**Glorification of terror**

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A terrorist’s characterisation justifying his or her act of terror under the grab of whatsoever compulsion rings alarm bells about the exacerbation of fifth generation warfare, conducted primarily through media engineering and other kinds of tools and techniques of misinformation. Pakistan seems to have been embroiled in a heinous gambit of fifth generation war, as some international media outlets have launched a covert campaign to glorify a terrorist that killed three Chinese teachers and one Pakistan national.
Everybody agrees that a terrorist is a terrorist and come what may, should never ever be personified as a hero. However, in the wake of the coverage in the communication landscape to the perpetrator of the KU terror attack, we must review our portrayal of terrorism.
It is often easier to get information about the terrorist than it is about the victims. In order to report on the story, the media often tells viewers what is known, so they often tell us information about the terrorist. Depending on what information is revealed, it can lead to sympathising with the killer. If information about their past, their family, etc is told to viewers, it is easy for some people to want to feel bad for them.
People begin to make connections based on their past and in doing so, they look past all the awful things that these people did. Instead of focusing on the terrorist, attention should be given to the victims. It is their stories that should be told, their pictures we should see on the news. The victims all have families, friends who were affected by these disastrous events. Society is judging them and vilifying them, but we are also giving them what they want. Attention. They are the headlines on the news getting all the publicity they want. Media needs to be careful and make sure that it is still respectful of the lives that were lost.
According to Pakistan law, portraying personality of terrorist provoking empathy is prohibited. As per PEMRA’s Rules and Code of Conduct (CoC) 2015, glorification of terrorists cannot be allowed even in that statement, only the selected parts are allowed to be aired which do not, in any manner, glorify a terrorist and his terrorist setup.
In case of non-compliance of PEMRA’s decision, strict action will be taken against the violators under Sections 29 and 30 of PEMRA Ordinance 2002 as amended by PEMRA Act 2007. In the past, there are glaring examples of coverage not being given to terrorists. In the case of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) when the interview of TTP spokesperson Ehsan Ullah Ehsan was about to be aired, PEMRA took action, saying that this was a clear violation of PEMRA’s directives that it had issued under the National Action Plan and Section 3(3) of Electronic Media Code of Conduct, 2015.
TTP is a terrorist organisation and Ehsan Ullah Ehsan has been a spokesperson of this terrorist outfit. During the last several years, he has taken responsibility of the mass murder of Pakistani nationals through terrorist activities across the country. Thousands of children, men, women and civil and military officials lost their lives due to the heinous crimes of his terrorist organisation. It is quite heart-wrenching and deeply disturbing for the loved ones of those martyred in terrorist acts to see the member of a terrorist outfit appearing on TV screens in any capacity/mode; a known militant who earlier would claim responsibility for acts of massacre.
PEMRA also directed all satellite TV channels not to misuse respectable religious titles and qualifications as prefixes of terrorists. PEMRA issued these directives to all satellite TV channels in a letter in the previous time. The letter warned all satellite TV channels that the titles and qualifications such as Maulana, Moulvi, Qari, Mufti, Hafiz, Doctor/Engineer, etc, should not be used at the beginning as a prefix or introduction to the names of persons involved in terrorist activities, which is tantamount to the glorification of terrorism. It may be mentioned that under the Protection of Pakistan Act 2014, glorifying terrorists is a cognisable and non bailable offence. PEMRA also directed electronic media to run comprehensive awareness campaign to expose and discredit terrorist outfits.
Even in the UK, government had to discourage any sort of coverage that may have led to glorification of terrorists after the 7 July London Bombing in 2005.
Six days after the attacks, then UK PM Tony Blair said the new anti-terror laws would aim to “pull up this evil ideology by its roots” by tackling incitement to terrorism. He announced a two-week consultation on a variety of measures, including how the law against those “glorifying” terrorism could be tightened. Glorification—a person who “glorifies, exalts or celebrates” a terrorist act—made it into the draft legislation. The legislation threatened a five-year jail sentence for anyone glorifying a terrorist act committed over the last 20 years. The small print said the home secretary would draw up a list of historical terrorist acts that it would be a criminal offence to glorify. In striking down glorification, the Lords proposed an offence of “describing terrorism in a way that would encourage people to emulate it”.
The Terrorism Act 2006 introduced into UK law a new offence of the encouragement or glorification of terrorism. Statements which are likely to be understood as a direct or indirect encouragement or other inducement to the commission of terrorist acts may be caught by the offence. We should continue to implement strict rules against the glorification of terror here in Pakistan as well and denounce all instances of this when they occur.