



Bundeskriminalamt

HERBST-
BKA TAGUNG 2015
AUTUMN
CONFERENCE

**International Terrorism: How can prevention and repression
keep pace?**

BKA Autumn Conference, 18 - 19 November 2015

Setting the stage for terrorism - the role of the media

Summary

Yassin Musharbash

journalist/author, "Die Zeit"

The propagandists of the "Islamic State" are masters of staging. They have long been counting on the reactions of journalists and thus they make us face substantial challenges every day.

The reason behind this is that attention and publicity are the oxygen of terrorism. And more than any other group of people do journalists decide on the distribution of these two resources.

Would it consequently be better if journalists stopped writing about terrorism? Or if they only wrote the absolutely necessary minimum? By no means! As interesting as this mental experiment may be from an academic viewpoint, in terms of our role as journalists it is far off the mark.

Our mission is to enable the readers to form their own opinion. Our mission is not to silence terrorists. Carried to extremes, this means that it should not make any difference to us if the "Islamic State" is secretly rejoicing that we are reporting on a certain fact. As long as the analytical use for our readers prevails, the report is justified.

It is rather a question of how to guarantee good media coverage.

Some of the difficulties are obvious.

For example, it is not easy to personally meet terrorists and even if you succeed in doing it, there still is a credibility problem.

So we have to talk to people who know more than we do because they are closer to the source. But even then we are soon confronted with similar problems, a good example being the so-called "dropouts" who try to manipulate us.

The security agencies, on the other hand, also create difficulties for us. In countries such as Pakistan or Egypt this is a much greater problem than in Germany. But even here, there are certain tensions between us and the authorities, including the BKA.

So where are the boundaries? Where do we have to draw the line?

Do we, the media, for instance run the risk of triggering a Werther effect when we write about terrorists? The answer is "no", at least as long as we do our work reasonably and soundly. Anyway, such an effect is produced to a much greater extent by Internet activists than by us, the journalists.

However, the "Islamic State" makes us face dilemmas on a daily basis. This is the case

every time it is the only source of a message. The destruction of Palmyra is an example of that.

The solution for us as reporters is to increase the share of information which we have researched ourselves. The antidote to propaganda and staging is research.

Therefore, good journalism needs to be independent. It has to be independent from terrorists and their propaganda and, to the same extent, from information stemming from security agencies or politics.

This has a second consequence, i.e.: transparency is imperative for us. Our readers have the right to learn how much we trust our sources. Only in this way can journalists report on terrorism soundly and solidly and disclose staged propaganda for what it is.