

# Media and Journalism in an Age of Terrorism



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Edited by

Renaud de la Brosse and Kristoffer Holt

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



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This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-3312-3

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-3312-7

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# FOREWORD

## BY PETER DAHLGREN

### LUND UNIVERSITY (SWEDEN)

As an institution, as a set of practices, and as an ensemble of media content essential for the lifeline of democracy, journalism is always "in transition" – always evolving, like society itself. However, the past two decades or so have been a particularly stressful time for journalism, in both the established Western democracies as well as the newer struggling ones. In the newer democracies, it is often the explicit curtailment of freedom of expression by state authorities and the lack of resources for journalistic endeavours that stand in the way of a journalism that can help foster democratic development – even if such problems are never fully absent in the West. Overall, though, there a number of other forces at work globally that converge to alter the shape of journalism; in recent years the word "crisis" is often heard in discussions about its current state.

To briefly identify just some of the more prominent vectors of change, media policies have veered towards less regulation and more market dynamics. The political economy of media industries – with their growing concentration of ownership – demands larger and quicker profits, with the attendant decline in allocation of resources (not least for personnel) and pressure to popularize content; the drift towards "infotainment" is nothing new but it has been increasing. Editorial control is drifting over to the accounting office.

Also, the contours of journalism as a profession have become more blurred as the field interfaces and overlaps all the more with public relations, advertising, and strategic political communication; "opinion journalism" is expanding at the expense of reporting and analysis. The consequences here are not least an erosion of professional identities, rendering increasingly problematic the questions of what journalists should be doing as well as – and even more fundamentally – who is and who is not a journalist.

The new digital technologies have been an immense boon for journalism but they have also engendered many new issues, including the dilemma of the definitions of journalism. Thus, the increased Twitterization of journalism as well as the rise of various genres of "citizen journalists" have proven to be ambivalent developments,

sometimes helping to extend the reach and accuracy of journalism and at other times undermining its professionalism, merging with advocacy and activism of all colours. From another angle, today's complex media infrastructure offers easy ports of entry for actors whose goals are anti-democratic: "net trolls" can create chaos with falsehoods, hate mongers can harass and threaten, and, not least, terrorists can recruit online as well as spread propaganda in mainstream media.

Further, also in the wake of digital developments, media audiences, including those for journalism, have become heterogeneous, more segmented, more mobile. Political communication has become increasingly strategic, often targeting specific niche audiences, thereby eroding what we traditionally understand to be shared public spheres that comprise the major bedrock for the dynamics of democracy.

Obviously, much more could be said in this vein. However, this little glimpse of the shifting contingencies presently reconstructing journalism can serve as a backdrop when we turn our attention to terrorism and consider journalism's relationship to it. Terrorist activity strives for destabilization within democratic societies; this has required the development of strategies for response on the part of a number of major institutions, including journalism. Journalism's confrontation with terrorism is thus shaped by its contemporary turbulence. Yet, as is sometimes underscored, "crisis" does not have to mean a termination, an ending, but rather a moment of change, of new possibilities. In the context of journalism, it can even mean a positive resiliency, opportunities for creative developments.

And that brings me to the volume at hand, edited by Renaud de la Brosse and Kristoffer Holt, which so well illuminates journalism's struggles to respond to terrorism. For we see in this fine collection many of these strands weaving in and out of the chapters: issues of regulation and state control, the suitable degree of independence of journalism vis-à-vis the state, questions of editorial control, of citizen-journalistic sources, journalistic professionalism and values, digital challenges and potentials, and questions of how best to relate to audiences – to what extent and how should coverage be popularized (mostly for economic reasons) – how best to inform without spreading unnecessary fear or lapsing into ideological rhetoric? Even in established democracies, the sense of emergency generated by terrorist acts can often lead to a diminished independent stance for journalism vis-à-vis the state – journalism may become mobilized to help facilitate "security". Or it may be actively muzzled with the argument that this is a necessary security measure. How can or should journalism navigate these difficult waters?



The various chapters offer analysis, debate, reflection; they raise many fundamental questions, including how exactly do we define the concepts of "terror", "terrorism" and "terrorist"? These terms have become established in the vocabularies of politics and journalism but their meanings are not always so self-evident, and may in some contexts even embody ideological dimensions. And further, these terms often become unjustly attached to whole groups or populations, particularly Muslim people and the religion of Islam. Overall, the key questions offered in this book by the editors and their colleagues serve as outstanding springboards for contemplation and discussion – and provide some signposts for answers.

That this contribution builds on efforts from both academic researchers and journalists makes it all the more cogent. These two professions, both with their roots in the Enlightenment ideal of striving after the truth, make use of different methods, work under different time frames, and in some ways manifest different "cultures" – that can at times even have difficulty understanding each other. Yet here they coalesce so well, with their different voices contributing to a unified whole – one that strives to develop journalism in difficult times.

29 Oct. 2018

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In Kalmar, Sweden, media researchers and journalists from across the globe gathered to share experiences and discuss *Journalism in a world of terrorism*. The topic proved to be improbably current as the terrorist attack in downtown Stockholm occurred just weeks prior to this conference in the spring of 2017.

We would not have been able to go through with this important conference without valuable support. With our deepest gratitude, we thank our sponsors:

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Regional Federation in Kalmar County  
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Kalmar County Government  
Council of Europe  
Newspaper Barometern OT  
Swedish Public Radio Kalmar  
Fojo Media Institute  
The Institution for Media and Journalism  
Linnaeus University

# INTRODUCTION

DR RENAUD DE LA BROSSE

LINNAEUS UNIVERSITY (SWEDEN)

AND DR KRISTOFFER HOLT

GULF UNIVERSITY FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (KUWAIT)

This book is not a litany of the many terrorist attacks that have occurred over the last five years, nor is it a value judgement on how the media have reported on these events. Its ambition is to question the issues at stake in emerging journalistic practices and to raise a number of subsequent ethical questions. In 2017 Linnaeus University took the initiative to organize an international conference focusing on journalism in a world of terrorism – terrorism in the world of journalism. Our aim was to understand what it means in 2018 to report on terrorism in different national contexts. The conference (held 9-10 May, Kalmar) offered a unique opportunity for academics and journalists to come together in order to share experiences, discuss and reflect on the numerous dilemmas journalism in the world of terrorism has to cope with. Accordingly, this book depicts the wide diversity of approaches as well as reports the richness of the dialogue between practitioners and researchers – which constitutes the overall originality of this joint venture project between the Department of Media and Journalism and the Media Institute Fojo.

Indeed, conflicts and terrorism nowadays constitute a field of study particularly conducive to assessing the role of media in contemporary democratic societies. The same also applies for societies engaged in transition and democratic consolidation processes, which are simultaneously facing the threat of terrorism (as is, for example, the case of Tunisia, Niger, Algeria and Morocco – countries from which some of the participants came).

Some key issues were particularly under scrutiny: How does terrorism affect the media and their coverage of these events? Are the media an integral part of the strategy of terror deployed by the main actors (lately almost exclusively from Islamist extremist groups)? To answer these crucial questions, academics and professionals certainly had to examine all facets of the existing links and interrelations between the terrorist

phenomenon and the media. A common experience articulated by researchers and journalists alike is that conflicting crises, as well as terrorist attacks, will necessarily affect reporting because of their sensational manifestations – it is impossible to not tell the story even if it might add to the pain of victim countries.

The reality is that currently the media market is over-saturated and in response to this, we as observers are witnessing the development of crude tactics that aim to capture the attention of the public. Recently there has arisen a form of dramatization of facts, or a phantasmagoria of the terrorist phenomenon by the media, which constitutes a problematic tendency in itself and whose harmful effects are real. It is an understatement to say that an unhealthy relationship is at work here, especially in the attempts to cover the occurrence of terrorist events live.

The various national political scenes are increasingly marked by the predominance of the terrorist attacks, a new political reality is thus emerging – and it is of course first and foremost the media's responsibility to make it understandable and analyse it through the coverage they deliver to the public at large.

In this complex process characterized by significant changes, in particular within the political field, media products participate in forging the unconscious and collective representations: the media always provide their audiences with the reading keys for the messages that are emitted as they “give life” to the various actors and their identities. It is primarily the task of the media – given the role that is theirs in democratic regimes – to provide a reading grid, and an intelligibility, of the tragedies caused by terrorism and conflict.

But how is it possible to ensure that the narrative construction of such events is not accompanied by the risk, always present, of being exploited in one way or another, either by the states or by the terrorist actors, simply by the act of relaying their official statements or their proselytizing? Here lies a trap the media and journalists must do everything they can to avoid falling into. Their credibility as providers of meaning and sense-making in this new reality is at risk.

To collect, produce and disseminate information in a context of conflict and terror is all but straightforward. From this point of view, as media researchers and as professional journalists, it could be very interesting for our respective communities to apprehend these social facts as revealing the role played today by the media in modern democratic societies or in those undergoing democratization.

In this respect, participants in the conference "Journalism in a world of terrorism" have collectively raised significant questions. Thus, this book

aspires to start to answer questions posed to the media, to journalists and to society as a whole.

The contributions published in this book give an account of the vigour of the debates and the diversity of ways to apprehend the terrorist problem from different societal contexts. Without aiming at completeness, one can nevertheless list some of the most recurrent questions:

- Can there be a consensually accepted definition of what the terrorist phenomenon is?
- Is there a boundary between what constitutes a terrorist act and violent protests of ideological essence?
- How much professional autonomy do journalists enjoy when covering conflict and terrorist events? To what extent can they fall under the control of actors such as states and terrorist groups?
- Can this new context lead to things like censorship and self-censorship?
- And, on the other side, if the freedom of covering these types of events exists, what dangers and pitfalls exist, particularly in the case of live broadcasting?
- Is it possible to professionally cover some terrorist actions without also contributing to their visibility, which can result in a form of legitimization?
- What are the main challenges and obstacles faced by journalists in the field and in the newsroom when they report such events? What choices do they need to make? With what consequences?
- Are the media able to enlighten public opinion and influence the way an act of terrorism can be perceived both nationally and internationally?

This work of common reflections hopes to make more intelligible to everyone the ins and outs of a phenomenon that certainly seems to be here to stay, and that affects or will affect all societies without exception.

First of all, this book will have achieved its primary purpose if it provides material for a better understanding of terms used in a journalistic context and, hopefully, a more careful use of the words “terror”, “terrorism”, “terrorists”, etc. Because the role of journalism is to report, certainly not to scare. The role of journalism is to report independently, not to become a propaganda tool.

Second, the contribution of this conference should be sought out for the fact that it allowed for comparing approaches between the academic world and the journalistic world, thus helping to facilitate the

understanding of each other's fields and objects. All society might benefit from this dual perspective.

Third, our comparative approach, taking into account different societal contexts through an international perspective, has helped us understand what is happening on a larger arena. As a matter of fact, we can use each other's experiences as mirrors when looking at ourselves.

Finally, whether one likes it or not, the threat and act of terrorism are henceforth of a perennial character on which it is therefore necessary to advance our knowledge. It is even more important for us to see how far we can pursue our reflections on this issue in the medium and long term. And, why not, by setting up a network of practitioners and researchers, capable of enlightening society and the public on the issues and challenges associated with appropriate and quality coverage of the terrorist phenomenon. It is not possible, for example, to make it understandable without contextualizing it in its entirety and in the necessary debates on the political response to oppose it.

The book starts in Part I with reflections from practitioners who have faced the issue of dealing with terrorism and media reporting in different ways. Chapter one contains the transcript of an interview with Can Dündar, (former editor-in-chief of the Turkish daily *Cumhuriyet*), who spent 92 days in prison based on accusations that his journalistic work was "acts of terrorism"; now exiled, he participated in the conference through Skype. The second chapter is an interview with Ulf Johansson, who was head of news on Swedish public service TV during the terrorist attack on Drottninggatan in Stockholm, April 7, 2017. In the interview he talks about the challenges he faced during the hours after the attack, when everyone's attention was focused on the news providers for information. The next piece in this part of the book is written by Nina Hjelmgren, who highlights the personal experience of a journalist who reports from the scene of terrorist attacks. In chapter five, Nouri Lajmi, who is president of the Tunisian HAICA (an independent authority for the regulation of broadcasting communication) shares insights about the implications of terrorism on the field of media regulation in a country that is in transition to democratic rule.

Part II of the book offers insights from different research perspectives. In chapter six, Renaud de la Brosse offers insights from an analysis of reports from the Tunisian case of the Bardo attack on 15 March 2015. De la Brosse points to a number of shortcomings (regarding, for example, undue attention to the "spectacle" aspect of a terrorist attack, uncritical use of sources, absence of impartiality, etc.) in the news reporting and argues that journalists are generally ill- or insufficiently equipped to report facts

relating to terrorism in a satisfactory way. This perspective is further illustrated by Suvojit Bandopadhyaya and Jakob Kristensen Baek, who present, in the following chapter, a Twitter-based case study, illustrating the risks of news sourcing through social media and how it can turn mainstream media into potential tools for “message amplification” which could indirectly aid terrorists in their aims. While news media certainly risk becoming complicit in the terrorist goals by disseminating images of terror (and also of propaganda material like images of camaraderie among terrorist fighters), there is also the risk of engaging in discourse that stigmatizes innocent people.

Daya Thussu argues, in chapter eight, that the concept of terrorism can be used by politicians and governments to promote geopolitical and economic interests through “mediated narratives and stereotypes” of Muslims as a threat, pointing to the tendency among journalists worldwide of over-emphasizing the religious underpinnings of actual terrorist acts while at the same time underreporting the overtones of political resistance. Similarly, in the following chapter, Jamie Matthews problematizes the consequences of news reporting about terrorism for Muslim minorities in the UK, especially highlighting the problem of dealing with governmental anti-terrorism discourse in a journalistically sound way. Matthews evaluates initiatives taken by British journalists to give Muslim “suspect communities” the “right of reply” in order to balance reporting on terrorism – and concludes that this ambition remains, even after a series of attacks in 2017, especially in elite media, but the bulk of journalistic reporting seems to adhere to official discourse that tends to lean more towards a hard line, and sometimes an “exclusionary” stance.

The study of journalists’ relationship specifically to official anti-terrorism initiatives (like the Moroccan anti-terrorism strategy SMAT) is further analysed in a different context in chapter ten by Abdelatif Bensfia, who presents results from a study of Moroccan journalists – but in this chapter more from the angle of how journalists and the media can actually contribute to fighting terrorism while at the same time also pointing to the risks of “over-mediatization”. In this context, Suvojit Bandopadhyaya’s theoretical chapter on terrorist decision-making makes a significant contribution to understanding how media act as an important resource for terrorists (especially online) in linking ideology to actions – especially by producing and disseminating (in the case of ISIS, especially, through their online magazines) a discourse of legitimization of terrorist onslaught by framing it as acts of “resistance” against other allegedly tyrannical or oppressive powers. This chapter also points to the fact that online communication has provided terrorist organizations with (for them)

valuable resources, not only in terms of reaching possible recruits but especially as a means of mediating themselves as “spectacle”, which in turn leads to high interest from all other media actors.

In chapter twelve, Rune Ottosen, on the other hand, takes a critical look at the Twitter feed in Norway about a possible terror threat in July 2014. Ottosen looks specifically at how the Twitter feed reflected the public discourse about this threat that was dramatically announced, but never explained to the public, even after it was called off by the police. In the next chapter, Maud Woitier presents an analysis of the legal consequences for journalists in France in relation to the declared state of emergency after the attack on Charlie Hebdo on January 7, 2015. She raises an important concern related to the stricter control of journalistic practice that has emerged in spite of other laws, protecting journalistic freedom. Finally, in the last chapter, Pernilla Severson points to the need for a critical perspective when using big data methodology to study the phenomenon of terrorism.



# **PART I**

## **JOURNALIST PERSPECTIVES**

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTERVIEW WITH CAN DÜNDAR EXILED FORMER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF CUMHURIYET, ISTANBUL

#### **What is happening in Turkey?**

Can Dündar is a Turkish journalist, author and former editor-in-chief of Cumhuriyet, a daily newspaper based in Istanbul. He now lives in exile and spoke to the conference via Skype about the repression of journalists and journalism under the guise of "anti-terrorism" in Turkey. In May 2016 Can Dündar survived an assassination attempt, witnessed by multiple reporters in front of the Istanbul courthouse. Later the same day, he was sentenced to five years in prison on a charge of "revealing state secrets" but he appealed the verdict. He had earlier been incarcerated for 92 days on a charge of carrying out "an act of terrorism", only to be released when the Constitutional Court declared that it was "an act of journalism". Can Dündar is the recipient of the International Press Freedom Award 2016 from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).

Can Dündar was invited to the conference but due to security reasons he was unable to leave his place of exile. Nina Hjelmgren, journalist and project manager at the Media Institute Fojo, hosted his digital participation in the conference.

**N H:** *Hello, how are you? Do you still have your energy?*

Yes, of course. Much more than ever.

I am in exile, away from my country, my paper, my family, my wife, but it is part of the business in Turkey. If you are a journalist in a country like Turkey, you have to be prepared for all these kinds of suffering.

**N H:** *If you look back a couple of years, did you see this coming?*

After the last referendum in Turkey, I am much more optimistic about the future. Because it showed that half the country is still resisting Erdogan. It

is really important to know that 24 million people voted against him, very important. The "No" campaigners were also under threat, and that is why it is such a big victory.

**N H:** *Even more journalists and public workers have lost their jobs.*

Yes, I mean, this is the worst period of time in our history. Especially for journalists, it is like hell nowadays. We now have 150 journalists in jail, which makes Turkey the biggest prison for journalists in the world. A horrible record.

It is very dangerous to be a journalist in Turkey, but it is crucial in such times of crisis. I am in a way proud to be a journalist in this time. In Sweden or Norway, it is easier to be a journalist, but if you are under threat you have to cope with that, deal with death threats even. We are risking our lives to give the audience information. For me, it is even more meaningful today to be a journalist in my country, that is why I am optimistic and willing to do my job every day. More than ever now.

**N H:** *Are you finding ways to be published inside Turkey?*

Unfortunately, I cannot write for my paper now. That can put colleagues who are in jail at risk. The government, unfortunately, is holding them hostage. Anything I write can endanger their lives in Turkey – and my wife's life. On the other hand, I am trying to reach my readers, my audience, in many different ways, by Internet, Twitter, Facebook – by every channel I try to reach them.

**Courtney C. Rasch**, American journalist and advocacy director for the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ): *I was hoping you would tell the audience the creative ways journalists use to resist in Turkey.*

It is very difficult to meet with the audience in times of censorship and self-censorship. When you arrest a journalist, you may silence hundreds of them at the same time, it is so dangerous. Unfortunately, there is a cloud of fear over the country that we have to deal with. We are working in different ways to bypass censorship. Last year, I was in jail and found ways to write for the international press. I would find ways to hand my work to my lawyer, even if it does not seem possible now. And if I could do that from jail, of course, I can do it now, I mean, reach my audience. It is really important not to stop the communication. They block the Internet sometimes, then we find other ways to publish some material. We have reporters there but also ordinary people, carrying their phones with them to demonstrations. In today's world, it is difficult to stop communication.

**N H:** *You also said you need to be careful not to jeopardize the situation for your colleagues and for your wife and son? That must affect your writing, I should think.*

Yes, it is a very hard decision, but I talk to my wife, she lets me continue.

**N H:** *What happens next with you?*

Hopefully we go back to our country. It will not be easy for Erdogan in the coming years. It depends on our struggle, and your support, really, it is so crucial. You must support those people and their struggle against a kind of state terrorism.

**N H:** *Support, how?*

In terms of press for example, you can go to Turkey and cover their cases, their trials. Every day we have a media case in Turkey. Your resistance would be very important for them. Or you can publish their stories in your country's papers. You can invite their families, you can write letters to them. Not only media. There are trade unions, parties, and politicians. What about your parliamentarians? Try to get in touch with the politicians in jail. And academics, hundreds were fired. You can invite them or find opportunities in your universities. You have to get in touch with the civil society. The governmental level is not accessible any more. That solidarity would be really important for us.

**C C R:** *You seem optimistic even though the most massive crackdown on media in modern history has swept over Turkey. We know by looking at the world that usually the crackdown on journalism comes before the consolidation of power and rise of totalitarianism. So, what gives you hope, and do you think there can be democracy without a free and independent press?*

In our building, at the entrance, we have a security check. There are pictures of those journalists killed by terrorist attacks; four of the pictures are still there. Every morning when we enter, we bear in mind that this can be our destiny. It is so easy in Turkey to kill a journalist. I was attacked last year, survived thanks to the braveness of my wife. While the attackers are free now, they have confiscated my wife's passport, she cannot leave the country. Knowing that, still being alive is a big advantage as an oppositional journalist! It is enough to make me optimistic! So, we have to stay alive and struggle more. Of course, we have to be careful, but being pessimistic does not help at all. We have to be optimistic. I believe in the tradition of democracy in this country, and I know that many people support this and human rights in Turkey.

**Walid Al-Saqaf**, media researcher in Sweden: *I have been in Turkey for some time; we are proud of you! Your name means "soul" and it really reflects the soul of journalism. We do not know what will happen now, after the referendum. What is your outlook in terms of the laws that might change that have an effect on the freedom of expression? Capital punishment may be introduced again. We don't know how it will affect journalists. Is there a fear of that and how can the international community support you?*

In terms of the penalty issue, I don't think that Erdogan is capable of bringing it back. He is just bluffing in my view and trying to convince the Europeans that he has a strong hand to do anything he wants. That is the play he is using with the European world. Unfortunately, Europe supported him very much from the very beginning and is responsible for his rise. This refugee deal is helping him a lot. It is a dirty deal that allows him to blackmail Europe, using these 3 million refugees, blackmailing Europe by saying that he could, at any time, let them return to Europe. That fear makes Europe very fearful of him. The only thing they can do is take this advantage away from him, isolate *him*, but not Turkey. There is another Turkey, too. Get in touch with this other Turkey, be in solidarity with those people in any channel and any way.

**Rune Ottosen**, professor of Journalism at Oslo Metropolitan University in Norway: *I am a member of the Norwegian PEN board, and we have campaigned for Turkish journalists during the last year. We can put pressure on our own governments. Turkey is a member of the European Council and NATO. These organizations are supposed to be supporters of democracy. Our leaders should support democracy by defending those who suffer this dictatorship in Turkey. Start with ourselves, ask our governments to do something!*

**N H:** *Is there anything you want to add, Can?*

Yes, it is a very crucial moment. The problem is this: Europe wants to punish Turkey by isolating it, they want to punish Erdogan. But Erdogan is not a European guy, any kind of isolation from Europe would help him, not Turkey. And that is the dilemma we have for the moment. You can, of course, pressure your governments to isolate Turkey, but you must isolate Erdogan from Turkey. We support the European ideals of press freedom, democracy, human rights, and equality between men and women. Erdogan represents other ways. You must find a way to support the people who oppose the dictatorship. Isolating Turkey from the European family is not the way. We have to find ways to support the people of a democratic

Turkey and get rid of this oppressive government, and I believe your conference will find different ways to differentiate those two.”

**N H:** *There are quite a few journalist students in the audience. Please explain to them what it takes to become a good journalist with the kind of endurance that you have.*

I just want to suggest something that is very important today. I am thinking about supporting ways. We appreciate all the hard work others are doing to support us, like the Norwegian PEN, but unfortunately the Turkish government doesn't care. So, we have to find ways to make an impact on them. The only possibility I can think of is this: We are working on a project with French colleagues, we can follow up on stories that were censored in their country. Make them more visible worldwide.

Take my story for instance; it was about Turkish intelligence service trucks trafficking arms illegally to Syria. I was stopped, censored, imprisoned, and now I could not go beyond the story. But let's say that a couple of other international journalists follow up that story, see where those arms were heading or coming from. That would be a message to the Turkish government that if you touch a journalist, you may find many of them following up on that story and a message to the journalist that wrote the story that she/he is not alone!

In this way, we can show our solidarity internationally. I can, for example, follow up a story on the corrupt leader of Azerbaijan or some other place where there is oppression. There will be journalists supporting them – our journalist colleagues – and following up their stories. It is a much more concrete way to make it known internationally. In a global world, if the censorship is globalized, we have to globalize the support for the free media.

We can isolate journalists but not their stories.

## CHAPTER TWO

### INTERVIEW WITH ULF JOHANSSON HEAD OF NEWS ON SWEDISH PUBLIC SERVICE TV DURING THE TERRORIST ATTACK IN STOCKHOLM APRIL 7, 2017

#### **Terrorist Attack in Stockholm, April 7 2017**

Ulf Johansson was then head of news on National Public TV, editor-in-chief of the most important source of information. In Sweden, public radio and TV are the sources people trust the most. Interviewed by Nina Hjelmgren.

*What were you doing Friday April 7 when it was getting closer to 3 pm?*

I was in the last meeting that day, a meeting on how to implement company strategy on the news floor.

*And you were looking forward to the weekend?*

Yes, I was.

*You learned in a dramatic way what happened in downtown Stockholm.*

It was very fast, it happened at 2.53, the meeting room is close to the news desk, I was there by 3. From there on, I realized at 10 pm that the whole afternoon had just flashed by.

*What was the first information you received?*

There have been a lot of dramatic accidents throughout Europe but early on it seemed to be more than someone who had lost control of their car. Very early on, we realized this was something else.

*How did you realize that?*

The first thing we did was to get our team out there, not too far away. We got first-hand reports quickly, both from eyewitnesses but also from our own staff who were quickly on the scene. We understood and could report that the truck had been driven along a long path in the walking zone.

*Downtown Stockholm. Busy Friday afternoon. People going home. Many on their way to the subway station. Like 11-year-old Ebba, who was on her way to meet her mother at the subway. Pedestrian area. A really busy area in downtown Stockholm. This truck came at high speed down the pedestrian street. We learned later on that another driver tried to drive in front of him to scare people away, not to be injured.*

*It took a while before you knew what was really happening. So many rumours in Stockholm at the time, about shootings. Which was the first rumour you heard?*

There were rumours about different shootings around Stockholm. And this has been discussed afterwards. Was it right for the media to report on other things apart from the truck? There were rumours in different places around Stockholm. Hard decision to make. Report or not. Experiences from other places like Paris, where different things happened in the city. We decided to report on one shooting when we had a policeman saying they had reports of a shooting, it had not been confirmed.

*And you reported only having this one source, a policeman who had heard of a shooting?*

There were different kinds of reports on that shooting.

*Was there a shooting?*

No, and we were criticized about that. I still though believe that it was correct to report from our point of view. We reported that we had information about it but that it had not been confirmed. And as soon as we had the information that there had not been any shooting at that place, we reported that many times. We had questions all the time about the shootings. "Why don't you report on all the shootings?!"

*Because that was all over social media?*

Yes. And we said: No, we aren't reporting because there haven't been any shootings.



*But you agree that there is a dilemma, to be reporting on something that has not been confirmed?*

Yes. We actually had footage from our cameraman, recording the voice of a security man shouting: "You have to leave because there are shootings". There were other rumours as well. We had a rumour about a man who had blown himself up; never reported on that. It did not happen.

*Were you stressed?*

I was very stressed. I would say that the first hour was one of the toughest, standing in the middle of the newsroom, deciding what to publish and what not to publish. And it is very hard pressure when something like this happens.

*Anything you regret?*

Most the questions that followed have been about the single shooting we reported on. I still think that we would have been even more criticized if there had turned out to be an actual shooting. In the way we reported that, we did the right thing. The balance is difficult.

*Four people were killed and 15 injured in the attack. What happened after the attack, I dare to say that I have never seen anything like it. I am from Stockholm, I love the city, even more now, seeing how people answered to this attack with open doors and love. It was wonderful to see.*

*Thank you, Ulf!*

## CHAPTER THREE

### “MINUTES AFTER THE ATTACK: ‘YOU ARE ON LIVE IN FIVE’”

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All alone. Surrounded by chaos. Scattered body parts. Wounded people. Blood. Cries. The odour of burned flesh. You heard the explosion in the distance. What happened? Your smartphone is in your pocket. "Can you be on in five?" Minutes, that is. Live. What do I report?

It was a sunny day, like it normally is in Kabul in June. Together with Dr Zekria, my interpreter, I was strolling in the central bazaar. Not really buying anything, just looking. The busiest part of the bazaar was the exchange market; the value of the Afghan currency was falling and people were eager to get their hands on dollars.

"What do you say about going for lunch, have some Kabuli Palaw?" I asked.

*Bang!!!!*

In a tenth of a second, the air was thick with anxiety.

Everything stopped.

Everybody was quiet.

Focus. Concentrate. Listen. Look around without moving.

I was new on the scene, had no idea what was happening. Everybody around me seemed to know exactly what to do.

"A rocket. It was a rocket that hit the bazaar, not far from us."

"Let's go and see what happened," I said, and started to rush.

Dr Zekria's hand on my shoulder stopped me.

"Wait. They can load six. Most of the time they only load four. We must wait and see."

The frontline to the Taliban at the time was just south of the capital and they would target civilian areas like the central bazaar and the

university. For no other reason than terror. How many had died this time? How many were wounded?

Everything was covered with dust and a small fire was burning where the rocket had landed. Four people were dead and 14 wounded, some very badly. Three of those were children. People were doing what they had to do; wrap the dead for funeral within 24 hours, get the wounded to a hospital and clean up all the debris.

Within an hour, life was back to what seemed to be normal.

I had never before experienced a rocket attack. I had never before seen people wounded by rockets. Had it not been for Dr Zekria, I would not have known what to do. I would most likely have put others and myself in even more danger.

Yes, I am a journalist but this was nothing to report back to Sweden about; this was nothing out of the ordinary in Kabul, Afghanistan.

**This is one of the journalistic dilemmas. The perception of war and terror differs depending on where and when it occurs. Afghans? Does anyone back home really care? No, not if only Afghans are wounded or killed in Afghanistan.**

At the time, June 1996, the Taliban were not yet known as terrorists in the world community; they were a warring faction created and supported by Pakistan, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia to fight Ahmed Shah Massoud, who, with his ragged soldiers and without world support, refused to give up. He even had to blow up the narrow entrance to the Panjshir valley in his effort to secure a small area in the north-eastern part of the country. The Taliban ruled the rest of Afghanistan together with Al Qaida. The Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, and Osama bin Laden were brothers-in-law.

“I stopped going to work in my store. Stopped leaving my home. I never knew who I would see hanging, hanged from one of the traffic posts on the way to work. Sometimes a neighbour, sometimes a relative,” the gentle man in Herat told me when I visited in 2002, after the fall of the Taliban.

“Here, in Herat, the Al Qaida Arabs ruled during the Taliban time, assassinating civilians by hanging. Some were shot at the football stadium. People passing the stadium were forced to go in and watch.”

Is that not terror?

**No!**

A very normal reaction to bad news is denial, “No, it can’t be true!” Anyone who has received that phone call knows that. Some people react

by becoming totally passive, even freezing when experiencing something terrible; others are rational and take action.

**Do you know how you would react when you experience something horrible? A journalist has to know that.**

Like, for example, on January 13, 2018, when a government employee in Hawaii sent out a false alarm, warning of an incoming missile attack. According to the *Washington Post*, he had misunderstood that there was a drill underway and believed that a ballistic missile had actually been fired at the state. "No, it can't be true" was most probably the most common initial reaction, followed by panic and wild fantasies about North Korean missiles. The message blaring "BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT INBOUND TO HAWAII. SEEK IMMEDIATE SHELTER. THIS IS NOT A DRILL" went uncorrected for an agonizing 38 minutes.

It is vital for a leader of a civil society to remain calm and trustworthy. The current US President has, through his choice of words, inflicted such a sense of insecurity in citizens that many actually believed the message to be true.

**Denial and panic do not work for journalists. Critical thinking, yes, at all times. And checking facts and sources.**

### **A Norwegian Terrorist?**

A colleague at Norway's National Radio was planning to leave early this Friday afternoon, July 22, 2011, on the eve of his vacation in Thailand. His suitcase was already packed.

Then the unimaginable happened. An explosion in downtown Oslo. What on earth was going on? He left the radio station to find out. He had never seen anything like it. Shattered glass. Blood. Wounded bodies. Or were they dead? He was to go on air, report on the explosion. What to say? What did he know? Not much.

He tried talking to the police, believing they would be a reliable source. But he talked to numerous police officers who all had different information and realized they were anything but reliable sources. He heard of another possible explosion. How could he confirm that? He had never been in an atmosphere like this before. This was peaceful Norway!

All he knew was that he could only report on actual facts, facts that had been confirmed, nothing else. He did not want to add to the speculations. There were enough rumours racing around the capital as it was.

This is one of the most challenging parts of being a journalist, to report live about an attack when only the attacker knows the story. Initially, no one else has the full picture. You only know what you see in front of you.

You cannot trust other, secondary sources, what other people have seen or heard, without checking them out.

Standing out there in the middle of the street, surrounded by chaos, how do you check your sources?

**You only report what you know for sure. Once you falter, you lose your credibility as a journalist. It takes a long time to earn the public’s confidence as a journalist but takes only seconds to lose it.**

No, there was no second explosion. It was the department stores’ display windows that came crushing down due to the pressure wave from the first explosion.

Eight people were killed by the car bomb placed in downtown Oslo, near the government offices. Over 200 people were wounded.

Who could be behind this?

In 2011, social media had started to play a part in sharing information. A mother who had received a disturbing text message from her son contacted the radio station. Her son was at the youth camp arranged by the ruling Social Democratic party on Utøya, an island outside Oslo. He had heard gunshots. On Utøya, 560 people had gathered for an annual meeting, most of them were adolescents. One man, Anders Breivik, shot and killed 69 of them and wounded more than 100 before he was stopped.

He had placed the car bomb downtown before boarding a ferry to Utøya, carrying his weapons.

Initially, Anders Breivik was not referred to as a terrorist, or the attack a terrorist attack. He was called a lone madman, his motives unclear.

Norway was wounded, deep. One of their own had caused this harm. A right-wing extremist with political motives. It took a while to get the whole picture. It will take even longer for the wounded society to heal, if it ever does.

## **Terror Wreaks Havoc**

Terror creates sudden chaos, instils fear and horror in people going about their daily lives. It is a weapon to inflict insecurity and pain on ordinary people. When they are commuting to work, sitting in their classrooms, shopping in the malls, sunbathing on the beaches or attending concerts with friends. In places like these:

**Madrid, Spain, March 11, 2004.** Ten bombs packed with nails and dynamite exploded on four trains heading into central Madrid in the early morning rush hour, three days before the general election in Spain. A total of 191 people were killed and nearly 1,800 people wounded, according to

*The Guardian*. ETA, a Basque group labelled a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union, and al-Qaeda were the original suspects cited by the Spanish government. ETA denied involvement. Militants who were based in Spain but inspired by al-Qaeda were designated later as the prime suspects.

**Beslan, North Ossetia, Russia, September 1, 2004.** Masked men and women wearing bomb belts burst into the courtyard of Beslan's School Number One as a ceremony was finishing. The siege of the school lasted three days, Russian authorities were blamed for using too much force during the rescue operation. A total of 334 people were killed, among them 186 children. A total of 750 people were wounded. Why? The captors wanted Russian troops out of Chechnya.

**London, Great Britain, July 7, 2005.** Four suicide bombers with rucksacks full of explosives attacked central London, killing 52 people and wounding hundreds. Four devices detonated, three on the Underground and one on a double-decker bus. The deadliest attack, according to the BBC, occurred on the Piccadilly Line between the King's Cross and Russell Square stations. Three of the bombers were born in the UK to Pakistani parents and had trained in terrorist camps in Pakistan.

**Mumbai, India, November 26, 2008.** Twelve coordinated attacks were carried out across Mumbai in the space of four days, leaving 164 dead and over 300 wounded. Ten young men belonging to Lashkar-e-Taiba had sailed from Pakistan armed with AK-47 assault rifles and carrying backpacks full of ammunition to attack the city's landmark sites.

**Nairobi, Kenya, September 21, 2013.** Militants stormed the Westgate Mall, Nairobi's premier shopping centre, throwing grenades and firing at shoppers. They killed 67 people and wounded 175. The Somali-based terror group, al-Shabaab, claimed responsibility for the attack. Westgate Mall reopened two years later.

**Sousse, Tunis, June 26, 2015.** Seifeddine Rezgui came walking down the beach outside the five-star Imperial Marhaba Hotel, carrying an umbrella. Under which he was hiding a Kalashnikov, with which he shot and killed 38 people and wounded 39. When he reached the reception area of the hotel, he reportedly threw a hand grenade. According to *The Guardian*, Rezgui, a Tunisian, was trained in the main ISIS camp in Western Libya at Sabratha.