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Globalizing Terror

Francis A. Beer and G. R. Boynton

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1 In the aftermath of the attack on September 11, 2001 British Prime Minister Tony Blair said, "Never forget how we felt watching the planes fly into those twin towers." There is nothing extraordinary about his statement until you think about what he did not say. He did not say the people of New York City watched. He did not say the people of New York and New Jersey watched. He did not say Americans watched. He was speaking to and for the world, and he said that we watched and felt. The change in the speed of communication over the past fifty years has produced a revolution. For the first time in human history the shot was heard around the world.

2 Terror has existed through human history, but it has become a critical political issue since 9/11. The political use of terror, terrorism, is the subject of a growing library of work. Amazon lists almost 4000 books for terrorism and terrorists, including five encyclopedias of terrorism. There is also an extensive literature in scholarly journals and the popular press. Among other things, this work describes the psychological profiles of terrorists; the extent to which they are rational or irrational; the political, social, economic, and cultural environments that encourage them; public reactions

to terrorism; possible and probable future terrorist scenarios; and strategies for controlling future terrorism (Healy et al. 2002).

3 The visual media have provided a feast of terrorist coverage, allowing the world to move from reading about terrorism to, as the Prime Minister said, watch it - in real time and in replay. The globalization of terror is something new. It goes hand in hand with the globalization of the media. The creation of new media technology has created a public space in which political actors may perform: Terrorists are some of the actors who can now play on a global stage (see Norris, Just, and Kern 2003; Greenberg and Thompson 2002; Hachten and Scrotton 2002; Nacos 2002; Nelson and Boynton 1997; Alali and Byrd 1994; Livingston 1994).

4 We trace this change. We began in 1998 and have recorded between 200 and 250 news broadcasts a year. We started with CNN's WorldView. In 2001 we switched to BBC's World News. In this analysis we examine how the global news media handle terror -- the globalization of terror. The analysis is in three parts: (1) what terror becomes in global broadcasting; (2) terror and the synchronization of global media; and (3) how terror becomes us.

What Terror Becomes

5 For a year the world watched the Kosovars living in terror. Finally, the world said that it had enough, a brief war ensued, the terror abated -- though the hardships continued. And the world stopped watching.

6 The Kosovars had no monopoly on terror, of course. Today the Israelis and the Palestinians are living out mutually assured terror. The Afghans lived in terror. The East Timorese, the Eritreans, the Iraquis and the list goes on.

7 The global media are there -- at least for a time -- making it possible for us to watch. What do they show us? What does terror become in the global media?

8 Kosovo is one case among many. By looking carefully at this case, one can see the elements that appear over and over in the reporting. Living in terror is told as threat and attack, fear and escape, and shock and mourning.

9 Here we focus on the threat of terror.

10 The Yugoslav government construed the Kosova Liberation Army as a terrorist organization. Fighting terrorists is war, and there are no limits on what the government can do.

Terrorists hide everywhere. The government cannot tell a terrorist from a

non-terrorist. Hence, every male is a candidate. There is no limit on who can be rounded up for interrogation.

The Yugoslav police went door to door searching for weapons and searching for men. It was the moment the family had dreaded. The man was taken away by the police. “Go inside, don't be afraid,” he shouted to his family. But many men did not come back.

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The threat does not go away because there are no limits on what the government can do. At any moment the police may show up and take anybody away -- never to return.

11 There are no limits on what the police may destroy. Any house, any structure is a potential

hiding place for KLA fighters. One day, any day, they can destroy. "They came into our main street,” the man said, “and then shelled our house."

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For everyone whose house had not been destroyed this was the threat. If they did it there, if they did it then, they can do it here and now. The threat is ever present -- until you have been destroyed.

12 There are no limits on whom they can shoot. If anyone may be a KLA terrorist, then anyone can be shot as soon as they do something the least bit suspicious.

Trying to escape from the police is definitely suspicious. So the woman was shot.

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The threat is not so much what they have done to you as it is what they may do to you. It is what you dread; it is what may happen. Terror is living with what may happen.

13 People tried to escape the threat by hiding in the countryside. That could work in the summer, it could work if you were willing to live without housing and without food. It could work until you were found. Then the

survivors mourned.

Escape to the Countryside

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Mourning When Escape Fails

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14 As the global media tell the story, terror becomes threat, attempting to escape the threat, and mourning when escape fails.

On the Same Page

15 There are many similarities in news broadcasting around the world. For example, the anchor and the anchor desk are ubiquitous.

WorldView

BBC World News

China

Croatia

Dubai

Germany

Korea

Russia

Vietnam

16 Atlanta, Washington, New York, London -- China, Croatia, Dubai, Germany, Korea, Russia, Vietnam -- the anchor or anchors are managing the broadcast sitting behind a desk and in front of a map and screen display.

17 In addition to the other similarities, there is the story of the day -- the story found in almost every media outlet. The story of the day is well known in the U.S. But there is a story of the day in news broadcasting around the world, as well. The world is synchronized in what it is shown as important.

18 The day was April 5, 2002. The Israeli invasion of Palestine was nine days old. Around the world the story of the day was the Israeli army terrorizing Palestinians and Palestinians fighting back. Terror was the centerpiece of the news from the Middle East.

There were tanks in the streets of Ramallah and Palestinian gunmen firing automatic weapons. There were helicopters attacking and destroying buildings. But the story of the day seemed to be the small arms fire as gunmen ran the length of a street. That one scene was repeated over and over in the news broadcasts we found.

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19 Forest fires in California, flooding in Europe and Bangladesh, an election in Germany -- they are all world news. But none synchronizes global broadcasting as terror does. We are all on the same page when terror is the story of the day.

How Terror Becomes Us

20 Tony Blair said that we watched, and we did.

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21 During the first twenty-five seconds, a news reporter explains to anyone who needs explanation what we are seeing. Then we are thrust into a crowd. We are in the midst of shouting, screaming, shock, disbelief. We feel the terror when we see through the eyes of the victims.

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22 It begins with a scream and a replay of the crash into the tower and the tower burning. The images set the story. This is where the grief comes from. The voice of a victim -- a telephone message for her husband, recorded as she was waiting for death. And a wedding picture of the victim. Then the picture of a flight attendant -- shown over the American flag. And her husband, sitting in front of a flag, recounting her call.

23 The camera moves back to show the large number of lives that have been destroyed. Then it moves in -- filling the screen with the face of a wife, then a father. Pictures of searching wreckage, pictures of a victim, then the screen is filled with the face of the wife. Finally, back to the destroyed buildings. The carnage of the lives is reinforced with images of the carnage on the ground.

24 We cannot miss the terror. Terror becomes us when we are called upon to remember. The news media remind viewers over and over about the event. It becomes a constant point of departure for news, as the sights and sounds are repeated and repeated. And we are called to remember.

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25 The global media brings terror to us all.

Conclusion

26 It begins with technology. The time required to communicate from anywhere to anywhere is now measured in seconds. Global communication has always been possible -- if you were willing to wait. But waiting only seconds brings new meaning to 'global communication' and creates a new human reality.

27 Kosovo, Israel-Palestine, the twin towers -- terror is not a sometime thing. Man's inhumanity toward his fellow men makes terror constant in human affairs. Not very long ago most of the terror was hidden -- beyond our willingness to wait for the news. That is no longer true. We experience the terror around the world as it happens.

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