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WAR

The BBC has a special responsibility to its UK and international audiences when reporting conflict. At such times, large numbers of people across the world access our services for accurate news and information. We must ensure they can be confident we are telling them the truth. They also expect us to help them make sense of events by providing context and impartial analysis and by offering a wide range of views and opinions.

We need to be sensitive to the emotions and fears of our audience when reporting matters involving risk to and loss of life, as well as human suffering or distress. Some will have relatives or friends directly involved. We will need to handle painful stories with great care.

The following editorial principles apply to our coverage of conflict.

- Our reports should normally make it clear where information has come from, particularly in the face of conflicting claims. We must label sources of information and material from third parties.
- We should normally say if our reports are censored or monitored or if we withhold information, and explain, wherever possible, the rules under which we are operating.
- The tone of our reporting is as important as the reliability of our reporting.
- We should respect human dignity without sanitising the realities of war. There must be clear editorial justification for the use of very graphic pictures of war or atrocity.
- We will ensure, as far as is reasonably possible, that next of kin do not learn of a relative's death or injury from our news bulletins, websites or programmes.
- We will ensure our online message boards are hosted to maintain a full debate and avoid offensive postings by switching to pre-moderation if necessary.

Specific advice on reporting war is issued, as required, on the Editorial Guidelines website. At such times we should also monitor our output, particularly scheduled programmes, including films, drama, comedy and music, to identify anything which

might be thought inappropriate in the light of hostilities.

MANDATORY REFERRALS TO CONTROLLER EDITORIAL POLICY

Content producers must refer:

- **any situation where BBC staff may be in potential breach of the Terrorism Act.**
- **any proposal to approach an individual or an organisation responsible for acts of terror for an interview.**
- **any proposal to broadcast material recorded at a staged event in the UK, or overseas where threats are made against UK citizens.**

TERROR

We must report acts of terror quickly, accurately, fully and responsibly. Our credibility is undermined by the careless use of words which carry emotional or value judgements. The word “terrorist” itself can be a barrier rather than an aid to understanding. We should try to avoid the term, without attribution. We should let other people characterise while we report the facts as we know them.

We should not adopt other people’s language as our own. It is also usually inappropriate to use words like “liberate”, “court martial” or “execute” in the absence of a clear judicial process. We should convey to our audience the full consequences of the act by describing what happened. We should use words which specifically describe the perpetrator such as “bomber”, “attacker”, “gunman”, “kidnapper”, “insurgent”, and “militant”. Our responsibility is to remain objective and report in ways that enable our audiences to make their own assessments about who is doing what to whom.

THE TERRORISM ACT 2000

We have a legal obligation under the Terrorism Act 2000 to disclose to the police, as soon as reasonably practicable, any information which we know or believe might be of material assistance in:

- preventing the commission of an act of terrorism anywhere in the world.

- securing the apprehension, prosecution or conviction of a person in the UK, for an offence involving the commission, preparation or instigation of an act of terrorism.

It is a criminal offence not to disclose such information, punishable by up to 5 years in prison. **Any situation where BBC staff may be in potential breach of the Terrorism Act must be referred to Controller Editorial Policy and Programme Legal Advice.**

The Act also outlaws certain national and international organisations described as “terrorist” groups, making it illegal for them to operate in the UK.

THREATS AND HOAXES

If we receive a bomb warning or other credible and specific threat, whether by phone, fax, email or text message, or even posted to a message board or received by tape, the first priority is to pass it on to the appropriate authorities. **We must not reveal the current code-words normally used by groups giving bomb warnings.**

We should not reveal security details or other sensitive information not widely in the public domain which might assist an attack.

We do not normally report threats against named individuals unless they have produced a visible effect, for example the cancellation of a public appearance.

We must take care not to identify as possible targets people who have not previously been identified and would otherwise not be in danger, for example by naming animal laboratories or firms undertaking work for military establishments.

We do not normally report incidents which turn out to be hoaxes unless they have had a serious and evident effect, such as a major and highly visible transport disruption.

STAGED EVENTS

Any proposal to attend an event staged by proscribed organisations or groups with a known record for acts of terror must be referred to a senior editorial figure or for Independents to the commissioning editor.

Any proposal to broadcast material recorded at a staged event in the UK or overseas, where threats are made against UK citizens, must be referred to Controller Editorial Policy.

Any proposal to broadcast material recorded at legitimate events when paramilitary or other groups stage an appearance must be referred to a senior editorial figure or for Independents to the commissioning editor, who may consult Controller Editorial Policy. In the UK, groups such as the Animal Liberation Front fall into this category.

HIJACKING, KIDNAPPING, HOSTAGE TAKING AND SIEGES

In cases of hijacking, kidnapping, hostage taking and sieges we must be aware that anything we broadcast or publish may be seen or heard by the perpetrators, both in the UK and overseas.

It is important that we report demands in context. We should also consider carefully the ethical issues raised by providing a platform to hijackers, kidnappers or hostage takers, especially if they make direct contact. We must remain in editorial control of the reporting of events and ensure that:

- we do not interview a perpetrator live on air.
- we do not broadcast any video and/or audio provided by a perpetrator live on air.
- we broadcast recordings made by perpetrators, whether of staged events, violent acts or their victims, only after referral to a senior editorial figure.
- we install a delay when broadcasting live material of sensitive stories, for example a school siege or plane hijack. This is particularly important when the outcome is unpredictable and we may record distressing material that is unsuitable for broadcast without careful thought.

When reporting stories relating to hijacking, kidnapping, hostage taking or sieges we must listen to advice from the police and other authorities about anything which, if reported, could exacerbate the situation. Occasionally they will ask us to withhold or even to include information. We will normally comply with a reasonable request, but we will not knowingly broadcast anything that is untrue. The police may even request a complete news black-out. The BBC procedure for dealing with such requests must be followed.

NATIONAL SECURITY

The Official Secrets Act affects our ability to report on some matters relating to security and intelligence issues. The Defence Advisory Notices provide guidance about defence and counter-terrorist information which if published might damage national security. The system is voluntary, it has no legal authority and the final responsibility for deciding whether or not to publish rests solely with us.

Content producers should seek senior editorial and legal advice at an early stage when handling material that falls in these areas. They must inform Controller Editorial Policy of any approach from the Defence Advisory Notice Secretary.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EMERGENCIES

In the early stages of covering national and international emergencies, including the reporting of disasters and major accidents, it is particularly important to source information. First estimates of casualty figures often turn out to be inaccurate. If different sources give different estimates we should either report the range or go for the source which carries the greatest authority and attribute the estimate accordingly.

When people have been killed, injured or are missing it is important that, as far as is reasonably practicable, next of kin do not learn this news from any of our services. We recognise that when names are not given in our reports the news may cause needless concern among people with close relatives who might have been involved. But we believe this is not as bad as the distress caused when names are received for the first time, by way of radio, television or online.

We need to narrow the area of concern as quickly as possible without identifying individual victims, for example in the case of an air crash by including details such as airline, flight number, place of departure and destination, to avoid alarming even larger numbers of people.

In a UK civil emergency, we aim to deliver essential information in the interests of public safety across all of our services. We work with emergency planners to identify the kind of major incidents requiring a special response. However, we must make the necessary editorial judgements to ensure accuracy and independence.

DEMONSTRATIONS, DISTURBANCES AND RIOTS

Comprehensive coverage of demonstrations, disturbances and riots is an important part of our news reporting. It is important that:

- we assess the risk that by previewing likely prospects of disturbances we might encourage them.
- we withdraw immediately if we suspect we are inflaming the situation.
- we treat estimates of involvement with due scepticism and report wide disparities and name the sources of the figures.
- we offer a comprehensive and impartial view. When it is difficult for reporters located on one side of a confrontation to form a clear overall view, their material should be put into a wider context for broadcast.
- when reporting live, we must either install a delay or cut away and record material for use in an edited report, if the level of violence or disorder becomes too graphic.

HOSTILE ENVIRONMENTS, HIGH RISK ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

Any proposals to work in hostile environments, on high risk activities or high risk events must be referred to Head of Newsgathering and Occupational Risk Management's High Risk Team.

A **hostile environment** is a country, region or specified area subject to war, insurrection, civil unrest, terrorism or extreme levels of crime, banditry or lawlessness, and public disorder. It also includes areas with extreme climate or terrain. The BBC keeps a list of hostile and dangerous environments.

High risk activities include criminal investigations involving covert surveillance or recording and/or confrontation of serious criminal or extremist or violent political groups. See Section 7 Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour – Investigations.

High risk events include riots, civil disturbance or extreme public disorder, armed criminal incidents such as hi-jacking or sieges as well as any event involving chemical, biological or radiological (CBR) substances or extreme climatic events such as hurricanes, severe floods, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions.