

10 RULES ON HOW TO REPORT TERRORISM NEWS



Headquarters

Eti Mah. GMK Bulvarı No: 132 Maltepe-Çankaya ANKARA

T: 0312 999 20 00 (pbx)

F: 0312 231 21 74

E-mail: kurumsaliletisim@aa.com.tr

Istanbul Office

Merkez Efendi Mah. Mevlana Cad. No: 140/A

Toya Plaza

Kat: 2 Cevizlibağ-Zeytinburnu / ISTANBUL

T: 0212 513 10 90

F: 0212 511 60 39

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FOREWORD

The objective of terrorist organizations is to create an environment of fear, intimidation, panic and anxiety by making a psychological impact on masses through actions, and thereby weakening the response mechanisms of society.

Today, terrorist organizations prefer media-based actions to reach greater masses as their area of impact widens worldwide. To quote former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, nicknamed the Iron Lady, “Propaganda is the oxygen of terror.”

It is known that the Red Brigades, based in Italy, conducted their activities on Wednesdays and Saturdays in order to get maximum coverage in Thursday and Friday print editions, which used to be most popular during that time.

Public Prosecutor Mehmet Selim Kiraz was taken hostage and martyred on March 31, 2015, in Çağlayan Court by members of the terrorist organization, DHKP-C (Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party/Front); pictures of the prosecutor with his mouth taped and a gun to his head were published in some newspapers the next day, leading to discussions on whether such images and news actually constitute “the public announcement of a newsworthy event, or propaganda for the terrorist organization”.

It should be noted that the most powerful weapon of terrorism is “propaganda”, and for terrorism-related news, the responsibility to do the right thing that reflects public interest should be the main concern of broadcasters, instead of other concerns such as competition, rating and circulation.

In order to prevent terrorist organizations from making propaganda through mass media, the media’s self-control mechanism should be in place, and news reporting should be done based on principles of accuracy and objectivity. Given the fact that the publication of terrorism-related news comes with responsibility, Anadolu Agency has prepared “10 Rules on How to Report Terrorism News”.

We hope this document contributes to creating a common language in the media on terrorism news.

MEDIA AND TERROR

Turkey, a country located in a region that has seen high number of terrorist attacks in recent years, is also affected by propaganda activities of terror organizations and their supporters. Therefore, it has become imperative to adopt a common approach to tackle terrorism-related news.

In this regard, the media itself needs to act responsibly instead of being led by laws, RTUK (Radio and Television Supreme Council) and court decisions. It should not become a tool of covert propaganda for terrorist organizations or fall into the trap of rating concerns.

PAY ATTENTION TO THESE 10 POINTS WHEN REPORTING TERRORIST INCIDENTS!

1- Do not report newsflash or breaking news based on hearsay!

A correspondent's testimony is the basis of a news story. In cases where there is no correspondent, or the correspondents are not accepted to describe the scene, rely on information revealed by authorities. On the other hand, in cases where the authorities are out of reach, or no official statement has been made, use the *double-check mechanism, also known as cross-checking*.

Do not rely on social media regarding terrorist incidents. Do not use any information without official verification or statement.

In today's world where information spreads like wildfire, preparing news on terrorist attacks based on rumors and speculations could lead to irremediable mistakes. Do not forget how hard it is to remedy the negative impact created by unverified information. Do not sacrifice accuracy for the sake of speed.

2- Do not serve objectives of terrorist organizations!

Terrorist organizations aim to create fear, panic and intimidation in large groups of people through sensational acts. Detailed news and images related to terrorist incidents serve the purposes of terrorist organizations, not the freedom of information. The limits of such news to be broadcast or published should be determined based on its social utility.

Never mention how a terrorist attack was planned, implemented or carried out, or the results of that attack!

3- Rating and circulation should not be a concern when it comes to terrorism!

Never forget that terrorist organizations prefer actions that attract media attention in order to reach larger groups. Therefore, when reporting news on terrorism, leave all concerns about competition, rating and circulation behind, and try to inform the public in the most accurate way, without distortion.

Do not ignore the principle of liable broadcasting!

4- Do not use images of dead or injured people!

As in any other news, do not use images of dead and injured people in terrorism news, out of respect for victims!

Use visuals that show the scene as a whole without causing any panic.

Use visuals that illustrate the response of security forces and healthcare providers, and that provide positive messages indicating that security forces and healthcare providers have control over the situation.

Note that otherwise, this will help strengthen the psychological impact and propaganda sought by terrorism!

5- Do not use terminology of terrorist organizations!

Do not use definitions, phrases and terminology employed by terrorist organizations, such as “guerrilla”, “revolutionist” and “self-sacrificing activist” etc. Stay away from titles and adjectives that may institutionalize and legitimize such organizations, for example like “commander”, “president”, “party”, “head” or “leader”!

Do not emphasize the names of terrorist organizations frequently!

Do not mention the identities or code names of terrorists, if it does not serve public interest!

6- Do not rush to reveal identities of the dead!

Do not announce the identities of those who lost their lives in terror attacks before their relatives have been informed by authorities!

Never forget that the trauma which individuals will experience upon learning the loss of their loved ones through the media could lead to serious problems!

7- Do not report statements of terrorist organizations or ringleaders!

Do not report or publish the statements of ringleaders or terrorists, if they do not serve the public interest. Do not forget that such statements may be full of codes!

Do not make exclusive interviews with terrorists. These interviews may serve as propaganda of the organization, give the members of terrorist organization a strong image, or even legitimize them!

8- Pay attention to information and images on social media!

Consider the information on social media as just a tip! Never use this information without confirmation!

The information, images and videos uploaded to unverifiable social media channels are open to all kinds of manipulation, and could be used for propaganda and provocation purposes.

Social media accounts of those who are known or trusted by the community can be hacked and manipulated by ill-intentioned people. Approach the images and videos on such channels with caution!

9- Be aware of the perception operations of terrorist organizations!

Terrorist organizations prefer “self-immolation”, “hunger strike” and “suicide blast” to get more coverage in the media. While reporting such acts that are part of a terror group’s perception operations, consider public interest, and do not become a propaganda instrument in the heat of the event!

10- Do not announce preparations for counter-terrorism operations beforehand!

Security forces may find themselves in a difficult position due to news propagated by media organs. Therefore, do not report military mobilizations or any intelligence on operations!

Do not forget that prior announcement of operation preparations, for example by broadcasting/publishing information that could be used as intelligence by terrorist organizations, hampers and damages the efforts of security forces!



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