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"Media Responsibilities in an Age of Terror"
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I can't imagine you are looking forward to a lecture with this title. Thinking about an age of terror is bad enough. Worse, I am going to lecture you—senior media executives—on your responsibilities. You are always being lectured on your responsibilities, by bishops, politicians and commentators. Worst of all, you are about to be lectured to by that self-important and self-elected breed, the Puritan scold, the know it all public intellectual.

I feel for you. I really do.

Because you are media executives, your responsibilities are public property. They are everybody's business: the politicians who fund you, if you are a public broadcaster, the viewers and listeners, who bombard you with emails, the advertisers, who wish you'd be a little less responsible and little more fun.

But you can't escape the scrutiny. It goes with the territory. You are the unelected fourth branch of democratic government and the scrutiny you get is the scrutiny you deserve. It is also the scrutiny you need. You need to be responsible to your share-holders, your stake-holders, your funders, and ultimately your fellow citizens. If you are responsible to them, you will do a better job.

So what responsibilities are we talking about here? Let's start with your peace-time ones, and then think aloud about the different ones that seem to derive from a war on terror.

We know what your responsibilities are in peace-time: to divert and entertain, to keep us amused, to thrill us upon occasion (who wasn't thrilled—and heartbroken—by that Game 7 of the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Your mandate is to be a mirror: to show us who we are: what kind of place Canada is, at home and abroad.

You have patriotic responsibilities. By patriotic, I don't mean flag-waving bombast. I mean the responsibility to serve your country, the place that gives you the audience, the licenses, the revenue that allows you to operate. Being a patriotic broadcaster simply means serving your community, and all the people who make it up. There is no incompatibility between patriotism and profit. Indeed, the better you serve your country, the more profitable you are likely to be.

Serving your country means presenting it warts and all, all of it, not just the central populated zones, but all of it, all of its peoples—immigrants, aboriginal peoples,

black, white, in between, French, English, the whole dazzling array of Canadian diversity. Those of you from other broadcasting cultures have exactly the same responsibility to your increasingly diverse audiences. Your audiences have a right to turn on TV that they pay for (whether it is in advertising or through their taxes) and see themselves: in all their amazing variety. They have a right to hear their own voices, their own fears, their own passions and their own convictions. I'm not sure any of our broadcasting in Canada really succeeds at meeting this responsibility. When I turn on the TV and listen to the CBC, I see and hear too many white middle class people like me. That can't be right.

At the same time as you have a responsibility to represent the diversity—political, social, religious, racial, ethnic and linguistic—you are also supposed to bring us together, to reinforce and sustain a common sense of citizenship, based in shared experience and values. This tension—between emphasizing what is different and holding on to what is common—is not easy to resolve. You don't want to balkanize the audience; you don't want to super-serve just one section of it, and you also don't want to become a country's cheerleader. So being fair, being inclusive, being nobody's cheerleader is a balancing act.

Getting the balance right is important because our identity is at stake. The Canadian media market is small, and we probably receive more foreign media as part of our daily diet than any other place on earth. Nothing wrong with that, but the market doesn't always serve our need to understand our own lives, as opposed to our neighbors' lives down south.

All my adult life Canadians have worried that our media is not serving our national identity, and building our national story. Yet the effort that began in the 1960's to increase Canadian content and encourage the telling of Canadian stories has paid off. It seems obvious, at least to me, that we are actually more certain in our sense of national identity than we were when I was growing up in Louis St. Laurent's Canada. That identity is much more complex than it used to be: it's no longer just a matter of the wide open spaces, the cold, hockey and maple syrup. It includes French and English, aboriginal, immigrant in a new synthesis. The conclusion I draw? Our national broadcasters haven't done a bad job bringing us together.

Canadian broadcasters are in the midst of a national election, one which promises to be close and hard fought. Elections are fought largely on the public stage of the media. You are the gatekeepers and the referees of democracy. So you have to be fair and balanced and critical. None of this is easy. The line between being critical and being cynical is hardest to keep to. Journalists see a lot of politicians up close, and often they don't like what they see, though it is also true that sometimes, just sometimes, the more you see what politicians do, the more you respect the crazy few who do it for a living and manage to do it well.

Voting participation rates are going down in Canada. We used to think we were better citizens and more public spirited than those selfish know-nothings down south,

but our numbers, while still better, are trending downwards. Most of the trend is probably the fault of politicians. Sponsorship scandals poison the wells of trust. But some of the cynicism may be the fault of broadcasters. We've made it fashionable to be cynical about politicians, about the whole process. But we need to hold the line between skepticism and cynicism, between being critical and just being dismissive. It's cynical to hold politicians to a standard that just isn't realistic: none of us are angels, god knows and so we shouldn't hold anyone to angelic standards. We should expect of politicians what we expect of ourselves, no more no less: we make the best decisions we can, with the information available at the time; we serve the people as best we can, within the limits of our patience and good humor; we expect people to be honest and accountable with the public money, as we would expect ourselves to be. Politicians need private lives just like the rest of us. They have bad days like the rest of us. They aren't geniuses, like the rest of us.

None of this is an argument for going easy on the politicians. One of my favorite programs on the Comedy Channel—The Daily Show with Jon Stewart—spares no one, not Bush, not Kerry. Its humor takes no prisoners, but it is never cynical about politics. Satire, it has been said, is the revenge of disappointed hope. We need more satire and we need more hope in Canadian politics.

So the public responsibilities of media leaders in a time of peace are not complicated. You run institutions whose purpose is to amuse, inspire, inform, reflect us in all our diversity, bring us together, and keep the democratic wells of trust and knowledge clean and pure.

But how do matters stand in war-time, or more specifically, in a war on terror. This type of war is clearly different than any national emergency we have faced in the past. Indeed a large segment of the public doubts that it should be called a war at all. How, they say, can you make war on a tactic? And if you declare war on a tactic that has proven an eternal temptation to any group that believes it lacks peaceful redress, what can victory in a war on terror possibly mean?

So that's the first difference between a war on terror and any other war we've ever fought. We don't know what it would mean to win, and unless we can figure out what winning looks like, our politicians may want to fight it forever. If terrorism is a politics, a search for solutions to oppression or exploitation, the best tactic is political: find peaceful solutions to grievance. Terrorism stops when homeless or exploited people get what they want: land, a home, the rights they have been denied.

That may be the first challenge that terrorism presents to the modern media. If our mission is to explain, then our mission with terrorism is to explain terrorism. And what we need to explain is that terrorism is politics by other means, disgraceful means, illegitimate means, but ones which serve the needs, hopes and aspirations of people. So in our mission to explain, we need to resist the temptation to demonize, to turn all terrorists into fanatics. This is tough to do when the terrorists are attacking people we care about—especially Israel—but we need to hold to the balance between explaining and justifying.

Explaining is not justifying. Documenting the rage, hatred and disillusion of Palestinians is not the same thing as justifying suicide bombers.

Anyone who has covered the Israeli-Palestinian conflict knows the scrutiny placed by communities from both sides on every word, every gesture of a reporter. Media executives need to have the guts to push back on this pressure. They need to back up their reporters, not lock them down in a prison of political correctness.

We need to remember that there is really no such thing as a foreign story anymore. For Canadian Jews, Israel is a domestic story, and so it is for Canadian Arabs and Palestinians. Just as the NATO operation in Kosovo was a vital domestic story for Canadians of Serbian origin. Or the battle between the Tamil Tigers, a terrorist group if ever there was one, and the Sri Lankan government, convulses Scarborough, a suburb of Toronto. These communities live their foreign allegiances passionately and they compete with each other to detect bias and hidden agendas whenever your reporters are reporting from "their" war zones. So the argument—nobody really wants foreign news anymore—misses a key fact of the emerging Canadian demographic: for millions of Canadians, the distinction between foreign and domestic is blurring to vanishing point. Canadian broadcasters need to serve an audience with dual loyalties, one to their new home, the other to the one whose fate they still follow with intense interest.

If the first basic challenge is to understand terrorism as politics, not as mindless fanaticism, if the first challenge is to convey to Canadians what is happening out there, the second challenge is to understand what is happening here at home. For a war on terror poses serious difficulties for any liberal democracy.

In my latest book *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror*, I argue that the chief impact of terrorism on liberal democracy has been to strengthen executive power—the power of Presidents and Prime Ministers—at the expense of courts, the legislature and a free press. Democracy is not just majority rule, balanced by minority or individual rights. Democracy is also checks and balances, the system of "adversarial justification" of executive measures by legislatures, courts and free press. As media executives you have a vital role in ensuring that "adversarial justification"—the constant questioning of executive power—remains effective and unimpeded.

How does "adversarial justification" stand in the democracies of today? To ask this question is to ask how free we really are. The key problem is secret government. A war on terror is fought largely by secret agencies, below the radar of judicial, legislative or media scrutiny, all on Presidential or Prime Ministerial orders. The concentration of executive power and the proliferation of secret government are the chief dangers that terrorism poses to free government.

In other words, it is not just the attacks of terrorists that harm us, but our reactions to them, and what these reactions do to our institutions, that should give us pause. I can't think of a democracy in the 20th century—with the possible exception of Weimar Germany—that was actually destroyed by terrorism, and Weimar democracy was brought

down, by political violence from left and right, combined with a devastating depression. In other words, terrorism can only succeed in toppling a democracy if it also triggers a severe economic depression. Otherwise—and here the examples are the Basques in Spain, the IRA in Northern Ireland, the Red Brigades in Italy, the Baader Meinhof Gang in Germany—democracy has won out over terror. Some of these victories have been achieved in countries—like Spain, Italy and Germany—with shallow democratic roots and a bad heritage of fascism. Yet they did not crack.

Israel has been under siege throughout Intifada 2—and many of its tactics (house demolitions, targeted assassinations, the construction of a security wall that is simultaneously a land grab) have aroused deep and bitter controversy. But Israel remains a democracy: peaceful elections have been held during the terrorist emergency, governments have changed hands; the courts continue to exercise scrutiny over executive measures; the press continues to be free and highly critical. Terrorism has destroyed Palestinian democracy, not Israeli democracy.

Our very own Canadian experience of terrorism—the post-box bombs in Montreal in the 60's, culminating in the murder of a provincial Cabinet Minister and the declaration of the War Measures Act—showed that liberal democracies can be very robust in defending themselves. Trudeau's actions—highly controversial at the time—drove terror out of Canadian politics.

So the hopeful message is that democracies are much more robust when faced with terrorist challenges than we suppose. But the more somber message is that all terrorist emergencies do harm to democracy. No one can forget that 500 people were arrested and held without charge in Quebec. Trudeau's actions eradicated terrorism in Quebec politics, but the same actions probably increased support for peaceful forms of Quebec separatism, as the memory of those imprisonments alienated substantial sections of the Quebec public from the federal government.

Terrorism distorts democracy: electorates want to be safe, so majority opinion calls for strong measures and decisive action. Governments respond and give themselves more power, and legislatures are usually too subservient to majority opinion to resist. Courts defer and allow national security to trump individual rights. In these ways, terrorism cannot defeat democracy in a straight fight, but democracy can defeat itself.

By this point, you may be thinking. What does this have to do with me? Aren't Canadians safe? Aren't we out of the line of fire? We weren't out of the line of fire at the World Trade Center. Our kids were in that discotheque in Bali. They could have been on the trains pulling into Madrid stations in March. Canadian innocence—that continuing belief that we are just too nice or too powerless to be in anyone's line of fire—is a luxury we can no longer afford.

One policy consequence of our necessary loss of innocence is perfectly obvious. If we fail to patrol our own borders effectively, if our immigration, customs, police and military fail to stop a terrorist attack on our neighbor, you can be sure of one thing:

Canada will lose control of its own southern frontier. We either defend ourselves adequately, or someone else will do it for us. America will not hesitate to infringe our sovereignty if it feels their own is threatened by our inability to do the job right. So even if we are not principal targets, we are next door to one, and if we want to remain free and sovereign, we need to shoulder the appropriate burdens of vigilance.

These burdens include enhancing our own intelligence capability so that we are not dependent on others to assess terrorist threats on our own soil; and strengthening an anti-terrorist capability of our own, so that if attacked, we do not have to depend on others to defend ourselves. We can only cooperate with allies, if we commit the resources to maintain independent capabilities.

Many of these measures are included in the federal government's National Security Policy. They all involve a large expansion of secret government in Canada: the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and the Communications Security Establishment; the Financial Transactions Analysis Center, which tracks down money laundering; the RCMP; the Joint Threat Assessment Center. I support all the new initiatives of this government to improve our security capabilities, so it may come as a surprise, if I also say: these guards need to be guarded.

There are institutional fire-walls to safeguard Canadian civil liberties: review committees, inspector generals, public complaints commissioners, parliamentary sub-committees. All these fire-walls need to do their jobs. But there are limits to the degree to which even conscientious public servants and bureaucrats can be trusted to protect our freedoms. Our last line of defense is a vigilant media. As long as we face terrorist threats, secret government will grow, and adversarial justification and review—the keystone of democracy—will be weakened unless the press does its job.

How many of you maintain national security specialists, people whose job it is to figure out what the Canadian government's secret agencies are actually doing? Where is Canada's Seymour Hersh? How many of you are testing our border security, our container security, our airport security? How many of you are reviewing the use of watch lists for air line travel? Are we so sure that the firewalls are working the way they should?

In January, a Canadian journalist's house was searched by the RCMP looking for the source of a leak, inside the security service, relating to the treatment of Maher Arar, the Ottawa telecommunications engineer, a Canadian citizen deported to Syria by US authorities after being stopped in New York in 2002. Arar is a case of rendition: the Torture Convention—Canada is a signatory—forbids the rendition of anyone to confinement in a country where there is a reasonable chance that the person will be tortured. Arar claims he was tortured in Syria. But that's not the only violation: the Americans can turn back a Canadian citizen to Canada, but surely have no right to deport him to a third country.

The third violation in the Arar case was the violation of press freedom by the RCMP. So what if the journalist in question got hold of sensitive government information? She was doing her job. The fact is government can always count on the discretion and probity of its employees when it plays by the rules. In this case, security services were leaking materials to protect themselves and discredit the suspect, and then chose to shift the blame to the journalist. The outcry at the RCMP search of a journalist forced the Prime Minister to admit it had all been a mistake, but the damage had been done, and the purpose had been achieved: to chill other journalists from venturing too far into the secret world of the RCMP, the CSIS and its relation to the CIA.

All of this should be a matter of serious concern, not just because it is an attack upon our profession alone, but because it is actually an attack on democracy itself, on the system of adversarial justification and review, in which the press plays a vital part.

We need to look south and consider carefully what is happening there. The institutional mechanisms that are supposed to protect democracy from tyranny are under obvious strain. Lawyers in both the Justice and Defense Departments bow to doctrines of presidential authority and command obedience which were discredited at Nuremberg; treaties that expressly forbid torture and abuse of prisoners are parsed with lawyerly finesse to green-light the abuses now uncovered at Abu Ghraib. The institutions within the federal bureaucracy that were supposed to subject power to law simply failed. The next line of defense—Congressional review—has been struggling to catch up with the devious ingenuity of an executive branch that routinely breaks its obligations to truthfully disclose and account for its actions before the other branches of government. We await the Supreme Court's rulings on whether a President has the power to imprison a US citizen indefinitely on a US navy brig. We can only hope that the Supreme Court will not allow such a frightening increase in Presidential power. If it does so, we have reason to fear that terrorism will have won a startling victory over constitutional government: forcing a democracy into a needless betrayal of its very nature.

In Canada we need to take all due care that such abuses of Prime Ministerial and government authority do not take place here, under the guise of 'necessity', 'emergency' and 'national security.' We hand a victory to terror if we do. In facing this challenge, we all need to meet our responsibilities. Nothing especially heroic is required. I mean nothing more nor less than that we do our jobs: to be skeptical, critical, to remain unimbedded.

I do my part by raising these issues, but you do your part, by going home and making sure that your news departments, reporters and producers understand that in the daily discharge of their duties, by asking the question no one wanted asked, the question no one thought to answer before, by presenting the facts, warts and all, of what our government is actually doing or not doing to keep us secure, they do what they can to keep us free.