disseminated unintentionally) and disinformation (deliberately inaccurate information, including the spread of fabricated intelligence).

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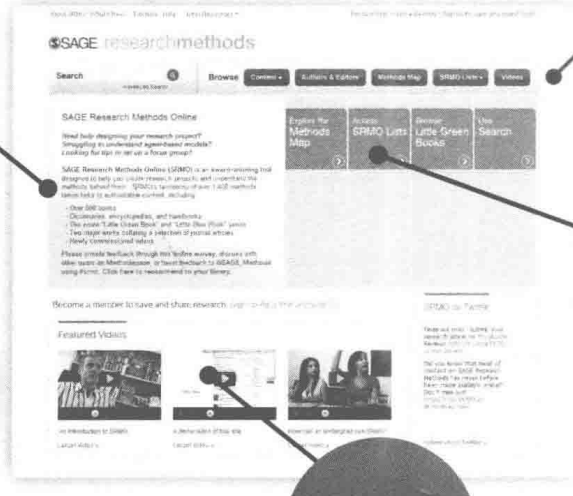

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