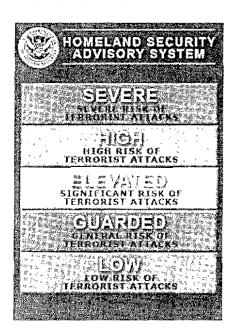# Fear of Terrorism

This chapter describes the role of fear in matters of terrorism and security, starting with the truism that acts of terrorism serve the purposes of terrorists by exploiting the public's fear. It presents an anatomy of fear – its relationship to actual risks, perceived risks, and internal and external stimuli that contribute to perceived risk and fear – and a model of fear management. It considers the roles of the media and politics as both stimuli of fear and tools for managing it.

A. Fear of Terrorism: Basics

Until 2001, people in the United States had relatively little fear of terrorism. Two vast oceans had insulated the United States from serious acts of violence from foreign sources, and its citizens were further protected against hostile alien forces by the strongest military on earth. Fear was reserved largely for street crime and cancer, airplane crashes and shark attacks, judging from the attention paid to stories on these subjects in media news programming. The suicide attacks on New York and Washington marked the opening of a new chapter in the history of fear in the United States. In the days that followed September 11, people throughout the United States bought many millions of dollars worth of duct tape and gas masks, puzzled over how to act when the terror alert color code was orange, and became extremely suspicious of men in turbans and women in head scarves. Four days after the attack, a Sikh gas station owner, Balbir Singh Sodhi, was shot and killed in Phoenix by an Arizonan who assumed that Sodhi was a Muslim.

The Homeland Security Advisory System, a color-coded terrorism threat advisory scale.

What is the nature of the fears that drive such behaviors? To what extent are these fears useful and reasonable, and to what extent are they harmful and irrational? What, if anything, should public officials do about fear? What can ordinary citizens do about it? These are the issues we take up in this chapter.

1. The Significance of Fear

Terror is very much a matter of fear: "terror" means fear in the extreme. (The word derives from the Latin verb *terrere*, to cause trembling.) Terrorism is fueled by the public's fear; its power lies "almost exclusively in the fear it creates" (Martin and Walcott, 1988). Terrorists commit acts of violence against noncombatant populations typically because they anticipate that doing so will strike fear into the hearts of the population. They might, of course, have other motives for attacking innocents, such as sheer hatred, a desire to exterminate another group, and so on. In those cases, too, fear is a critical factor: fear generated by acts of terrorism creates new problems and imposes further harms, above and beyond those caused by the acts themselves, and in both the near and long term.

From the perspective of the terrorist, acts of violence are successful when they cause mass hysteria, inducing target populations to impose vastly greater harms on themselves as a consequence of their own fear than from the immediate damage associated with the initial acts. As we have seen in Iraq and elsewhere, this can produce a cycle that defines defeat in a war against terrorism. To borrow Michael Ignatieff's (2004) words about what defeat in

such a war looks like: "We would survive, but we would no longer recognize ourselves or our institutions. We would exist but lose our identity as free peoples" (p. 154). Thus, the yield to the terrorist of a considerably larger payoff than from the initial attack may in turn be an incentive for further acts of terrorism. This cycle can be broken either when the public sees that the acts have subsided or when prospective terrorists understand that their acts, even substantial ones, draw limited attention and have little subsequent impact on the target population. The self-perpetuating nature of the problem is captured in the words of the twentieth-century cartoon character, Pogo: "We have met the enemy, and it is us."[1]

Because fear is an essential aspect of terrorism, our ability to understand terrorism and deal with it effectively depends critically on our understanding the nature and sources of fear and the harms it imposes on society. Strategies for dealing with offenders and protecting targets against street crimes have been effectively complemented with strategies for managing the public's fear of crime. Such fear-management strategies could be even more effective for dealing with terrorism, because fear is more central to terrorism than it is to crime. Our efforts to deal more directly with terrorists and to protect targets of terrorism may also be more effective if coupled with effective strategies for managing the public's fear of terrorism.

2. Short- and Long-Term Consequences of Excessive Fear

Fear is not all bad. Doctors distinguish between short-term *acute pain* and long-lasting *chronic pain*, and a similar distinction has been made between *acute fear* – the natural and immediate response to danger that tends to subside quickly – and *chronic fear*, the sort that persists after an immediate danger has passed (Hollander, 2004; Mahl, 1952). Reasonable levels of fear can generate the sort of concerns that help us develop coherent responses to various dangers – acting to prevent them in the first place and then dealing with them effectively when they do occur.

There are many compelling reasons to conclude, however, that the public's fears of terrorism are inflated, and inflated fears tend to harm us in both the short term and long term. In the short term, an extreme level of fear tends to divert people from productive activities, it induces them to consume resources that may do little to protect them against harm, and it can produce severe stresses and reduce social capital and the quality of life. In extreme cases, fear can produce public panics, severe social and financial disruptions, and sharp spikes in accidental deaths, injuries, and suicides. The stresses and reductions in social capital can persist beyond the short term, bringing about detachment and distrust – harming emotional and physical health and economic well-being. These larger effects can spread in a costly social contagion: fear of violence is deeply ingrained, with a strong potential to spread to

others. In their landmark essay, "Broken Windows," James Q. Wilson and George Kelling (1982) observe, "In cases where behavior that is tolerable to one person is intolerable to many others, the reactions of the others – fear, withdrawal, flight – may ultimately make matters worse for everyone, including the individual who first professed his indifference."

Over the longer term, fear can induce politicians to pander to and thus aggravate the public's chronic fears, reducing freedoms and invoking responses at home and abroad that may serve to alienate prospective allies rather than to reduce the sources of the threats and thus enhance security. In the case of terrorism, excessive fear makes all targets more attractive. *New Yorker* essayist Adam Gopnik (2006) puts it succinctly: "Terror makes fear, and fear stops thinking." *New York Times* essayist Thomas Friedman (2007) says it even more succinctly: "9/11 has made us stupid." He elaborates sarcastically, "Since 9/11, we've become 'The United States of Fighting Terrorism.'"

There can be good reason to fear fear itself, as President Franklin D. Roosevelt warned in his 1933 inaugural address. Today the public's fear of the fear of terrorism appears to be too *small*, and the consequences of this lack of concern for the hazards of excessive fear could be great.

3. *Fear of Crime, Fear of International Violence*

Terror means fear in the extreme largely because terrorism is crime in the extreme. Criminologists have found that fear of crime can impose costs on society that exceed those of crime itself, manifesting as reduced quality of life, wasteful expenditures on resources and measures that do little to prevent crime, stress-related illnesses and health costs, and related social costs (M. Cohen, 2000; President's Commission, 1967; Warr, 2000). Because the damage associated with a typical act of terrorism is considerably greater than for a typical street crime, the level of fear and the associated social costs are generally much greater for terrorism than for ordinary crime. Raising fear levels is, after all, a primary goal of terrorism. It is no coincidence that the subject of terrorism has dominated the news since September 11, 2001 – and it may well continue to do so for years to come – while crime has been moved from the front page to the metropolitan section of most major newspapers, despite the fact that the level of crime did not decline appreciably in the years following 9/11 and in fact began to increase around 2005.

In one important respect, the public's fear of international violence is very much like its fear of crime: fear of terrorism has remained high even after several years without a serious terrorist incident on U.S. soil. This is not a new phenomenon. Fear of crime remained high throughout the 1990s even as crime rates plummeted: the homicide rate, a bellwether of crime generally in the United States, dropped from 9 homicides per 100,000 residents in 1990

to about 5 per 100,000 in 2000 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Uniform Crime Reports*).

Just as crime rates have declined, so have other forms of international violence over the past few decades. The ending of the Cold War brought with it a huge decline in the amount of international violence. There were 40 percent fewer conflicts throughout the world in 2003 than in 1992; 80 percent fewer deadly conflicts involving 1,000 or more battle deaths; and an 80 percent decline in the number of genocides and other mass slaughters of civilians. International terrorism did increase during the period, but terrorists killed just a fraction of the number killed in wars during the same period (Mack, 2005).

4. Community-Oriented Interventions to Reduce Excessive Fear

In the 1980s, police departments introduced fear reduction programs as an essential part of a community policing movement. A centerpiece of these programs was putting police in closer contact to the public – largely through the use of foot patrols and bike patrols, the establishment of mini-precincts in local neighborhoods, and new incentive systems to induce police officers to become less authoritarian and more service-oriented (Cordner, 1986; Skogan, 1990). These programs spread to the courts and correctional sectors and to the community at large – in the form of neighborhood watch networks – thus making the control of fear a central element of community-oriented criminal justice systems and a complement to conventional strategies for preventing street crime. Such practices and policies may be applicable to the problem of terrorism, as is discussed further in the section, "Fear and Public Policy: Managing Fear."

Some fear reduction interventions for street crimes will be more relevant and practical than others for the prevention of terrorism. We would do well, in any case, to consider the full range of strategies and interventions to ensure that policies and practices that are applicable to the public's fear of terrorism are not overlooked. At the federal level, homeland security officials are authorized and responsible as well to consider approaches that will effectively manage the public's level of fear to ensure that it is neither excessively high nor too low relative to objective threat levels.

B. The Anatomy of Fear and Its Relationship to Risk

We can begin to understand the fear of crime in general and the fear of terrorism in particular by asking the following questions: What is the nature of fear? What are its sources? And, how is fear related to real risks and to factors that are independent of those risks?

1. *The Nature and Sources of Fear*

Thomas Hobbes (1651/1996) documented the significance of fear in the seventeenth century, regarding it as a natural passion that shapes human behavior. Psychologists validated this claim over the next three centuries, starting with the definition of fear as the sensation of alarm caused by the anticipation of a threat; they then elaborated on the definition with evidence that the sensation is typically accompanied by physiological changes such as increased pulse, perspiration, rapid breathing, and galvanic skin response (Mayes, 1979). People may fear for their own safety, for the safety of loved ones, or both. Fear is not all bad: it keeps us out of harm's way. Some of it is innate – fear associated with abrupt change is clearly evident in newborn babies – but it is mostly learned, either through the recurrence of a previously experienced harm or the anticipation of a harm about which one person has been warned by another. In the case of crime, fear may be induced by an actual victimization, an immediate threat such as a menacing person behaving strangely in a high-crime area at night, by news of a series of violent stranger attacks in an area, or by other signals of danger ahead.

Fear is a matter of *biology*: the emotion we refer to as "fear" is stimulated by physical phenomena. Neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux (1998) describes the mechanics of fear as centered in the amygdala, an almond-shaped mass of gray matter in the anterior portion of the temporal lobe, the "hub in the brain's wheel of fear." Stimulation of the amygdala generates an outpouring of stress hormones, including adrenaline, which produces a state of extreme alertness, followed by the secretion of a natural steroid, cortisol. Research physician Marc Siegel (2005) describes the result as follows: "The heart speeds up and pumps harder, the nerves fire more quickly, the skin cools and gets goose bumps, the eyes dilate to see better and the brain receives a message that it is time to act." Although the triggers of fear vary from one species to the next, all animals with this brain architecture experience fear through this basic mechanism.

Fear is in the genes. Cognitive barriers that cloud one's ability to recognize legitimate threats can be inherited. Creatures with too little fear of genuine threats are more inclined to be killed by the threatening entities, and the genetic lines of those victims tend to diminish or vanish altogether as a result. Age and gender are obvious biological factors that influence one's level of fear. Younger people tend to be less fearful than older people; hence they more often engage in behaviors that bring greater risks to their own safety and the safety of others – due in part to lower levels of experience, but due largely as well to inherent differences in tastes for risk between the young and old. The young are more likely to succumb to accidental deaths than the old, and they are more likely as well to be victims of crime. And because males
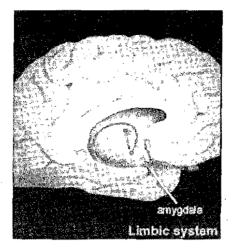
Diagram of the brain, highlighting the amygdala.

tend to be more aggressive and less fearful, they tend to experience higher rates of accidents and violent victimizations than females.

Fear is also *environmentally determined*. First-born children tend to be more cautious than second-born children. And it is *learned*: we tend to fear the most what we understand the least, often through lack of experience or awareness. Most of us are inclined not to repeat behaviors when, through direct experience, we know that those behaviors threaten our safety or the safety of others. Fears are shaped as well by others: parents, neighbors, teachers, the media, and peers. What is learned from each of these sources may produce misperceptions of actual risks, but it is learned nonetheless, and it in turn alters fear levels, for better or worse.

2. The Universality of Fear

The misperceptions that give rise to inflated fears and the extreme social costs that typically accompany these distortions and fears are by no means unique to the United States. Europeans have expressed concerns about terrorist attacks in Spain, Holland, and elsewhere on the continent; they are considerably more exposed to threats of terrorist attacks than are citizens of the United States. Akbar Ahmed (2003) observes that with the 9/11 attack came 24-hour television coverage under the large letters – "America Under Siege" – which tended to overlook the effects the attack had on the Muslim world. Traditional societies the world over had feared the corruption of their youth following years of invasive Western pop culture broadcast through new communication and information technologies, and the 9/11 attack left Muslims everywhere feeling even more under siege than before and fearing reprisal.

Phobias are ubiquitous, and they are as old as humankind. We have discovered that they are common in isolated and connected societies alike, that modern technology not only fails to inoculate people against fear but can actually contribute to the rapid spread of fear.

3. Fear and Risk

Fears often do not correspond closely to the actual risk levels of the threats perceived. Each person's unique combination of inherent inclinations and personal experiences shapes both her or his sense of the risks associated with various threats and the fear attached to those perceptions. The lack of correspondence between fear and actual threat is caused by a myriad of factors, including the widespread tendencies to ignore certain types of pertinent information and, under the *precautionary principle*, to give excessive weight to the worst possible outcome (Sunstein, 2005). It is also fed by *emotional contagion* based on misinformation obtained from parents, peers, media, and other sources, which can be significantly heightened through tipping point mechanisms, such as social cascades (i.e., the rapid spread of ideas through social networks) and group polarization. Furedi (2004) notes, "If vulnerability is the defining feature of the human condition, we are quite entitled to fear everything." The influence of others serves to validate and deepen such individual inclinations toward vulnerability.

We can identify two distinct facets of an individual's tendency to overreact, or occasionally to underreact, to threats: (1) making subjective assessments of risks that are high or low relative to the objective risk levels and (2) having fear levels that are high or low relative to those subjective assessments. Rare but extreme threats tend to activate both aspects of distortion. For example, only a dozen or so shark attacks occur annually worldwide. Yet, thanks in no small measure to the horrendous nature of an individual attack, which affects our sense of vulnerability, and sensational media accounts that exaggerate people's perceptions of the risks of shark attacks, the fear of such attacks is considerably higher than the fear of fatal threats that are *thousands* of times more likely to occur. More than 100,000 deaths in the United States are caused each year by car crashes and gunshot wounds; 75,000 people die each year due to alcohol abuse alone (Simao, 2004).

Much the same can be said of fears of serial murders as of shark attacks (and, even more so, of threats of asteroid collisions and cell phone radiation). They are presented by media as legitimate threats, and people tend to fear them at levels that are vastly out of proportion to any reasonable assessment of their incidence (the frequency of occurrence per year, or per century in the case of fatal asteroid collisions) or prevalence (how many people have been victimized cumulatively to date).

Curiously, fear levels are often highest among the very groups that face the least risk, as in the case of the elderly and crime. At the other extreme, people who are frequently exposed to real threats often learn to live with the dangers and exhibit fear levels that would seem appropriate for groups that are in fact much safer. In the case of natural hazards, such as floods, earthquakes, and volcano eruptions, groups with little economic or political power tend to be more at risk than others (St. Cyr, 2005). Because the poor and powerless often live in places where terrorism is more common and do not have the resources to defend themselves against natural disasters, they may be too preoccupied with day-to-day survival to get caught up in frenzies of fright that safer, yet more fear-obsessed populations often experience.

4. *Subjective vs. Objective Assessments of Risk*

Our sense of danger is so often out of line with reality largely for two reasons: (1) it is based on unsystematic evidence and (2) our perceptions are often distorted – even when our fear level is parallel with our perception of the risk of various threats. Unsystematic evidence, whether experienced first hand or learned indirectly, can be highly unrepresentative of reality due to a variety of causes: the nature of the event experienced directly may itself be unrepresentative of the class of events with which we associate the experience; the occurrence of the event may be more or less rare than we realize; our perception of the event may be distorted by physical interference or emotion; recollections of events change over time; and our filtering of information about events not directly experienced may distort our perceptions of the risk and actual nature of the thing feared.

The accumulation of mixed messages from others can add to this individually imposed confusion. Parents often condition children to err on the side of caution and to overestimate threats; peers often counter parental messages, encouraging their friends to engage in thrill-seeking behaviors. Social scientists have discovered that this interaction of our unique innate predispositions with the vast jumble of mixed information from the environment can cause our *subjective assessments of risk* of a particular threat to be at considerable variance with the actual *objective risk* of the threat. We tend to blow some threats well out of proportion and underestimate others.

Our understanding of the discrepancy between subjective assessments of risk and actual objective risks was informed substantially by research conducted in the 1970s by experimental psychologists Daniel Kahneman,[2] Amos Tversky, Paul Slovic, and others, following the path-breaking research of psychologist and decision theorist Ward Edwards in the 1950s and '60s. They found that people use a variety of *heuristics* – simple rules of

thumb that are easier to use than more rigorous methods involving complex computations – to draw inferences and make decisions. They found further that people use heuristics to assess and respond both to ordinary situations and to extraordinary hazards. The various heuristics used, however, often contradict fundamental laws of probability and tend to distort people's perceptions of risk.

Kahneman and Tversky (2000) refer to the tendency of people to distort probabilities as the *psychophysics of chance*. One of the most common distortions is the tendency for most people to give excessive weight to improbable events (pp. 1, 7–9, 209). They have difficulty distinguishing between small probabilities, like 1 in 100, and extreme rarities, like 1 in 1,000,000. The former is, in fact, 10,000 times more likely than the latter. These distortions tend to produce excessively risk-averse behaviors in most situations involving rare but sensational threats, incoherent behaviors in situations involving uncertainty in which facts are presented in convoluted terms, and excessively risk-taking behaviors in situations involving large but uncertain benefits, as in lotteries in which odds are stacked against the bettor.

Tversky and Kahneman (1982) refer to another such distortion as the *availability heuristic* (or simply *availability*): people tend to think that events are more probable when they have occurred recently. The events loom large because they are fresh in the memory. For example, people are inclined to fear earthquakes more when they have occurred in the past year than when they have not occurred recently, even though the risk may in fact be lower a few months after an earthquake than years later, at the start of the next earthquake cycle. Cass Sunstein (2002) observes that the availability heuristic was readily evident in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, when "many Americans were afraid to travel in airplanes and even to appear in public places" (p. 50).

Similarly, Gary Kleck et al. (2005) find that perceptions of punishment are unrelated to actual levels of punishment. They speculate that these misperceptions are a product of the weak relationship between the number of highly publicized punishment events and the actual rate of routine, largely unpublicized punitive activities of the criminal justice system (p. 654). The challenge of maintaining public order by discouraging people from overreacting to prospective acts of terrorism thus has parallels to the challenge of maintaining public order by discouraging prospective offenders from believing they can get away with committing crimes.

A variety of factors can distort perceptions of threats by influencing one's immediate emotional state, much like a pang of hunger or whiff of fresh donuts can overwhelm the prudent shopper's sense of good health (Kahneman and Thaler, 2006). Vivid media images of the victims of rare disasters, in particular, serve to inflate the public's perceptions of threats and thus create

levels of fear that can harm the public welfare. When people see the photograph of a victim of a one in a million event on the evening news – a person killed by lightning or a shark attack, or by a suicide bomber in Madrid or London – typically, their first reaction is *not* that it is virtually impossible for them also to be victimized by such an event. Even when they are told that the risk is less than one in a million, they tend to distort the risk when confronted with the incontrovertible image of a real victim of disaster. The photograph of a death scene accompanied by a photo of the previously live victim offers more palpable information about a threat and thus is more compelling than the information that such episodes actually occur at an extremely small rate. Finucane et al. (2000) refer to this as the *affect heuristic* – the tendency for perception and behavior to be excessively influenced by images that trigger emotional responses.

Cass Sunstein (2002) refers to the tendency for people to suspend rational inference in the face of the affect heuristic as "probability neglect." He notes that the tendency for people to ignore probabilities and behave less rationally is particularly great in the case of terrorism[3]:

> When probability neglect is at work, people's attention is focussed on the bad outcome itself, and they are inattentive to the fact that it is unlikely to occur. Almost by definition, an act of terrorism will trigger intense fear, and hence people will focus on the awfulness of the potential outcomes, not on their probabilities (p. 51).

Sunstein (2002) observes that people's judgments of uncertain threats tend to be distorted in the following conditions: when the threat is unfamiliar or misunderstood, when people have less personal control over the situation, when the media give more attention to the threat, when the situation is irreversible, when the threat originates with another person rather than from a natural phenomenon (p. 59), and when people are influenced by the fears of others, a process known as *group polarization* (p. 88). Sunstein (2003b) speculates that the millions of Americans who devoted time and energy to purchasing duct tape and emergency supplies would have been far safer had they spent that same time and energy losing weight, staying out of the sun, driving carefully, and ending their smoking habits.

Frank Furedi (2002a) amplifies many of these points in his book, *Culture of Fear*, arguing that perceptions of risk, ideas about safety, and controversies over health, the environment, and technology have little to do with science or empirical evidence. They are shaped more profoundly by deeply rooted cultural assumptions about human vulnerability. These forces have worsened in the post-9/11 era: "'The end is nigh' is no longer a warning issued by religious fanatics; rather, scaremongering is represented as the act of a concerned and responsible citizen. . . . The culture of fear is underpinned by

a profound sense of powerlessness, a diminished sense of agency that leads people to turn themselves into passive subjects who can only complain that 'we are frightened'" (Furedi, 2004; see also Brzezinski, 2007).

The consequences of the public's excessive fear of sensational events such as terrorist acts appear to be considerably greater than is widely understood. According to Marc Siegel (2005),

> We feel the stress and become more prone to irritability, disagreement, worry, insomnia, anxiety and depression. We are more likely to experience chest pain, shortness of breath, dizziness and headache. We become more prone to heart disease, cancer and stroke, our greatest killers.... Worry about the wrong things puts us at greater risk of the diseases that should be concerning us in the first place.

It remains to be determined precisely how much stress-related illness and injuries and other social harms have been stimulated by gross exaggerations of danger in media and political messages. In the meantime, existing evidence suggests that the social costs of fear are high. For example, during the three months following the 9/11 attack, about 1,000 more people died in traffic fatalities than in the same period the previous year, due to a combination of factors that almost surely included a fear-induced spike in the demand for driving rather than flying distances of more than 100 miles (see Box 10.1 by David Ropeik).

Virtually every day, someone somewhere becomes the widely publicized victim of a tragic but rare event. Yet for each such person who is harmed, the quality of many thousands of other lives may be diminished substantially when they live their lives, taking unreasonable precautions, in fear that they too might succumb to the unlikely tragic prospects that have befallen the few – about whom we may know more than is good for our own safety and well-being.

C. Media and Fear

We learn about serious acts of violence in general, and about terrorism in particular, through the media: television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and, increasingly, the Internet. In our free and open democratic society, the public is served with such information under the First Amendment to the Constitution: "Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press." Restrictions on such information would make it more difficult for the public to hold their elected officials accountable for failures to provide protection for which they are responsible. The public obtains useful information about terrorism principally through the media.

At the same time, however, the media serve as an essential instrument of terror: without media, terrorists would have no stage on which to perform

Box 10.1. We're Being Scared to Death

– David Ropeik

I wonder whether the politicians who are using fear to get themselves elected would stop if they knew the harm they may be doing to people's health. Real physical harm. Making people sick. Perhaps even killing them. Not intentionally, of course, or knowingly. But this kind of "be afraid" message does more than encourage people to think that you are the candidate who will make them safe. It creates stress and may be at least as much of a threat to public health as terrorism itself.

The University of Michigan's Transportation Research Institute found that, in the period of October through December 2001, about 1,000 more Americans died in motor vehicle crashes than during the same period the year before. Why? Fear of flying certainly played a big role. Though that fear wasn't something created by the government, it demonstrates that when people are afraid, they make choices like driving instead of flying that make them feel safer, even though such choices raise their risk.

Here's another example. Around the 2002 July Fourth holiday – the first post-9/11 national birthday celebration – government warnings suggested an increased likelihood of terrorism. FBI records indicate that requests for handgun purchases in the latter part of June were one-third higher than average. Own a gun if you choose, but let's be honest. The likelihood that a gun will protect you from a terrorist attack is pretty low. But having a gun around does increase the chance of an accident.

Remember when anthrax was in the mail? Tens of thousands of us took antibiotics prophylactically. That made us feel safer, but taking such drugs in advance doesn't do much good – it just helps drug-resistant strains of bacteria proliferate.

And then there are the insidious effects of persistently elevated stress. Chronically elevated stress weakens our immune system. It is associated with long-term damage to our cardiovascular and gastrointestinal systems. It impairs formation of new bone cells, reduces fertility and contributes to clinical depression.

Making people afraid threatens their health. Are we stressed more than normal? A poll by the National Mental Health Association about the psychological effects of 9/11 (released in January of 2004) found that 49% of Americans described themselves as worried, 41% described themselves as afraid, 8% said they were more often emotionally upset for no apparent reason, and 7% were having trouble sleeping. In New York City, evidence

suggests increased drug and alcohol abuse and smoking in the three years since the Sept. 11 attacks.

It is hard to estimate how much harm has been caused by all this anxiety. The increased death toll on the roads in late 2001 alone is more than a third of the total number of victims on 9/11. It is entirely plausible to suggest that, because of our fears, as many people have been harmed, and maybe even died prematurely, as died on that awful day.

It's simplistic and overly cynical to say that every government communication about terrorism, such as raising the alert level or announcing an arrest, is political. There are thousands of government workers earnestly trying to protect us. But politicians of both parties who use fear to manipulate our votes contribute to the very harm from which they say they are trying to protect us.

Public health is at stake. And not just mental health. Our physical well-being is on the line here. People are being harmed as politicians frighten us to curry our votes. It is fair to demand that they stop, and we should hold them accountable at the polls if they don't.

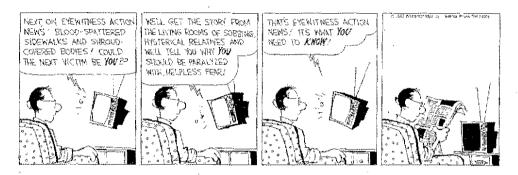[*Source: Los Angeles Times* (September 22, 2004)]

their acts of flagrant violence against noncombatants (Frey, 2006; Nacos, 1994; Norris, 2003). The fear that defines terrorism requires media broadcasting; the wider the audience reached, the greater the fear and more effective the act.[4]

1. Do the Media Exploit Our Sense of Powerlessness?

The public is especially fearful of extreme predatory acts of violence, acts against which they are powerless to defend or protect themselves. This sense of powerlessness surely contributes to the public's exaggerated fears of terrorism, violent crime, and shark attacks. Accidents in cars and homes, in contrast, are more likely to be a product of one's own behavior than that of a predator, as in the case of terrorism and street crime. Media accounts of surprise attacks by predators against innocent victims seize the public's attention more indelibly than do depictions of readily preventable fatal falls down staircases or from ladders, or of heart attacks that result from overeating and lack of exercise. The sense of powerlessness that lies beneath the public's exaggerated fears of predatory attacks offers vicarious thrills for the many who are not affected, who can sit safely in their homes and witness the aftermath of such attacks on hapless victims. In the weeks preceding the 9/11 attack, two of the most prominent items in the news were the disappearance of Washington intern Chandra Levy and shark attacks. Although

Box 10.2. Calvin & Hobbes: Calvin's Dad Gets the News (January 13, 1995)

– Bill Watterson

sheer curiosity often draws attention to such events presented as news, some also derive pleasure, secretly or otherwise, in beholding from a distance sensational stories of predatory tragedies befalling others (see Box 10.2).

For the media, these curiosities and vicarious thrills stimulate enhanced audience shares and, in turn, more extensive media airing of such events (Schaffert, 1992). The disproportionate attention these events receive is often justified on the grounds that the media are simply satisfying the public's demand. The "if-it-bleeds-it-leads" approach to media programming, however, brings with it a moral hazard: the disproportionate media attention given to extreme acts of predatory violence can further distort the public's already inflated fears of terrorism and other predatory events. Disproportionate publicity given to such events leads people to perceive that the risks are greater than they actually are. Sunstein (2005, pp. 78–98) points to several examples of the phenomenon of "this month's risk," including the Love Canal scare in the late 1970s, the Alar apple pesticide scare around 1990, and the summer of the shark in 2001. Robinson (2006) notes, in a similar vein, the disproportionate attention given by media to the occasional disappearance of a photogenic young white woman, clearly aimed at improving ratings rather than at informing the public about legitimate interests of public safety. Most Americans would probably be surprised to discover, as Anne Applebaum observes in Box 10.3, that their lives are actually far safer and that they live much longer than just about any group in human history, even in the era of terrorism (see also Spencer and Crossen, 2003).

The public's gross misperceptions of risk derive largely from the tendency of mass audiences to unconsciously take information provided over the airwaves and cables unskeptically as gospel. The late Marshall McLuhan (1996), celebrated authority on the power of media, likened the public's difficulty in distinguishing between media presentations and the real world to a fish that has no experience of life outside the pond: "We don't know who discovered water but we're pretty sure it wasn't the fish."[5]

Box 10.3. Finding Things to Fear

– Anne Applebaum

Is life today more dangerous than it used to be? It certainly seems that way. Between Alar in apples (remember that one?), acrylamide in crackers and trans fats in just about everything, our food has become inedible. What with the radiation emitted by our houses, the arsenic in the water and the toxic rays coming out of cell phones. it isn't really safe to sleep, drink, or talk, either.

Last week the entire Metro system in Washington, the capital of the free world, had to close down for a whole day because someone might be blown onto the tracks during a hurricane that began after dinner. This week children in Washington were not allowed to go to school for a whole day because streets were blocked by fallen trees and power lines, and because traffic lights at some intersections weren't working. A previous generation might have walked around the fallen trees and looked both ways before crossing the street. but the children of this generation clearly live in a much more dangerous world than did its parents, and we need to protect them.

Or maybe a previous generation was simply better at calculating risks than this one is. Consider this: In 1996 British scientists claimed, on fairly flimsy evidence, to have established links between mad cow disease in cattle, the human consumption of hamburgers, and a fatal brain disease called CJD in humans. "We could virtually lose a whole generation of people," one scientist infamously intoned, predicting a CJD epidemic of "biblical proportions."

In response, the British government slaughtered millions of innocent cattle. The costs were astronomical; the economy of the countryside was devastated; British agriculture has never recovered. Yet there were only 20 cases of CJD in Britain in 2000, 17 in 2002. So far, this year there are 12. At the same time, more than 1,000 people in Britain will die this year from falling down stairs. More lives would probably have been saved, in other words, if the British government had simply banned the construction of two-story houses.

It's pretty easy to laugh at British hysteria, especially when it concerns something called mad cow disease. But are we any better? After Sept. 11, 2001, thousands of people in this country swore off airplanes and began driving cars, apparently believing that cars are safer. In fact, the number of deaths on U.S. highways in a typical year – more than 40,000 – is more than double the number of people who have died in all commercial airplane accidents in the past 40 years. To put it differently, the odds of being killed in a terrorist incident in 2002 were one in 9 million. In that same year, the odds of dying in a traffic accident were about one in 7,000. By taking the precaution of not flying, many people died.

There are, I concede, some clear psychological explanations for some of this. It is a fact, for example, that people fear man-made disasters (terrorism, pesticides) far more than they fear natural disasters (hurricanes, snowstorms), even when the latter are more dangerous. It is also a fact that people fear unfamiliar things, such as SARS, far more than they fear familiar things, such as pneumonia, even though the latter kills a lot more people than the former. Indeed, thousands refused to fly to Asia for fear of catching SARS, but people didn't quit smoking in similarly large numbers, even though the chances of dying from smoking-related diseases were, and remain, a lot higher.

Although it is equally illogical, people are also more afraid of things they do not control, which is why driving a car does feel safer than flying in an airplane. When I am driving, I am behind the wheel. When I am in an airplane, someone else is driving, and for all I know he might be ill, or drunk, or incompetent, or flirting with the stewardess, or absent altogether.

Finally – although I have no proof – I'll also hazard a guess that people are disproportionately frightened by things they read about in the newspaper. By contrast, they are disproportionately willing to discount the evidence of their own experience. If you look around your neighborhood, you'll notice that the water is clean – which it wouldn't necessarily have been 100 years ago – and that the food isn't rotten or stale. Most children aren't dying young. Most adults aren't dying in middle age.

Life is far safer and lasts much longer for the average American than it ever has for just about anybody at any other time in human history – and maybe that explains the ludicrous precautions that city officials and federal bureaucrats and teachers and doctors and everyone else feels obligated to take nowadays to satisfy the public's demands. Now that we've eliminated most of the things that the human race once feared, we've just invented new ones to replace them.

McLuhan's sentiments were echoed by George Gerbner (Oliver, 2005) two decades later. In testimony before a Congressional subcommittee on communications in 1981, Gerbner said the following[6]:

> The most general and prevalent association with television viewing is a heightened sense of living in a "mean world" of violence and danger. Fearful people are more dependent, more easily manipulated and controlled, more susceptible to deceptively simple, strong, tough measures and hard-line postures.... They may accept and even welcome repression if it promises to relieve their insecurities. That is the deeper problem of violence-laden television.

In their news coverage of terrorism, the media have not passed up opportunities to exploit the public's innate fear of sensational tragedy. Former Vice President Al Gore (2007) highlights another form of media exploitation: thirty-second spot commercials that run during each election cycle and facilitate political pandering. As philosopher Ray Tallis (2007) puts it, "Apocalypse sells product, and one should not regard the epidemiology of panic as a guide to social or any other kind of reality."

Let us consider first how news coverage exploits public fears (the use of media for political ends is addressed later in this chapter). In late 2006, after more than five years without a serious episode of terrorism on U.S. soil, Wolf Blitzer and his colleagues at CNN continued to conclude television stories about violence in the Middle East and stories related to homeland security with this statement: "Stay tuned to CNN day and night for the most reliable news affecting your security."[7] CNN was not exceptional in this regard; it is in the mainstream of TV news reporting in the United States. Some networks, such as Fox News, have been even more exploitive. What are the consequences of this fear-feeding frenzy?

Perhaps the most serious consequence of media preoccupations with terrorism is that they may contribute significantly to self-fulfilling cycles of fear and violence. Some of this is self-evident: terrorists use the media as a tool for terror, taping videos of the beheadings of noncombatants and broadcasting warnings of further attacks by jihadist leaders. Western media outlets ordinarily edit and often censor the more gruesome of these media images, but there can be little doubt that the widespread airings of these events and threats in news reports feed the fires of fear and overreaction. Media coverage shapes public opinion, and public opinion, in turn, shapes public policy.

Even in the domain of crime, where the perpetrators typically have little or no interest in making the public more fearful, evidence indicates a statistical association between fear of crime and media. Wesley Skogan and Michael Maxfield (1981), for example, found a systematic positive correlation between the fear of crime and the number of hours spent watching television, after controlling for crime rates and other factors. Linda Heath (1984) found similar correlations between fear of crime and reading newspapers

that emphasize the reporting of crime. Although such systematic evidence has not yet been reported for the case of terrorism, largely because frequent acts of terrorism are a relatively recent phenomenon, the impact of 9/11 gives reason to expect an even stronger association between media presentations and fear for terrorism than for crime.

2. Reliable Media Accounts, Invalid Risks

The reporting of information about terrorism, crime, and other threats to public safety (including natural disasters, accidents, and illnesses) appears on the whole to be relatively *reliable* in all major media sources. The way that it is reported, however, provides an exceedingly *invalid* sense of the likelihood that an individual will be a victim of any of these threats. The media have more incentive to provide public information that is accurate – a growing corps of media ombudsmen has helped in this effort – than to ensure that the information is representative of ordinary life. Ordinary life is, by definition, not newsworthy. Rare, extreme events are more newsworthy than commonplace trivial ones, but the problem with even accurately reported extreme events is that they tend to overwhelm the senses.

Mark Warr (2000) notes that the reporting of such events typically provides insufficient historical or geographical context. Information that focuses on the extreme rarity of the most severe events is considered less interesting, hence less newsworthy. The problem is likely to be worse with respect to terrorism. We have learned much more about the rates and causes of crime based on valid information in the United States and elsewhere; we have very little comparable evidence about terrorist events and their causes. Scary stories supplant such evidence, and however reliable those stories may be, they are no substitute for valid evidence of the prevalence of the threats described.

The scary stories are particularly toxic with regard to relations between Islam and the West. We are confronted repeatedly by apocalyptic images of suicide bombers acting in the name of Allah. Muslims have been assaulted no less by grotesque images of Abu Ghraib and of women and children killed by U.S. military, the collateral damage inflicted in the name of freedom and democracy. These images have become etched in the minds of the general public on each side, yet extensive interviews with ordinary people reveal that neither set bears any resemblance whatever to the lifestyles, morals, and aspirations of the mainstream of either side (Ahmed, 2007; Burke, 2007; see also Esposito, 2002; Gerges, 2006).

The problem has been exacerbated by several profound changes in the very nature of media. Throughout most of the twentieth century, major news networks controlled the broadcast reporting of news. Toward the end of the century we witnessed a proliferation of channels of electronic communication – the Internet, blogs, e-mail, chat groups, online journals, and the thousands

of cable and satellite television channels. Jonathan Sacks (2002) refers to this change as the replacement of broadcasting with "narrowcasting." People throughout the world have thus been given the means to listen only to those who agree with them and to screen out voices of dissent. Vivid television images, especially, evoke emotion rather than generate understanding (Gore, 2007). The result: the most visually compelling protests, the angriest voices, and the most extreme slogans dominate, contributing to the replacement of a culture of conciliation with a culture of conflict. With these developments comes a loss of conversation, which Sacks (2002) regards as the heartbeat of democratic politics, and in turn a reduction in the prospects for civic and global peace and an expansion of the breeding grounds for terrorism.

3. Media Objectivity

The reliability of media accounts of terrorism and other events that stimulate public fear grows out of the media's responsibility for objective reporting. Reporters who fail to satisfy high standards of accuracy, and their employers, can become stories themselves, as occurred in the cases of Jason Blair and the *New York Times*, Dan Rather and CBS, and Eason Jordan and CNN. Checks against biased, inaccurate, or otherwise irresponsible reporting are further enhanced by ombudsmen, noted earlier, and by a growing industry of media-on-media reporting, such as WNYC's weekly "On the Media" program, Slate Magazine's "Press Box" column, and numerous Internet media watch "bloggers."

Media Rights and Responsibilities. Terrorism raises unique and extremely vexing questions about media objectivity:

- How do reporters balance their responsibilities to their employers to provide exciting stories with high standards of professionalism and decency?
- How do reporters balance both of those with their sense of patriotic duty when conflicts emerge?
- How can they report about terrorism responsibly when such reports call attention to and thus legitimize the agendas of the terrorists?
- How should a hostage event be reported when the reporting can itself worsen the outcome of the event and increase incentives for further hostage-taking?
- How much detail should a reporter provide about the vulnerability of domestic targets if doing so might give new ideas to potential terrorists?
- Should reporters protect their sources of information when doing so can endanger innocent others?
- Why do terrorist events in the Middle East receive so much more attention than equally, if not more, serious events in Africa or Southeast Asia?
- Does "balanced" reporting require that every point of view, however unrepresentative or extreme, be included in the story?

- What circumstances and rules should govern whether an attacker is called a "terrorist" or "mass murderer" or "Islamo-fascist"[8] rather than an "insurgent" or "freedom fighter" or "revolutionary"?
- How should conflicts between freedom of the press and the sensitivities of others be resolved?
- How, in short, does a reporter honor the right of the public to have accurate information when doing so feeds fear and terrorism?

Several commentators have drawn conclusions about where reporters come down on these questions. Some argue that the reporting tends to favor the terrorists excessively (Alexander, 1984; Bassiouni, 1982; Y. Cohen, 1983; Podhoretz, 1981), whereas others argue that the reporters allow their sense of patriotism to overwhelm the objectivity of their reporting (Ewers, 2003). Still others assert that the reporting reveals the incivility of the terrorists and thus hurts the causes they intend to advance (L. Martin, 1985; Paletz, Fozzard and Ayanian, 1982).

A major difficulty in assessing objectivity is that such assessments are largely in the eyes of the beholder. Those who think Fox News's reporting of terrorist events is objective will rarely be inclined to see Al Jazeera's reporting of the same events as objective, and vice versa. Many regard both to be biased, with Fox News giving a distinctly pro-American perspective and Al Jazeera reporting from a strong pro-Arab perspective. The facts reported by both may in fact be accurate, but the selection of events reported, people interviewed, and segments shown may not be at all representative of the respective populations from which each of these selections is made. The selection may, instead, be designed to feed the point of view of a particular audience.

The Danish Cartoon Episode. Tension between freedom of the press and the need for media to exercise self-control and refrain against inflaming passions reached a boiling point in early 2006. The ordeal began in September 2005, when the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published twelve cartoon depictions of the prophet Muhammad, one showing a bomb in his turban. Many Muslims regard any picture of their revered founder as blasphemous, and the cartoons were considered especially insulting. The initial response was in the form of restrained protests by Danish Muslims; this was followed by sharp criticisms throughout most of the Muslim world. Other European newspapers expressed solidarity with the principle of freedom of the press by reprinting the cartoons. By late January 2006 the reaction had became incendiary, resulting in boycotts of Danish products, demands that Denmark's prime minister apologize, burning of the Danish flags, bomb threats, the issuance of fatwas against offending cartoonists, the destruction of European embassies and consulates, rioting, and the deaths of dozens of people in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, and elsewhere.

The affair was portrayed initially in much of the Western media as a clash of civilizations, a conflict between the hallowed principle of freedom of press and quaint "premodernistic" notions of blasphemy ("Clash of Civilization," *Wall Street Journal*, 2006). The editor of *Jyllands-Posten* argued that, in inviting and publishing the cartoons, he was just following Karl Popper's adage of avoiding tolerance of the intolerant: "Our goal was simply to push back self-imposed limits on expression that seemed to be closing in tighter" (Rose, 2006).

Arguing on the side of moderation, op-ed essays and editorials elsewhere expressed the idea that with the right of freedom of the press comes the responsibility to exercise restraint and show respect for ideas that some hold as sacred (Hiatt, 2006). Urging Western media to lead by example, Reza Aslan (2006) argued that the cartoons "fly in the face of the tireless efforts of so many civic and religious leaders – both Muslim and non-Muslim – to promote unity and assimilation rather than hatred and discord; because they play into the hands of those who preach extremism; because they are fodder for the clash-of-civilizations mentality."

Along a similar line, Robert Wright (2006) observed that the error of the Danish newspaper "was to conflate censorship and self-censorship." He argued for asymmetric standards, asserting that the need to exercise restraint in publishing material offensive to Muslims was greater than for followers of other religions because contemporary grievances of Muslims run deeper. Wright reasoned that, in much the same way that the Kerner Commission recommended in 1967 a greater show of respect for the dignity of poor urban minorities and the need to recognize the difference between what *triggers* a riot (how police handle a traffic stop in Watts) and what *fuels* it (discrimination, poverty, and so on), so is it essential to support peaceful coexistence with Muslims by avoiding offensive acts, to "let each group decide what it finds most offensive."

Guidelines for Finding a Balance. What compass should journalists and producers use, in both the print and broadcast media, to guide them through this thicket of difficulties, balancing the public's right to know with its right to be protected from harm? Several treatises have been written on the role of journalists and the standards of professional journalism. Most lists of such standards include the commitment to reporting that is truthful and unbiased, responsible and in good conscience, engaged and relevant, comprehensive and proportional, honest yet respectful of things held sacred. One such list of journalistic standards, based on a survey of some 300 journalists conducted by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (2001) and sponsored by the Pew Research Center, is shown in Box 10.4.

Kovach and Rosenstiel explain that it had been common, but is no longer acceptable, to reduce journalism to simple platitudes like "We let our work speak for itself." Instead, they write, "The primary purpose of journalism is to

Box 10.4. Kovach and Rosenstiel's Elements
of Journalism

1. Journalism's first obligation is to the truth.
2. Its first loyalty is to citizens.
3. Its essence is a discipline of verification.
4. Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover.
5. It must serve as an independent monitor of power.
6. It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.
7. It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant.
8. It must keep the news comprehensive and proportional.
9. Its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience.

[Source: Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and The Public Should Expect* (Three-Rivers Press, 2001)]

provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing (2001, p. 17)." This is particularly essential, they observe, in emerging nations. In advanced nations, and particularly the United States, they see another danger – namely, that "independent journalism may be dissolved in the solvent of commercial communication and synergistic self-promotion (p. 18)." They see the ideal of a free and independent press threatened for the first time not just by intrusive governments, but no less by commercial interests that may conflict with high goals of public service.

Journalism professor Philip Meyer (2004) puts it starkly: "Our once noble calling is increasingly difficult to distinguish from things that look like journalism but are primarily advertising, press agentry, or entertainment. The pure news audience is drifting away as old readers die and are replaced by young people hooked on popular culture and amusement." Comedy Central's Stephen Colbert spoofs this tendency: "Anyone can read the news to you. I promise to *feel* the news *at* you" (quoted in Peyser, 2006, p. 53). Programming is driven by ratings and profits, and news that merely informs cannot compete for large audiences with news that grabs the attention, shocks, and entertains (Altheide, 2006). Meyer sees the source of the problem in a shift in media ownership. Outlets previously owned by people with stakes in local communities are now run by faceless investor-owned corporations.

Columnist Jim Hoagland (2005a) sees the commercialization of media as having dire consequences both for the responsible coverage of terrorism and

the larger conversation on national security matters. He sees this as more disturbing even than the decline of civility in society:

> It is not so disturbing that the national political discourse has become detached from civility. That has been true, and not fatal, at other periods in American history. . . . What is disturbing is that the national political discourse is increasingly detached from reality. The emotionalism and character assassination practiced by both sides . . . is mistaken for "politics."

> Instead of turning out more engineers or scientists, American society seems at times more geared to forming consumers, producers and critics of a particularly bombastic kind of political theater, which comes in entertainment and information flows that are increasingly hard to distinguish.

Can the media find a way of controlling itself more responsibly and effectively in the face of these pressures? If it fails, what recourse can the public take? Philip Meyer argues that the only way to save journalism is to develop a new business model that rewards community service, one "that finds profit in truth, vigilance, and social responsibility." He observes that the nonprofit sector may be more amenable to responsible public service journalism and that support from foundations can be a more than suitable complement to conventional commercially supported media. Meyer regards National Public Radio (NPR) as a suitable model for nonprofit journalism[9]:

> While subscriber support is an important source of its revenue, more than 40 percent comes from foundation and corporate sponsors. NPR keeps a policy manual that spells out the limits of permissible relationships with funders. It does not allow grants that are narrowly restricted to coincide with a donor's economic or advocacy interest.

There are other prominent nonprofit broadcast media outlets, including C-SPAN and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, created by Congress in 1967. C-SPAN is significant for its distinctly noncommercial format and educational mission. It presents unedited broadcasts of lectures, congressional hearings, academic panel discussions, and book reviews on matters of public interest, policy, international affairs, science, politics, economics, literature, health, the environment, and ethics.

One of the distinctive features of the nonprofit broadcasting media is that they present more thoughtful, less sensational coverage of critical issues. Thus, nonprofit broadcasting offers an answer to William Raspberry's (2005) lament of the "death of nuance" in contemporary media:

> Some of the blame for the death of nuance must be laid to the mindless divisiveness of those cable news outlets that treat politics as a blood sport. It's hard to acknowledge that the other guy maybe has a point when he is

determined to prove to the world that you have no point whatsoever. Nuance starts to sound wimpy.

Clearly, there are many ways to strengthen the ability of media to serve the public more effectively in the era of terrorism. Paul Wilkinson (1997), director of the St. Andrews University Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence, reminds us that the stakes are high and that journalism standards need not be sacrificed as the media strive to avoid serving the interests of terrorism. He recalls Margaret Thatcher's metaphor: "Democratic nations must try to find ways to starve the terrorist and the hijacker of the oxygen of publicity on which they depend." In Box 10.5, Wilkinson offers several suggestions for improving the media's ability to help in the fight against terrorism without compromising in any fundamental way professional journalistic standards.

The problem that Wilkinson does not address is that some media outlets are more responsible and show more self-restraint than others, and members of the audience – responsible and irresponsible alike – can choose to go wherever they want. Although the solutions to this problem are elusive in a free and open society, the problem itself is clear and extremely dangerous: irresponsible media feed the terrorists and create bad policy (Frey, 2006). *Wall Street Journal* columnist Daniel Henninger (2006), commenting on gruesome television images from the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel, puts the matter as follows:

> Whatever the purpose, a world in which people get fed streams of awful images to drive political conclusions produces a familiar effect: They eventually become inured to the images. Human wells of moral outrage are deep, but not bottomless. If emotional outrage is the basis on which they are expected to make judgments about politically complicated events like Lebanon, many will turn away, rather than subject themselves to a gratuitous, confusing numbing of their sensibilities. This is not progress.

D. Exploitation of Fear by Politicians

The media are not alone in feeding and inflating our fears. Politicians often take it a step further and convert the inflated fear into bad policy (Altheide, 2006; Mueller, 2006). Why should they wish to do so? Because they know that voters are often influenced more by emotion than by reason (Westen, 2007). Politicians have learned – through direct experience or from their advisors or both – that the voters' fear of crime and terrorism can be used to advantage in campaigning for public office, whereas the failure to do so can end political careers. In a televised debate with George H. W. Bush, in the presidential election of 1988, Michael Dukakis was asked about his opposition to capital punishment: Would he not support the death penalty

Box 10.5. The Media and Terror: Managing the Symbiosis

– Paul Wilkinson

The relationship between terrorists and the mass media is inherently symbiotic. For mass media organizations the coverage of terrorism, especially prolonged incidents such as hijackings and hostage situations, provides an endless source of sensational and visually compelling news stories capable of boosting audience or readership figures. For the terrorists, modern media technology, communications satellites and the rapid spread of television have had a marked effect in increasing the publicity potential of terrorism. As long as the mass media exist, terrorists will hunger for what former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, called 'the oxygen of publicity.'

The free media clearly do not represent terrorist values. Generally they tend to reflect the underlying values of the democratic society. But the media in an open society are in a fiercely competitive market for their audiences, constantly under pressure to be first with the news and to provide more information, excitement, and entertainment than their rivals. Hence they respond to terrorist propaganda of the deed because it is dramatic bad news. This does not mean that the mass media are controlled by the terrorists. It does mean that terrorists attempt to manipulate and exploit the free media for their own ends. It also means that responsible media professionals and the public need to be constantly on their guard against terrorist attempts to manipulate them.

Terrorists view the mass media in a free society in cynical and opportunistic terms. They have nothing but contempt for the values and attitudes of the democratic mass media. For example, they view the media's expressed concern for the protecting of human life as mere hypocrisy and sentimentality. However, many terrorist leaders are well aware that their cause can be damaged by unfavorable publicity. Hence the more established and sophisticated terrorist movements invest considerable time and effort in waging propaganda warfare directed both at domestic and international audiences.

The free media in an open society are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation by ruthless terrorist organizations. In using TV, radio, and the print media the terrorists generally have four main objectives:

1. To convey the propaganda of the deed and to create extreme fear among their target group

2. To mobilize wider support for their cause among the general population, and international opinion by emphasizing such themes as righteousness of their cause and the inevitability of their victory

3. To frustrate and disrupt the response of the government and security forces, for example, by suggesting that all their practical anti-terrorist measures are inherently tyrannical and counterproductive

4. To mobilize, incite, and boost their constituency of actual and potential supporters and in so doing to increase recruitment, raise more funds, and inspire further attacks

Police face considerable obstacles in dealing with this. In an open society with free media it is impossible to guarantee that police anti-terrorist operations will be safeguarded against being compromised or disrupted by irresponsible media activity. However, a great deal can be achieved by ensuring that expert press liaison and news management are an intrinsic part of both the police response to any terrorist campaign and the contingency planning and crisis management processes. Indeed, in a democratic society a sound and effective public information policy, harnessing the great power of the mass media in so far as this is possible, is a vital element in a successful strategy against terrorism. This power of the media and the political leadership to mobilize democratic public opinion, so contemptuously ignored by the terrorist movements, reveals a crucial flaw in terrorist strategy.

There are a number of other important ways in which responsible media in a democracy serve to frustrate the aims of terrorists. Terrorists like to present themselves as noble Robin Hoods, champions of the oppressed and downtrodden. By showing the savage cruelty of terrorists' violence and the way in which they violate the rights of the innocent, the media can help to shatter this myth. It is quite easy to show, by plain photographic evidence, how terrorists have failed to observe any laws or rules of war, how they have murdered women and children, the old and the sick, without compunction.

What else can the media do in a positive way to aid in the struggle against terrorism? There are numerous practical forms of help they can provide. Responsible and accurate reporting of incidents can create heightened vigilance among the public to observe, for example, unusual packages, suspicious persons or behavior. At the practical level the media can carry warnings to the public from the police, and instructions as to how they should react to an emergency. Media with international coverage can provide valuable leads concerning foreign movements and links between personalities and terrorist organizations.

Finally, the media also provide an indispensable forum for informed discussion concerning the social and political implications of terrorism and the development of adequate policies and counter-measures. And media which

place a high value on democratic freedoms will, rightly and necessarily, continually remind the authorities of their broader responsibilities to ensure that the response to terrorism is consistent with the rule of law, respect for basic rights, and the demands of social justice.

These contributions by the media to the war against terrorism are so valuable that they outweigh the disadvantages and risks and the undoubted damage caused by a small minority of irresponsible journalists and broadcasters. The positive work of the media has been either gravely underestimated or ignored. The media in western liberal states are a weapon that can be used as a major tool in the defeat of terrorism. The media need not become the instrument of the terrorist. In the end, voluntary self-restraint aimed at avoiding the dangers of manipulation and exploitation by terrorist groups is likely to be the most effective and responsible approach available to mass media organizations.

[Adapted from Paul Wilkinson's "Media and Terrorism: A Reassessment," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Volume 9, Number 2 (Summer 1997), pp. 51-64.]

for a hypothetical offender who had raped his wife? His deliberate, bland defense of his position against capital punishment, together with his having been held accountable for a heinous crime committed by convicted felon Willie Horton following a furlough release while Dukakis was governor of Massachusetts, all but sealed Mr. Bush's victory. Few presidential candidates of either political party have expressed opposition to the death penalty for twenty years after the Bush-Dukakis election, and it became common practice for a political candidate to seek political advantage by "Willie Hortonizing" the opponent, attempting to persuade the electorate that the opponent was weak on crime.

A similar political strategy of exploiting public fear has developed on the issue of terrorism. In the 2004 Presidential campaign, Democratic candidate John Kerry accused the Bush administration of waging a thoughtless, insensitive response to terrorism, resulting in a less secure United States. Vice President Cheney responded with this retort: "America has been in too many wars for any of our wishes, but not a one of them was won by being sensitive" (Milbank and Hsu, 2004). Senator Kerry responded in kind, approving a televised commercial of a woman saying, "I want to look into my daughter's eyes and know that she is safe, and that is why I am voting for John Kerry." Although many saw the Bush team as the leading fearmongerers, sociologist Frank Furedi (2004) wrote that the "politics of fear" transcends the political divide: "In fact, Kerry is a far more sophisticated practitioner of the politics of fear than his Republican opponents." Politicians who avoid

fueling the fires of fear can be found in both major political parties, but many other politicians across the political spectrum have shown little reluctance to exploit public fears about threats to domestic and foreign security in order to win votes, and they appear to be able to do so with impunity.

Parents often aim to overcome their children's lack of awareness of real dangers such as street traffic, and mythical ones such as razor blades in Halloween apples, by magnifying the risks, hoping to replace their children's inexperience with protective information, however distorted. They often take the opposite approach to deal with imaginary threats such as monsters under the bed by reading calming bedtime stories. Paternalistic governments may be inclined to treat their citizens in much the same way, blowing some risks out of proportion and enacting overly protective laws – Furedi (2002b) and Sunstein (2005) refer to this as the "precautionary principle"[10] – and underplaying others, especially when special interest groups (the tobacco lobby is a prominent example) make such distortions attractive. One of the characteristic strengths of an established free society is a bond of mutual trust and responsibility between the elected and the governed: government ensures that the information the public has about domestic and foreign threats is accurate and balanced, and it trusts them to handle the information responsibly. Terrorism can erode this cohesion, and politicians who use terrorism for political ends may accelerate the erosion.

Brzezinski (2007) argues that, by obscuring the public's ability to reason, fear "makes it easier for demagogic politicians to mobilize the public on behalf of the policies they want to pursue." Furedi (2006) goes on to observe that politicians and governments find it easier to exploit the idea that the public is vulnerable than to lead the public to higher ground:

> The politics of fear can flourish because it resonates so powerfully with today's cultural climate. Politicians cannot simply create fear from thin air. Nor do they monopolize the deployment of fear; panics about health or security can just as easily begin on the Internet or through the efforts of an advocacy group as from the efforts of government spin doctors. Paradoxically, governments spend as much time trying to contain the effects of spontaneously generated scare stories as they do pursuing their own fear campaigns. The reason why the politics of fear has such a powerful resonance is because of the way that personhood has been recast as the vulnerable subject.

This sort of exploitation of public fear by the White House following 9/11 has been asserted perhaps most forcefully by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Ron Suskind (2006), based on extensive interviews with former CIA Director George Tenet and his intelligence associates. Suskind writes that a guiding principle behind the invasion of Iraq and other policies associated with a questionable war on terror was Vice President Dick Cheney's "one percent

327

doctrine": the best way to think about a low-probability, high-impact event is to treat it as though it were a certainty. (Recall the Furedi and Sunstein's precautionary principle, described earlier.) Suskind reports that intelligence experts accustomed to providing the executive branch with systematic evidence and objective conclusions about security threats found their analyses ignored under this doctrine – except when their findings or conclusions supported preferred policies – so that predetermined initiatives could be sold to the American public.

The problem with the logic of the one percent doctrine is that it may actually produce conditions that raise a small probability of catastrophe to a much larger likelihood. A safer and saner approach may be to recognize that fear is precisely what terrorism is designed to exploit and to deprive the terrorists of opportunities to exploit our fear. Political leaders are in positions to follow this approach. Political scientist Andrey Cronin (2006) argues that al Qaeda is dangerous, but that we can inoculate ourselves against its dangers by depriving it of its ability to manipulate us psychologically. Terrorism ends with us, not with al Qaeda.

Political pandering in the presence of serious threats to security is neither inevitable nor inescapable. Effective political leadership does occasionally emerge, especially in times of grave threats to national security. One has only to consider Prime Minister Winston Churchill's effective exhortations to the people of England, Londoners in particular, to be courageous in the face of brutal and incessant blitzkrieg bombings by the Germans in World War II. He led both by word and example, holding cabinet meetings at 10 Downing Street rather than in bunkers, often well into the dangerous nighttime as bombs exploded nearby. The people followed Churchill's lead, and the courage of the British helped first to enable them to survive the attacks and carry on, and eventually to contribute in significant ways to the defeat of Germany. (On the occasion of his eightieth birthday, in 1955, Churchill remarked that it was Britain that "had the lion's heart," that he merely "had the luck to be called upon to give the roar.")

A memorable display of fear reduction leadership echoing Churchill's was shown by New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani in the hours and days following the 2001 attack on the World Trade Towers. Of particular significance is the fact the Giuliani became a serious presidential contender in 2007 based principally on his display of extraordinary leadership in that time of duress. Although his reputation for calming the public's fears were diminished by what many regarded as a shameless, nonstop exploitation of his 2001 accomplishment for political gain in the presidential campaign of 2008 (see, e.g., Friedman, 2007), Giuliani had revealed in 2001, nonetheless, that showing courage can be a considerably more successful political strategy than stoking the coals of fear.

E. Fear and Public Policy

1. Managing Fear

Given the central role that fear plays in terrorism, public policymakers would do well to combine their focus on interventions against terrorists and the protection of targets with attention to managing the public's fear of terrorism. Fear is not an immutable given, a phenomenon over which we have no control. It is manageable, both for individuals and groups, and by both public and private agents. How can public officials work with private citizens to do this?

First and foremost in any campaign to reduce unwarranted fear is a credible system of security against terrorism. The general public is sophisticated enough to recognize that nothing is as credible as the passing of several years without a serious incident of terrorism. It is almost inevitable that serious terrorists will slip through even strong security defenses from time to time, but over the long haul, political rhetoric is no match for the reality of security on the ground.

Second, in the post-9/11 era the fear of terrorism, by most reasonable accounts, has been excessive. A basic element in a strategy of fear management is to treat excessive fear as a public health problem and have the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services develop a coherent and comprehensive set of programs for preventing and responding to the problem (Butler, Panzer, and Goldfrank). To deal with inflated fears of terrorism, authorities can also consider applying fear reduction programs that have proven successful in managing the fear of crime to the fear of terrorism. Fear reduction strategies for conventional crime instituted as part of the 1980s community policing movement, described earlier, have elements that are applicable to the problem of terrorism, where the stakes may be much higher. Local authorities can legitimately regard acts of terrorism as extreme violent crimes under state law. From their perspective, fear management interventions should be both highly relevant and useful.

These interventions are likely not to be uniform over time and place. Some fear reduction interventions for street crimes are likely to be more relevant and practical than others for the prevention of terrorism. Effective outreach programs to mosques in neighborhoods with Muslim populations, for example, are likely to be more useful in dealing with fear within both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities than programs aimed at removing ordinary graffiti. Introducing guardianship at airports after 9/11 was a great expense and inconvenience, but the public was quite willing to endure both the costs and the intrusions in order to reduce their fear level. Fear reduction programs that induce effective adaptive behaviors – such as avoidance, seeking professional help and pertinent information, getting insurance, planning, and

finding suitable coping and protective actions – appear to be among the more effective programs (Kirschenbaum, 2006).

As noted earlier, federal officials are also responsible for ensuring that public fear levels are neither excessively high nor too low relative to objective threat levels. As Gregg Easterbrook observes in Box 10.6, the federal government plays a critical role in managing the public's fear of terrorism.

Box 10.6. The Smart Way to be Scared

– Gregg Easterbrook

WASHINGTON. Thursday, I walked into a hardware store in suburban Maryland to buy de-icing crystals in advance of a predicted weekend snowstorm. Lines of customers waiting to pay snaked through the aisles, dozens of men and women with shopping carts full of duct tape and plastic rolls. Needless to say, I left without de-icing compound. I also left thinking, What's the point of this?

Flashing "threat level" warning boxes on newscasts. Police officers with shotguns wandering Times Square, antiaircraft missiles near the Washington Mall. Federal instructions to stockpile water and batteries and obtain plastic and tape for a "safe room." Yet it's far from clear that this security rush will help anyone.

Government cannot, of course, know what will happen or when. During the 1960s, when the menace was missile attack by the Soviet Union, citizens were urged to do both the useful (stock fallout shelters) and the useless (crouch under the desk at school). Officials suggested such things because it was what they were able to think of.

Today, with no sure defense against terrorism in a free society, officials concerned about chemical or biological attack are suggesting the things they are able to think of. But this may only distract attention from the more likely threat of conventional bombs – and the ultimate threat of the atom.

Consider the mania for duct tape. As Kenneth Chang and Judith Miller reported in *The New York Times* last week, experts view the taped-up room as mainly a psychological benefit. Moreover, many now rushing to buy duct tape may have exaggerated, media-pumped fears of chemical or biological weapons.

If terrorists use chemical weapons, they will probably affect a tiny area at worst, because terrorists would have chemical agents in relatively small amounts. Though any amount of chemical agent might seem ghastly, in actual use chemicals have proved no more deadly, pound for pound, than conventional bombs.

The British and Germans used one ton of chemical weapons per fatality caused during World War I. The 1995 release of the nerve gas sarin in the Tokyo subways by the Aum Shinrikyo sect killed 12 people, fewer than a small, standard bomb might have killed in that crowded, enclosed area. An estimated 5,000 Kurds died in Saddam Hussein's chemical attack on Halabja, Iraq, in 1988, but this involved dozens of fighter-bombers making repeated low passes over the town. It's hard to imagine that terrorists could pull off such a coordinated heavy military maneuver.

A terrorist release of chemical weapons in an American city would probably have effects confined to a few blocks, making any one person's odds of harm far less than a million to one.

Your risk of dying in a car accident while driving to buy duct tape likely exceeds your risk of dying because you lacked duct tape.

Last week, a Washington talk radio host discussed what listeners should do if "a huge cloud of poison gas is drifting over the city." No nation's military has the technical ability to create a huge, lingering gas cloud: in outdoor use, chemical agents are lethal only for a few moments, because the wind quickly dilutes them. Chemical agents are deadly mainly in enclosed circumstances – subways, for example, or in building ventilation systems. The duct-taped room in a home is of little use in such a scenario.

A 1993 study by the Office of Technology Assessment found that one ton of perfectly delivered sarin, used against an unprotected city, could kill as many as 8,000. But the possession by terrorists of a ton of the most deadly gas seems reasonably unlikely, while perfect conditions for a gas attack – no wind, no sun (sunlight breaks down nerve agents), a low-flying plane that no one is shooting at – almost never happen. Even light winds, the 1993 study projected, would drop the death toll to about 700.

Seven hundred dead would be horrible, but similar to the harm that might be inflicted in a crowded area by one ton of conventional explosives. Because these explosives are about as deadly as chemicals pound for pound, but far easier to obtain and use, terrorists may be more likely to try to blow things up. Almost all recent terrorist attacks around the world have involved conventional explosives.

The image of millions cowering behind plastic sheets as clouds of biological weapons envelop a city owes more to science fiction than reality. The Japanese use of fleas infected with bubonic plague against Chinese cities in World War II was the only successful instance of bioattacks in contemporary warfare. In 1971, "weaponized" smallpox was accidentally released from a Soviet plant; three people died. In 1979, an explosion at another Soviet site released a large quantity of weapons-grade anthrax; 68 people died.

331

Fear of Terrorism

In 1989, workers at an American government laboratory near Washington were accidentally exposed to Ebola, and it was several days before the mistake was discovered; no one died. A coordinated anthrax attack in the fall of 2001 killed five people, a tiny fraction of the number who died of influenza during the time the nation was terrified by the anthrax letters.

None of this means bioweapons are not dangerous. But in actual use, biological agents often harm less than expected, partly for the simple evolutionary reason that people have immune systems that fight pathogens. Also, as overall public health keeps improving, resistance to bioagents continues to increase.

Conceivably, being in a duct-taped room could protect you if a plane dropping anthrax spores were flying over. Smallpox, on the other hand, must be communicated person to person. Those in the immediate area of an outbreak might be harmed, but as soon as word got out, health authorities would isolate the vicinity and stop the spread. By the time you knew to rush to your sealed room, you would either already be infected or the emergency would be over.

Another point skipped in the public debate: smallpox is awful and highly contagious, but with modern treatment usually not fatal. Anthrax doesn't necessarily kill, either, as the nation learned in 2001. Only in movies can mists of mysterious bioagents cause people to drop like stones. In reality, pathogens make people ill; medical workers rush in and save most of the exposed.

If germs merely leave sick people whom doctors may heal, terrorists may favor conventional explosives that are certain to kill.

While government officials now emphasize improbable events involving chemical or biological arms, less is being said about how to be ready for two macabre threats the public is unprepared for: atomic explosion, and the radiological, or "dirty," bomb.

The chance that a crude atomic device will someday detonate on American soil is, by a large margin, the worst terror threat the nation faces. Yet the new Department of Homeland Security has said little about atomic preparedness.

To think the unthinkable, if an atomic device bearing about the yield of the Hiroshima weapon went off outside the White House, people for roughly a mile in each direction might die. But most people in the District of Columbia would survive, while the main effect on Washington's suburbs would be power failures and broken windows. So the majority of people in Washington and its suburbs who would not die would need to know what to do. But do they? Generally not, because there has been scant discussion.

(Here's what to do: Remain indoors at least 24 hours to avoid fallout; remain on ground floors or in the basements of buildings; if you are upwind

of the explosion stay put; if downwind, flee by car only if roads are clear since buildings provide better fallout protection than cars.)

Perhaps more likely than an atomic detonation would be a "dirty bomb," in which conventional explosives spread radioactive material. Since this has never been used, effects are hard to project. Most likely, even an extremely large dirty bomb (say, an entire truck converted to one) might kill only those within a city block. Fallout would probably threaten only those a few hundred or thousands of yards downwind.

Yet if people heard on the radio that a dirty bomb had exploded – if they so much as heard the word radiation – panic might set in. In Manhattan or Washington, mass chaos to escape might result in more deaths than the bomb itself.

But is the government explaining to the public how to react if a dirty bomb goes off? (Stay indoors; if upwind do nothing; if downwind, drive away only if roads are clear; take potassium iodide pills to prevent some effects of fallout.) The Department of Homeland Security Web site, for one, has loads of information about anthrax, but offers essentially zero on what to do in the event of radiological explosions.

Increased presence of police and military units in cities may help deter terrorists, and by being more visible and waving bigger weapons, law enforcement is doing what it can think of. But government officials who are advising people to buy plastic sheets create unnecessary anxiety while achieving little beyond helping hardware stores. The advice people need to hear concerns the atomic threat – and why potassium iodide matters more than duct tape.

We have not exhausted the prospects for reducing fear at either the local or federal level, in large part because we have put so many more resources and so much more energy into the war on terror in general and operations in the Middle East in particular. In turning people throughout the world against the United States, these efforts appear to have given the U.S. public reason to be more fearful of terrorism rather than less fearful. As we work to reverse this trend, we would do well to find new ways to adapt effective fear reduction programs used in other domains – for individuals and institutions, public and private – to the problem of fear of terrorism.

2. Finding a Balance

The total elimination of fear is neither an attainable nor a desirable goal. Just as it would not be healthy to eliminate pain altogether, so would it be unsafe
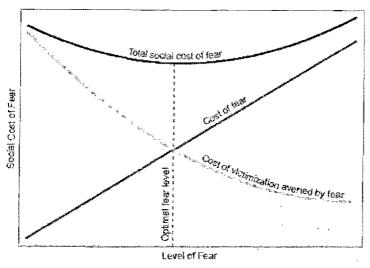
to seek a way to eliminate fear altogether. Some level of fear is necessary for us to feel compelled first to take ourselves out of the path of immediate danger and then to take measures to counter the sources of the danger (de Becker, 1997). The 9/11 Commission concluded that there was too little concern about terrorism before the 2001 attack, and by many accounts inflated fear of terrorism afterward has imposed vast unnecessary costs on people throughout the world (Applebaum, 2003; Furedi, 2006; Ropeik, 2004).

In the case of both crime and terrorism, the goal should be twofold: first, to make accurate objective assessments of the risks of threats and then realign subjective assessments of the risks so that they correspond to the objective assessments, and second, to remove elements of fear that serve no useful purpose. In much the same way that we can consider frameworks helpful for finding the proper balance of security and liberty and assessing criminal sanctions in terms of the total social costs of crimes and sanctions (Forst, 2004), so should we consider policies that aim for optimal levels of fear for various threats. See page 335 for a depiction of an optimal level of fear, the level that balances the cost of fear with the cost of victimization averted by fear. Such frameworks cannot determine public policies, but they can help identify the key factors for consideration and determine how to organize them coherently to provide a basis for assessing those policies.

F. An Agenda for Reducing the Social Costs of Fear

We have noted that Mayor Rudolph Giuliani showed exemplary leadership skills in the days after the 2001 terrorist attack on New York City. Two years later he remarked, "Courage is not the absence of fear; rather it is the management of fear" (quoted in Gambrell, 2003). Then, in the presidential campaign of 2008, he became widely criticized for excessively exploiting his status as a 9/11 hero. In 2007, the satiric newspaper, *The Onion*, ran the spoof headline: "Giuliani To Run for President of 9/11" (author anonymous). Although presidential candidate Giuliani clearly had lost his way by exploiting public fear for political gain, his message as Mayor Giuliani on the importance of managing fear still has resonance.

How might policymakers and public officials begin to think about the management of the public's fear? At the local level, fear reduction strategies that have been a key aspect of successful community policing programs can be tailored to deal with fear of terrorism, as noted earlier. At the federal level, just as effective energy policy cannot ignore the public's insatiable demand for and often wasteful consumption of scarce energy resources, so must an effective terrorism policy recognize the importance of interventions that deal effectively with a parallel problem on the "demand side" of terrorism: dysfunctional fear. Excessive fear makes all targets more attractive, as noted earlier, but they also produce misallocations among targets. Strategies for

Optimal level of fear.

managing the public's fear of terrorism might be developed in such a way that deals with both problems, satisfying liberals and conservatives alike. No side of the political spectrum can take comfort in the prospect that we may have actually contributed to our insecurity and misallocated resources along the way by placating exaggerated public fears – for example, by overemphasizing airport security at the expense of vulnerability at ports, nuclear and chemical facilities, and other critical, more vulnerable targets. Several authorities argue persuasively that such misallocations have been induced by misplaced fears (Applebaum, 2003; Fallows, 2005). Systems of accountability used by the Office of Homeland Security and associated agencies can be reshaped to support fear management as a legitimate goal of those agencies.

Sunstein proposes that deliberative democracies should be strengthened to help manage fear generally (2005). He proposes, in particular, that a federal risk assessment agency should be established to collect data and conduct research aimed at reducing actual risks and better aligning objective and subjective risk levels (2002). He notes that a significant barrier to the adoption of such reform is that public-minded administrators who dismiss the public's irrationality are often overruled by populist politicians who respond to parochial agendas and short-term concerns, however irresponsible for the nation as a whole, and to public concerns of the moment, however irrational and short-sighted (Sunstein, 2002, 2005). He adds that education and public information can help restore rational deliberation to the process. Tharoor (2005) suggests along a similar line that the media, for too long a source of fearmongering, is capable of serving no less as an instrument of education and tolerance.

Protection of the public is the first responsibility of government, and misplaced fears undermine public safety. The effective public management of fear is central to this responsibility of government. In cases of extreme abuse of the media's responsibility to not harm the public, the courts may be able to step in to provide protections. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes observed in the landmark 1917 case of *Schenck* v. *United States*, "The most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man in falsely shouting fire in a theater, and causing a panic." This could apply as well to needlessly incendiary media accounts of violence or threats of violence.

Effective, credible leadership is extremely important. Good leaders educate the public, providing useful information that reduces the fears born of ignorance. They can counter what Zbigniew Brzezinski (2007) refers to as "the terror entrepreneurs . . . usually described as experts on terrorism . . . engaged in competition to justify their existence." They can promote and fund public education programs that reduce excessive fear levels (Altheide, 2006). By doing so, they help build bonds of trust between the government and the governed, a social contract in which the people will follow loyally and manage their fear responsibly when they have sufficient reason to believe that the government is leveling with them without divulging information that helps terrorists needlessly, when the government attains a proper balance between liberty and security. On February 23, 1942, Franklin D. Roosevelt, spoke words that echoed Churchill's effective leadership across the Atlantic Ocean in the same war effort: "Your government has unmistakable confidence in your ability to hear the worst, without flinching or losing heart. You must, in turn, have complete confidence that your government is keeping nothing from you except information that will help the enemy in his attempt to destroy us."

When leadership of this sort fails to emerge, or when exceptional leaders get assassinated – an all-too-frequent occurrence in places most desperately in need of effective leaders – nongovernmental organizations and responsible citizens are left to find ways to fill the void. In such cases ordinary citizens must become extraordinary; they must step up and become leaders. Citizens of India, Iraq, and Israel have shown extraordinary courage in the face of extreme terror in recent years even in the absence of a Churchill-like figure. The day after a series of bombings on commuter trains in Mumbai (formerly Bombay) killed more than 200 people, Mumbai's tracks were cleared, trains resumed their routes, and the Bombay Stock Exchange's stock index rose by 3 percent[11] (Wonacott and Bellman, 2006).

Some portion of fear is, of course, unmanageable. Fear is, after all, in our genes; it is a natural survival instinct. Yet when such biological instincts get out of hand and worsen the dangers we confront, it is precisely the capacity of humans to reason – to find ways to control our instincts under stress – that has contributed immeasurably to the resilience of our species.

We have reason to fear terrorism, surely more so today than before September 11, 2001, but we would do well to keep in perspective the risks that terrorism poses to our national security and the security of our allies. Cataclysmic risks were more immediate in the United States in World War II and during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis than today, and people in most other countries have for decades been considerably more exposed to terrorism than have people in the United States. There is no cause for alarm if we take reasonable and effective measures to neutralize persons who have demonstrated a clear intent to commit acts of terrorism, if we protect the primary targets of terrorism, *and* if we can manage to manage our fear. The 9/11 attack revealed that concerns of the U.S. government and its citizens about terrorism had been inadequate, that the risks exceeded our fear (Clarke, 2004).

Today fear is the greater problem, and it is dangerous because of the strong tendency for it to feed on itself, to make us behave badly, to allow our instincts to overrule our ability to think, and to make us more attractive targets of terrorism as a consequence. Perhaps our greatest challenge is to master our capacity to "get a grip" when confronted with real danger, to find ways of strengthening our capacity to reason, to overcome our natural tendency to be more easily frightened than unfrightened[32] – and to groom leaders who will reduce the demand for terrorism by dousing the flames of our inflated fears. Doing so will help not only reduce the attractiveness of targets in the West to prospective terrorists but also improve the quality of life throughout the world, regardless of the effects on terrorism.

Discussion Questions

1. *Media and fear of terrorism and crime.* How do the media distort terrorism and crime? Explain why you think these distortions either worsen matters or do not. What feasible interventions are available to countervail against these distortions and the associated harms?

2. *Private citizens and fear of terrorism.* How do private citizens and institutions outside of the media distort terrorism and crime? Explain why you think these distortions either worsen matters or do not. What can be done to counteract these distortions and the associated harms? What can you do? What stands in the way of your acting to reduce excessive fear?

3. *State and local management of fear of crime.* What have elected and appointed state and local officials done to manage the fear of crime appropriately? What have they done that is inappropriate? What makes these actions appropriate or inappropriate? What incentives or disincentives might state and local authorities invoke to induce individuals, the media, and other institutions to reduce excessive fear?

4. *Federal management of fear of terrorism.* What have elected and appointed federal officials done to manage fear of terror appropriately? What have

they done that is inappropriate? What makes these actions appropriate or inappropriate? What incentives or disincentives might federal officials use to induce individuals, the media, and other institutions to reduce excessive fear of terrorism? Does a free society have a special responsibility to avoid manipulating the public's sense of fear by demonizing aliens and exaggerating the threats they pose? Explain. Do you agree that even in a free society – in Washington as in Hollywood – when the chips of fear are on the table, toughness trumps sensitivity and restraint? What should be done about this?

5. *Fear as an attractor of terrorism.* Is the suggestion that our fear attracts terrorism akin to the suggestion that a woman's provocative attire attracts rape? Do both suggestions have the effect of shifting the culpability for violence from the attacker to the victim? If so, does this imply that we should refrain from attempting to place restraints on victim behaviors that may provoke violence?