

**How National Security Reporters Make Meaning of Terrorism Information Disseminated  
by the U.S. Government:  
An Extension of Mass Communication and Terrorism Theory**

Heather Epkins  
University of Maryland START Center

*Project Scope*

One of the main sources of terrorism information the public receives is offered by American news media. Therefore, if the U.S. government communicates about terrorism issues, the U.S. media then disseminates this information, in some form, to the public. News media, then, provide an intersection of contact among terrorists, states and the citizenry.

This qualitative (in-depth interviews) study seeks to better understand how members of the Washington, DC-based news media covering national security issues, including terrorism, understand the *concept* of terrorism and then utilize this information to perform their jobs. More directly, what is the media's role in interpreting and disseminating terrorism-related messages from the United States government and how do they function in situational contexts of the threat communication process? Additionally, this paper will explore how these journalists understand the Homeland Security Advisory System (HSAS), as introduced by the first United States Homeland Security Secretary, Gov. Tom Ridge in March 2002.

*Recent Progress*

This project is 95% complete and will be completed within the following week. The literature review section needs to redirect its focus from agenda setting, priming and framing of news to activism literature.

*Relevance to Research Area*

This paper is relevant to two research areas: Emergency Preparedness and Response and Communications and Interoperability. This paper seeks to understand how national security reporters understand terrorism information disseminated by the U.S. government. Media obviously play a crucial role in both response and communications given to the public at large regarding any terrorist action or threat and are therefore a crucial public to be studied when seeking best practices for preparedness, response, communications and interoperability.

*Publications Since Beginning of Project*

None.

*Future Plans*

This paper will be submitted to a major communication conference in 2008.