- international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act; or
- seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structure of a country or an international organisation.

This definition has met with strong criticism from human-rights organisations. Their main concern is that this definition could refer to trade unions, campaigns by environmentalists, such as Greenpeace, and anti-globalisation protesters. In response to this concern, the European Commission included a 'Recital' and a 'Declaration' in which it explicitly states that '[N]othing in the Framework Decision may be interpreted to reduce or restrict fundamental rights or freedoms such as the freedom of assembly or association or of expression'. Whilst significant, this amendment does not carry any legal weight and the controversial debate on definitions of terrorism continues.

Sources

Jordan, M., *Terrorism's Slippery Definition Eludes UN Diplomats,* Christian Science Monitor, 12 April 2002. Available from www.csmonitor.com.

McCauley, C., *The Psychology of Terrorism,* Social Science Research Council, 13 February 2002, www.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/mccauley.

Merari, A. 'Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency', *Terrorism and Political Violence 5,* no. 4, 1993, pp. 213–251.

Wilkinson, P., 'The Strategic Implications of Terrorism', in *Terrorism and Political Violence. A Sourcebook*, Sondhi, M.L. (ed), (New Delhi: Har-anand Publications, 2000), pp. 19–49.

Track II: Security and Terrorism in the 21st Century, Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence, St. Andrews University, 1996, www.st-andrews.ac.uk.

Journalist ethics and reporting terrorism

At a time when the debate on terrorism has become increasingly polarised, what is the role of the media? To what extent does the reporting of terrorism influence how readers and viewers understand events? What influence does it exert on the course of the events themselves? These questions need to be addressed in the context of existing approaches, ethics and expectations of the media.

Journalists observe reality, select the elements they consider important, draw conclusions and organise them into a narrative, in a similar way to physicists, social scientists or even literary critics. However, compared with practitioners in these fields, journalists operate within limited boundaries in regard to critical self-awareness and responsibility. Instead, most adopt a rough-and-ready empiricist orthodoxy, namely 'objectivity', embodied in the phrase, 'we just report the facts'. Increasingly, though, journalists find this framework for analysis inadequate as an explanation of the complex relationship between reporting and the occurrence of events.

In a world saturated with information, readers, listeners and viewers are eminently aware of the impact of media. They realise that news is not a natural window on the world, but that it is cultural, something made. Furthermore, many now understand how news is made. Significantly, people are increasingly able and willing to present, shape or even create facts to be reported.

The globalisation of media means that these insights are widely shared. Ali Ahmeti, leader of the ethnic-Albanian National Liberation Army in Macedonia, when asked on BBC television in July 2001 what he and his group had

gained by taking up arms, replied, 'The whole of Europe now knows about our situation'. Nik Gowing, former Diplomatic Editor of Channel Four News and now anchor-man of BBC World, sounded a resonant warning after the Great Lakes crisis of 1996–97: 'even if their soldiers wear gum-boots' armies around the world are now capable of waging sophisticated information campaigns.

People's actions may not result from conscious and deliberate planning about the response they are likely to elicit from journalists, but any understanding of these actions is incomplete without allowing for the extent to which behaviour and experiences are structured by internalised narratives. And news is one of the most important narratives.

The feedback loop

In 2001, at a Reporting the World seminar on coverage of the Arab–Israeli conflict, Bob Jobbins, then head of news at BBC World Service, said 'Conflict resolution may become harder or easier as a result of my reporting, but that's a judgement that is made *after* our reporting'. This is a key underlying proposition in the theory of objectivity, a version of what the sociologist Max Weber once called an 'ethic of conviction'. News is reported 'without fear or favour' and the world presented, as Walter Cronkite used to reiterate every night to US TV audiences, 'the way it is'. Yet the reality of today's media is that it is 'the way someone would like us to see it'.

For journalists to see themselves as objective, in the sense of being detached from the events that they cover, is to overlook the role of news as a process in shaping human behaviour. The process leads people to create facts that will be reported in a way that, in their view, will bring some advantage to their cause, career or bank balance. Furthermore, 'media manipulation' is successfully achieved through watching, reading or listening to previous reporting. Every newspaper, newscast or webcast adds another layer to the collective understanding of how the process works. The way the facts are covered today unavoidably influences the calculations or instincts that inform the behaviour of people creating 'facts' to be reported tomorrow.

The production of news is not a linear process, with a clearly defined beginning and end, but is more accurately described as a dynamic 'feedback loop', connecting journalists and their sources in a seamless sequence of cause and effect. The question remains: to what extent can one gauge the impact of particular decisions made by journalists in selecting the facts to report and organising these facts into narratives?

Reporting 'terrorism'

It is the policymaker's lament that so many policies have to be made as solutions to unexpected problems. The suicide hijackings of 11 September are perhaps the ultimate example. As any policy is being formulated, a calculation will be made as to whether and how it can be credibly presented to reporters and the public as a feasible solution. This calculation, and therefore the policy, depends, in part, on how the problem has been diagnosed on the front pages and evening bulletins.

How were the attacks on New York and Washington, DC, diagnosed? *New York Magazine* media writer Michael Wolff immediately detected a state of 'notionlessness' in mainstream US news. A retreat, over a period of years, from consistent, in-depth coverage of world affairs left journalists, readers and audiences to 'identify the villain as some pure spasm of all-powerful, far-reaching apocalyptic irrationality'. Yet there was a good deal of intelligent reporting, which illuminated the strategic nature of the atrocity. Richard Falk of Princeton University called this 'the work of dark genius, a penetrating tactical insight that endangers our future in funda-

mental respects that we are only beginning to apprehend'.

This entails reporting terrorism as a dysfunctional but, crucially, intelligible response to an identifiable set of conditions. For example, *Time* and *Newsweek* explored 'why they hate us' and 'the roots of rage', tracing the links with issues of structural violence, from Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories to the impoverishment of millions from the Maghreb to Central Asia, and cultural violence, including the historic failure of religious and political reform movements in Islamic societies.

The cumulative influence of patterns in reporting can be highly significant. To diagnose violence as autistic—mad, bad and irrational—helps to make more violence appear to be a logical remedy. Diagnose it as arising from, or constructed by, underlying issues of political, economic and social development and it makes more sense to apply a remedy, as European Union Commissioner Chris Patten suggested, consisting of 'smart development assistance [rather than] smart bombs'.

Shared assumptions

Objectivity is seldom *articulated* as a theory of journalism, and when it is, its defenders usually admit that the journalist's role cannot be reduced to that of a mere cipher of information. One suggestion is that the nearest one can get to 'objective journalism' is to work on the basis of 'shared language and assumptions'. Yet modern global communication systems, and the fragmentation of domestic audiences, make this an increasingly unconvincing claim, which has been exposed particularly by coverage of the 'War on Terrorism'.

Shortly after the attacks of 11 September, the Pew Research Center conducted a survey of opinion leaders around the world, asking whether they thought people in their countries saw the atrocity as 'blowback'—a response to US foreign policy. In the US, scarcely any respondents did, in sharp contrast to respondents in the rest of the world. The Center's findings have subsequently been echoed in a mass of empirical and anecdotal evidence. Rightly or wrongly, the assumption that, to some extent, the US brought the attack on itself is shared globally. But this is not the underlying assumption in much of the reporting of the War on Terrorism, which presents itself as objective.

The coverage in London-based media of the complex maneuverings that may lead to another US-led attack on Iraq has generally been presented in terms of how it would strike a blow against terrorism. What is rarer is reporting from the opposite perspective, questioning what such a move would do, through 'blowback', to *increase* the danger from terrorism, and whether such an escalation was, in fact, the 'tactical insight' behind the events of 11 September.

What is needed is for journalists to help identify the assumptions behind the way events and processes are presented to us, who shares them and who does not. This is the only way we can inspect and assess them for ourselves, itself a necessary step in reaching an informed judgement about the wisdom and likely effectiveness of our leaders' responses.

The liberal theory of journalism based on objectivity is supposed to equip readers and audiences to do this and thus to contribute to the health of a democracy. But events of recent months have underscored the need for a new conceptual framework if journalism is to perform this essential role. The first casualty of the War on Terrorism may be the complacency of journalists. Judgements about the impact of their reporting, and the responsibilities that this brings, can no longer be deferred until after the event.

Jake Lynch is a consultant and author for Reporting the World, www.reportingtheworld.org