

The Faces of Terrorism

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Institute of Political Science and Journalism
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań
Poland 2006

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0557



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Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland

ISBN 83-87704-97-0

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Modern Mass Media and International Terrorism

I. Introduction

In 1995 Brian Mc Nair in his book *An Introduction to Political Communication* presented a terrorist organisation as a political actor and an element of political communication. He included terrorist organisation to the group of organisations which "aspire, though organisational and institutional means, to influence the decision - making process [...]"¹ and which may seek to do this by using the mass media as a channel of communication with the mass audience. Still, he regarded such an organisation as a *subordinate* or *marginal* actor of a political scene, and treated political parties and public organisations as the main participants of political environment. Although terrorist organisations have been using the mass media to attract public attention to their aims since late 60's, the year 2001 could be regarded as a turning point in the perception of that phenomenon. Terrorist attacks on the USA (September 11, 2001), and then on Madrid (March 11, 2004) and London (July 7, 2005) showed that terrorist organisations have already started to employ the public relations and media management techniques previously used exclusively by mainstream political actors. Actually, the terrorist groups seem to make even one step further now, applying all the features of the mass media to their strategy. Hence, being aware of the aims and consequences of the recent terrorist attacks one can admit that at least some of terrorist organisation should be treated as the *first-rank* political actors in the international arena.

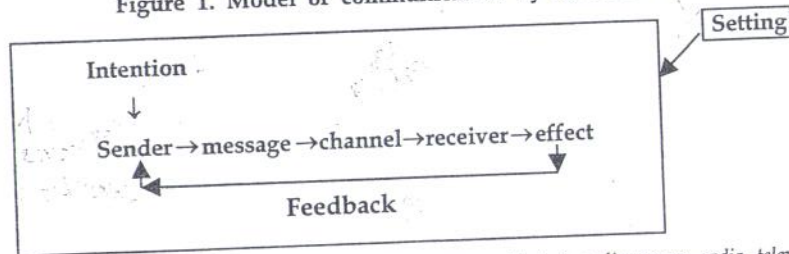
The aim of that paper is to introduce a terrorist organisation as a political actor and present an act of terrorism as a process of political communication. The subject of study directs our attention to theory of political communication and its basic definitions and elements. Mc Nair in his book mentioned above, followed Denton's and Woodward's definition of political commu-

¹ B. Mc Nair, *An Introduction to Political Communication*, Routledge, London-New York 1995, p. 5.

nication which stresses *intention* as a crucial feature of that process. In other words, political communication is "a purposeful communication about politics," which incorporates: 1) all forms of communication undertaken by political actors for the purpose of achieving specific objectives; 2) communication addressed to these actors by non-politicians such as voters, journalists, pressure groups, including terrorist organisations; 3) communication about them and their activities, as contained in news reports, editorials, and other forms of media discussion of politics.²

To describe such a type of communication we can use a modification of one of the most popular model of communication – Lasswell's model of act of persuasive communication. There are five crucial elements of that scheme (sender, receiver, message, channel, effect) and three extra ones: a sender's intention, a setting of the process of communication and a feedback (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Model of communication by H. Lasswell



Source: T. Goban-Klas, *Media i komunikowanie masowe. Teorie i analizy prasy, radia, telewizji i Internetu*, Warszawa-Kraków 1999.

Considering the definition of political communication we can notice three different types of senders here (political organisations, mass media and citizens), three different types of receivers (political organisations, mass media and citizens) and two main roles of the mass media organisations. Mass media can function as the transmitters (channels) of the messages that originate from some political actors as well as senders of political messages, constructed by journalists. Moreover, mass media may influence directly or indirectly all other elements of process of both national and international political communication being a crucial source of information about foreign events and passage between governments and citizens at the same time. As M. Kunczik wrote: "especially in democracies, which are

² Ibidem, p. 4.

based on competitive will formation and in which, at least theoretically, the individual can participate in the socially relevant decision - making processes, the mass media can exercise considerable indirect influence on a country's policies by the images they help to create with their foreign reporting."³ Consequently, the contemporary relations between political actors and the mass media and citizens are worth considering. Particularly, relations between some of the mass media phenomena and the way terrorist organisations act to achieve their objectives will be discussing in this paper.

II. Essential Features of the Modern Mass Media

Since 90's one can observe the development of information and communication technologies and their use and impact on the nature, volume, and content of information and communication. In particular, we should pay attention to an intense *expansion* of mass media that results in an immediate coverage on the events in almost every part of the world. Because of new technologies the mass media have extended their reach, geographically and temporally.⁴ It became possible to dismiss even 12,000 words per minute between any two places on the globe (e.g. one of the biggest news agencies – Associated Press delivers 20 million words and hundred of photos and graphics on a typical day⁵).

Furthermore, as a result of satellites used in spreading signals around the world an idea of so-called "real - time reporting" can be realised. Till the last decade of XX century the mass media organisations have been able to cover only past events. "The situation in the international media market has changed dramatically [...] with CNN entering the stage. During the [first] Gulf crisis, CNN became known to a broad public world wide through live transmissions of the conferences of American president, the addresses of Saddam Hussein and its live reports from bombarded Baghdad. CNN, with its 24-hour news program, was already a way for governments to communicate directly with each other."⁶ With this phenomenon "the very definition of news was rewritten – from something that has happened to something that is happening at the very moment you are hearing of it."⁷ Moreover,

³ M. Kunczik, *Images of Nations and International Public Relations*, New Jersey 1997, p. 18.

⁴ B. Mc Nair, op. cit., p. 14.

⁵ *Global Journalism. Survey of International Communication*, J. C. Merrill (ed.), Longman Publishers USA 1995, p. 35.

⁶ M. Kunczik, op. cit., p. 96.

⁷ "Time," January 6, 1992, p. 13. See: M. Kunczik, op. cit., p. 97.

"political arena has become more international and it results in the increased awareness of nation-states, institutions, groups and individuals in the importance of information flow and its consequences and impact on the national and international decision-making process as well as on the individual and private lives of people around the world. That is why we can say about *increasing number of international and transnational actors* in almost all aspects of the international flow of information."⁸

Undoubtedly, costs of using new technologies as well as having correspondents in many countries are extremely high. For this reason only the biggest and the richest mass media organisations can afford it. Hence, we can mention a **concentration** as a second crucial feature of modern mass media. It results in a fact that only a few huge organisations (so called "Big Four": Reuters, Associated Press, Agence France Presse and Deutsche Presse Agentur, but also CNN International) play a significant role in the global scene of mass communication.⁹ It means that a number of sources of information about international issues is seriously limited. The further consequences of the *global gatekeeping concentration* are: unification and multiplication of the mass media contents (so called "pack" journalism).¹⁰ Finally, it results in a visible *lack of symmetry of information and evaluation*. According to M. Kunczik, the mass media concentration could be regarded as a threat to the variety of opinions - nowadays owners of mass media organisations profoundly influence the way mass media present problems and events (H. Mowlana wrote about "communications oligarchy" and mentions ownership and control as two of the most important factors of international flow of information).¹¹

⁸ H. Mowlana, *Global Information and World Communication. New Frontiers in International Relations*, Sage Publications, p. 23.

⁹ British Reuters in year 1995 had: 327,000 receivers in 42,000 places in 154 countries. Its news bulletins were prepared in 24 languages. Five years later that agency had: 521,000 receivers in 52,800 places around the world. American Associated Press is one of the biggest press agencies in the world (300 offices and 3,000 employees). In the USA Associated Press sends its information to 6,000 radio and TV stations and to 1,700 newspapers. In other countries and areas of the world it has 8,500 receivers (printed and electronic mass media). Agence France Presse is a direct source of information for 650 newspapers and 400 radio and TV stations as well as for 1,500 companies and public institutions. It has also about 100 national branches and in that way it sends its messages additionally to 7,600 newspapers and 2,500 radio stations and 400 television ones. And programmes of American CNN International are retransmitted by over 200 independent stations around the world and reach over 74 million receivers. See: B. Ociepka, *Komunikowanie międzynarodowe*, Wrocław 2002, p. 75-114; J. R. Dominick, *The Dynamics of Mass Communication*, The McGraw-Hill Companies Inc. 1996, p. 19.

¹⁰ B. Ociepka, op. cit., p. 113; B. Mc Nair, op. cit., p. 62.

¹¹ H. Mowlana, op. cit., p. 8 and 33.

Additionally, the access to the mass media market is severely restricted.¹² As Mowlana wrote: "Because the control over the means of international communication is expensive and subject to economies of scale, there is little room for smaller countries to inject themselves into increasing global communications market. [...] This so-called globalisation of the mass media combined with the globalisation of the economy has resulted in the production and the distribution of television, video and other cultural industry products that have led not only to the homogeneity of the products but also to the reproduction of violent programs across national boundaries just because they are simply inexpensive and have the ability to cross cultural barriers."¹³

That brings us on to the third main feature of mass media: **commercialisation**. The fact that mass media organisations are treated as commercial companies results in using market rules (mass media are to be profits-oriented and competitive companies) and a marketing approach. On the one hand, that approach to news "makes decisions less of guessing game and more of a thoughtful, systematic process that takes into account the interests and needs of the audience. [...] It depends on a regular and accurate flow of statistical data about the audience. The data are then used as one factor, a central one, in determining what will be offered to the audience and in what manner."¹⁴ On the other hand, there is a strong competition between mass media organisations in the fields of production and distribution of information. This *competition pressure* usually results in the fact that the mass media desire preparing as many news as possible and do it quickly. Unfortunately, the quantity is more important than quality. That is why a definition of news created by Melvin De Fleur in 1966 is even more adequate today than it was in the 60's. "[...] News is the imperfect result of hurried decisions made under pressure."¹⁵

Such *news-hungry media* seek for news that can be easily 'sold' to the mass audience. One of the most popular statements in the mass media analysis says that competition between mass media organisations results in huge number of news that could not be received by people because of their natural limitations of perception.¹⁶ This is why mass media seek for some universal rules of attracting mass audience's attention and 'selling news.'

¹² M. Kunczik, A. Zipfel, *Wprowadzenie do nauki o dziennikarstwie i komunikowaniu*, Warszawa 2000, p. 246.

¹³ H. Mowlana, op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁴ E. E. Dennis, J. C. Merrill, *Media Debates. Issues in Mass Communication*, Longman Publishers ..., pp. 125-126.

¹⁵ M. De Fleur, E. E. Dennis, *Understanding Mass Communication*, Boston 1996, p. 446.

¹⁶ B. Reeves, C. Nass, *Media i ludzie*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 142-156.

Negative character of the message seems to be one of them. Popularity of certain type of messages could be explained by using the analogy to human perceptions of the world. In Bernard Roshco's opinion, the long-term processes belong to a hidden area and they appear from time to time as sudden and peculiar event that attracts people.¹⁷ In fact, people do not want to receive negative messages but this kind of information fixes their attention and is better remembered than a positive one.¹⁸ As a result, one can observe the phenomena of escalation of cruelty in news. At the same time, being exposed to violent messages for a long time, people become indifferent to them.

Accordingly, some more detailed standards and list of favourable characteristics of news can be defined. As an example, let us present "some of the standard criteria that are aid to make up the news" named by E. E. Dennis and J. C. Merrill in their book entitled *Media Debates. Issues in Mass Communication*:

- 1) Conflict (tension-surprise);
- 2) Progress (triumph - achievement);
- 3) Disaster (defeat - destruction);
- 4) Consequences (effect upon community);
- 5) Eminence (prominence);
- 6) Novelty (the unusual, even the extremely unusual);
- 7) Human interest (emotional background);
- 8) Timeliness (freshness and newness);
- 9) Proximity (local appeal).¹⁹

It is worth mentioning that such factors could become a hint how to prepare and organise an event to attract the mass media and public opinion. The main result of the fact that the mass media have created conditions of "media event" is that the groups that are normally out of access to the media can use these features to fix attention on themselves.²⁰ Consequently, the mass media may become an object of influence of other participants of process of communication. There are many different subjects, which tend to use the mass media to achieve their own objectives: the government, political parties, political organisations, minorities, groups of interests, as well as

¹⁷ B. Roshco, *Newsmaking*, Chicago 1975; *ibidem*.

¹⁸ B. Reeves, C. Nass, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ E. E. Dennis, J. C. Merrill, *Media Debates. Issues in Mass Communication*, Longman Publishers ..., p. 124. Similar standards were mentioned in an article entitled "The Structure of Foreign News" written in 1965 by Johan Galtung and Marie Holmboe Ruge. See: M. Kunczik, A. Zipfel, *Wprowadzenie do nauki o dziennikarstwie i komunikowaniu*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 183-187.

²⁰ A. Schmid, J. de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*, London 1982, p. 217; *ibidem*.

terrorist organisations. The mass media play a crucial role especially for all these political actors that would like to exist in the international area and reach an international audience.

At the same time, we should consider a potential power of the mass media both as sender and a channel of political communication. As it was mentioned above, the purpose of all political communication is to persuade. It means that the target of the persuasion should be perceived as a crucial element without which no political message can have any relevance.²¹ All communicators hope that there will be some positive (from their point of view) impact on the political behaviour of the receiver. But, the mass media "effect issue is one of great complexity and unending controversy."²² The main reason for that phenomenon is the fact that it is extremely difficult to investigate empirically the audience's relationship to the message and real influence of that message on receivers' opinions, attitudes and behaviours.

Nevertheless, one can mention some roles that the mass media can play. The first one is to *control* the flow of information (mass media as gatekeepers). This function includes a few more detailed ones. First of all, the mass media are responsible for selection and limitation the number of messages that are spread. Secondly, mass media can choose topics that are to be covered. Consequently, the mass media can create image of the society and the world in the public's minds. The printed and electronic mass media not only report selected events but also modify messages about them. According to hypothesis of agenda setting, the mass media could not tell people what they should think about some problems or events but what people should think of.²³ This means that the mass media not only single out issues and consequently focus public's opinion attention on them but also define problems, which are to be regarded as important for the audience (the society).

Consequently, in case of political communication the mass media statements and reports have two main functions: they may enable the group and/or political elites participating in the political process to communicate with each other, that is to create a focused public opinion and establish themes that may become subjects of public discussion by selecting the topics they consider worth reporting and reporting on them in leading articles, commentaries, and so forth.²⁴

²¹ B. Mc Nair, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 11.

²³ T. Goban-Klas, *Media i komunikowanie masowe. Teorie i analizy prasy, radia, telewizji i Internetu*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 267-269; A. Pyzikowska, *Teoria agenda - setting i jej zastosowanie*, in: *Nauka o komunikowaniu. Podstawowe orientacje teoretyczne*, B. Dobek-Ostrowska (ed.), Wrocław 2001, pp. 74-81, M. Kunczik, A. Zipfel, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-187.

²⁴ M. Kunczik, *Images of Notions and International Public Relations*, New Jersey 1997, p. 18.

Moreover, in a case of dramatic and critical moments (e.g. wars, tragedies) the mass media could play a significant role in political relations as they may influence political decision - making process. Nowadays this phenomenon is called 'CNN effect,' because of the CNN's role during the first Gulf War. Treating that case as a background for research we can notice that the mass media (especially TV) may play three main roles: an accelerant, an impediment and an agenda setting agency. Primarily, the potential effect of the global, real - time reporting by the mass media is the shortening of response time for decision - makers. "Policymakers decry the absence of quiet time to deliberate choices, reach private agreements, and mold the public's understanding."²⁵ Secondly, the mass media through emotional, grisly coverage may undermine morale. Moreover, they can constitute a threat to operational security. And finally, to attract public opinion's attention to some crisis and consequently reorder policy priorities.²⁶

The phenomenon mentioned above may be perceived as a new approach to the mass and political communication. It seems to indicate that although the mass media influence is usually estimated as indirect and limited, there could be some particular situations with the mass media as a crucial factor of the influence.

III. Terrorist Attack as an Act of Political Communication

"The word »terrorist« is a loaded term, used to describe organisations whose own members may prefer to think of themselves as »freedom fighters,« »guerrilla soldiers« or »revolutionaries.«"²⁷ We will use term of terrorist organisations, however, to refer to those non-state groups which "pursue terror tactics against governments, soldiers, civilians of their own or other countries."²⁸ In other words, all these organisations "share a readiness to work for their goals outside of the constitutional process and to use violence as a means of persuasion."²⁹ Actually, we will pay attention to terrorist organisations which, "unlike-sponsored terrorists who seek to avoid identification and publicity, actively court media attention, striving to make their 'target publics' aware of their existence and their objectives"³⁰.

²⁵ S. Livingston, *Clarifying the CNN Effect: An Examination of the Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention*, "Research Pages," R-18, Harvard College, June 1997, p. 2.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ B. Mc Nair, op. cit., p. 152.

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 10.

³⁰ Ibidem.

Considering different types of terrorist organisations and different typologies of terrorism in general one can notice that the characteristics mentioned above is typical for so-called "political terrorism." Political terrorists' targets tend to be "almost indiscriminate and unpredictable. Usually no one is particularly the target therefore no one is safe. Political terrorists desire to create a long-term atmosphere of fear, coercion and intimidation in the community. They often are willing to die for the cause and, what is a crucial feature, they usually involves efforts to influence an audience."³¹ Using Combs's typology of terrorism we can say that attracting the mass media attention is especially typical for two types of terror: mass terror (with general population as a target) and random terror (where anyone in the wrong place at the wrong time is a target).³² And taking Hacker's typology of terrorists we can conclude that so called "crusader" terrorists are those who try to make use with the mass media, as they seek for the largest group of audience as possible and treat killing their victims as symbolic action as well as a guarantee of publicity.³³ It seems to be adequate to distinguish one more type of terrorism: an international one. We may assume that some terrorist organisations are particularly interested in spreading their message in as many countries as possible. It is a consequence of the fact that the terrorists' objectives might have religious, ideological, cultural character. In that case "the enemy" is defined in much more general way (e.g. Western civilization). Additionally, in an era of the international politics (with network of political and economical relations between countries) many actions have an international response.

Interestingly, in many books terrorist organisations have not been mentioned as actors in the field of international public relations. Treating terrorist organisation as an actor of this field used to be quite rare because it was hard to classify them according to some popular scales, as private versus public and for - profit versus non - profit ones. Nevertheless, regarding attracting attention as an aim of international public relations, some authors have perceived terrorism as such as activity.³⁴ Furthermore, we believe that they can be defined as rather non-profit (political terrorism) and rather public (political, ideological and religion issues). Overall, we will perceive the terrorist act as "symbolic... designed to influence political behaviour by extra normal means, entailing the use or threat of violence"

³¹ P. Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, London 1986.

³² C. C. Combs, *Terrorism in the Twenty - First Century*, New York 1997, p. 15.

³³ F. J. Hacker, *Crusaders, Criminals, Crazies: Terror and Terrorism in Our Time*, New York 1976, pp. 12-14.

³⁴ M. Kunzlik, op. cit.

(T. Thornton)³⁵ and as a form of political communication, intended to send a message to some particular audience and capable of being decoded as such. According to this approach, terrorism as any other form of political communication can only have significance if it is transmitted through the mass media to an audience. In other words, terrorist organisations need an "oxygen of publicity:" unless the terrorist act is reported, it has no social meaning.³⁶

So called "mass media terrorism," as it was mentioned before, has manifested itself in the Western World since late 1960's. According to Schmid and de Graaf, "primarily it was the outgrowth of minority strategies to get into the news. Since the Western mass media grant access to news - making to events that are abnormal, unusual, dangerous, new, disruptive and violent, groups without habitual access to news - making use these characteristics of the news value system to obtain access."³⁷ Hence, terrorism has become "violence for effect" and "theatre of terror." "It is crime and it is politics. This three - fold confluence of real life - and - death spectacle, high politics and base crime fits so well into what the Western media is conditioned to cover that they cannot resist giving it full exposure."³⁸

Hence, as B. Bagdikina suggests, "there are growing numbers of men who understand how news is generated, organised and transmitted, and it would be unintelligent of them if they did use it to their own advantage."³⁹ One of the first example of a such attitude was a rhetorical question asked by Abane Ramdane, the FLN liberation movement leader: "Is it better for our cause to kill ten of enemy in the countryside of Telergma, where none will speak of it, or one in Algiers that will be mentioned the next day in the American press?"⁴⁰ The same way of thinking could be found in a statement of one of Palestinian terrorists who organise attacks at Munich Olympic Games in 1972: "We knew that people in England and America would switch their television sets from any programme about the plight of the Palestinians if there was a sporting event on another channel. ... From Munich onwards nobody could ignore the Palestinians or their cause..."⁴¹ Crucially,

³⁵ See: M. Kelly, T. Mitchell, *Transnational Terrorism and the Western Elite Press*, in: *Media Power in Politics*, D. A. Graber (ed.), Washington CQ Press, 1984, p. 283.

³⁶ B. Mc Nair, op. cit., p. 153.

³⁷ A. Schmid, J. de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*, London 1982, p. 217; see: B. Mc Nair, op. cit., p. 153.

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ B. Bagdikina, *The Information Machines*, New York 1971, p. 293. See: E. E. Dennis, J. C. Merrill, op. cit., p. 171.

⁴⁰ A. P. Schmid, J. de Graaf, *Violence as communication. Insurgent terrorism in Western media*, London 1982, p. 19; see: M. Kunczik, op. cit., p. 81.

⁴¹ G. Weimann, "Redefinition of Image": *The impact of mass-mediated terrorism*, "International Journal of Public Opinion Research" 1990, no. 2; see: M. Kunczik, op. cit., p. 80.

in both cases the strategy seemed to work. In both "displays symbiotic relationships developed between the freedom fighter and the mass media."⁴²

Since that time terrorist organisations have been trying to employ all instruments of the mass media management to spread their message. Above all, they create "pseudo events" that seem to be spontaneous and accidental whereas they are planned and organised. They use the same tactic to create so called 'photo-op' (photo opportunity) for journalists. Furthermore, they try to make use of 'priming' - the process in which the media affect the standard that people use to evaluate political figures and issues, by presenting news in some particular order and at some particular hours ('prime time'). For example, terrorist attack on the USA on 11th of September 2001 was planned exactly as a media event. Two hijacked planes hit the towers of the WTC on the Monday morning. Obviously, both time and place were chosen purposely.

First of all, WTC was an easily recognisable symbol of the American economy. Secondly, in the morning there were many people in their offices, so there was a huge number of potential victims. Last but not least, 9 o'clock a.m. it was the moment just after the TV stations have started very popular news programmes (such as "Good Morning America" in ABC Television). Consequently, all the electronic mass media were able to response immediately to the event and present it as news. As an image of the planes hitting the towers was a real spectacle, one could assume that all television and radio stations (as well as Internet means) would spread it around the world. Consequently, catching the American mass media' attention, terrorists opened the channel to dismiss their message to the international audience.⁴³

Considering an act of terrorism as an example of political communication we can mention two types of receivers (audiences): a narrow one which is a government of the country which was attacked, and a broad one: a society (national or international public opinion, including governments of some other countries). One should notice that even that global (international) audience can be divided into two groups in that case: the first one is an "enemy" society (a target of attacks), the second is an "ally" audience

⁴² M. Kunczik, op. cit., p. 81.

⁴³ There is a controversy over whether there is such a type of public opinion. Davison suggested that there are three prerequisites to an international public opinion becoming an important political factor: "People in several countries must give their attention to a given issue; they must have sufficient means of interacting so that common and mutually reinforcing attitudes can form; and there must be some mechanism through which shared attitudes can be transmitted in action." See: M. Kunczik, op. cit., p. 19.

(people who at least believe in the same ideas and values or even approve and support terrorists' activity).

Consequently, there are at least two dimensions of the message (or even two messages). The first one is directed to a broad mass media audience. Its aim may be to: demoralize the enemy, demonstrate terrorist organisation's abilities and its political power, reveal enemy's weakness or cause panic and chaos. Some more selective audiences should decode the second one: governments. They "are being warned that the terrorist organisation has the ability and the will to carry out such acts and that appropriate changes to policy should be forthcoming"⁴⁴ (in some cases, as al-Qaeda one, the requirements are clearly pointed out in some additional messages as video tapes with the leader's speech).

That brings me on to the problem of effectiveness of such an act of political communication. Of course, as Mc Nair wrote, terrorist act will shock and outrage the community against which it is directed, generating a public response. The question is if that response will suit the organisation's objectives. Let's consider possible reactions of all the types of receivers which were mentioned earlier: the mass media the national and international public opinion (both enemies and allies) and the government.

First of all, the terrorism has 'news value' and can be a means of attracting media and thus public attention to a political cause. In that way an audience receive some picture of the terrorist act. Consequently, all psychological objectives such as fear, chaos, lack of sense of security, etc., may be achieved. Furthermore, the nation that was a target may blame the government for the tragedy. In itself, however, publicity may not further a political objective and may, for obvious reasons in the case of terrorism, present an obstacle to it. The emotions mentioned above could help integrating the nation with the government in face of danger. It may happen mainly because while reporting the act of terrorism the mass media usually provide neither a political and historical background nor general context. They rather focus on the attack (bombs, hijacked planes, etc.) than on presenting all historical, political, ideological or religious reasons. The general message of the terrorist is usually simplified and sapped. Moreover, the main source of the interpretation and all the comments is the government. This is why, although the media may help the terrorist attract the attention of an audience, they will not let them transmit their message. It is worth mentioning that in 2001 al-Qaeda tried to avoid such a situation - Osama bin Laden spread also a verbal mes-

⁴⁴ B. Mc Nair, op. cit., p. 11.

sage to an audience both in 'ally' and 'enemy' countries (video types presented first by Al Jazeera - an Arabic language TV station).

Additionally, terrorist activity may provoke some political decisions. They may satisfy terrorists' requirements or may be directed against the terrorist organisations and its supporters (from investigations, actions organised by the police to "war on terrorism"). In that case, the mass media may play a crucial role as a instrument of creating the image of the problem in citizens' minds an influencing their attitudes towards some particular solutions. It means that mass media organisations could be treated here as a tool of government propaganda. At the same time, they may play a role of citizens' mouthpiece.

IV. Conclusions

In four years three attacks directed against Western countries were organised by some Muslim terrorist groups. Although terror has been an element of a long history of human relations with "others," since the first attacks on the USA the perception of terrorist organisations have changed dramatically. Now, they should be considered as the first - rank political actors that use all approachable instruments to fight with their enemies. They seem to follow and employ every techniques to achieve their objects that are usually used by other political actors, as political parties, governments and politicians. One of these contemporary techniques is the mass media management. Making such an professional use of the features of the mass media, terrorist organisations have indicated a need of the new approach to both *theory* and *practice* of politics (e.g. security). Furthermore, the mass media organisations and their functions in democratic systems should be redefined to include new elements and relations between them (Figure 2).

Considering a terrorist attack as an act of political communication might be perceived as an attempt of introducing such a new approach. Using the theoretical background of mass and political communication (definitions, models, functions of the mass media, etc.) and preparing a characteristics of the mass media we may notice and name some new potential roles that the mass media may play in political life. As a case of terrorist shows, relations between the mass media and other political actors might be a crucial factor of the strategy and feature of the latter.

Figure 2. Elements of political communication (a case of terrorist act)

