

## **SECTION 11: WAR, TERROR AND EMERGENCIES**

### **11.1 Introduction**

### **11.2 Principles**

### **11.3 Mandatory Referrals**

### **11.4 Practices**

**Accuracy and Impartiality**

**Identifying Victims**

**Demonstrations, Disturbances and Riots**

**Staged Events**

**Threats and Hoaxes**

**Hijacking, Kidnapping, Hostage Taking and Sieges**

**National Security and Counter Terrorism**

**Hostile Environments, High Risk Activities and Events**

## **11.1 INTRODUCTION**

The BBC has a special responsibility to its UK and international audiences when reporting conflict including wars, acts and planned acts of terror, sieges and emergencies. Large numbers of people across the world access our services for accurate news and information. 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.

At such times, when there may be conflicting information and opinions, and with reliable information hard to come by, we need to be scrupulous in applying our principles of accuracy and impartiality.

(See Section 3 Accuracy: 3.2 and Section 4 Impartiality: 4.2)

However, we must also take care that our journalism does not put individuals at risk of unnecessary distress or harm. Alongside normal ethical considerations (and exceptionally for journalists), the Terrorism Acts place legal obligations on individuals to disclose certain information to the police as soon as reasonably practicable.

The tone of our reporting is as important as its reliability. 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. We should avoid causing unnecessary offence whilst also ensuring we continue to convey the reality of events and do not unduly sanitise our reporting.

(See Section 7 Privacy: 7.4.38 - 7.4.44 and Section 5 Harm and Offence: 5.4.11)

(See Guidance online: Violence in News and Current Affairs Output)

Specific guidance on reporting war is issued, as required, on the Editorial Guidelines website.

At times of war, terror or emergency, we should keep our output under review, particularly scheduled programmes (including films, drama, comedy and music) and trails, to identify anything which might be thought inappropriate in the light of events.

(See Section 5 Harm and Offence: 5.4.53)

### 11.2 PRINCIPLES

11.2.1 Our reports of war, terror, emergencies and similar events must meet the Editorial Guidelines' Principles on Accuracy and Impartiality.

(See Section 3 Accuracy: 3.2 and Section 4 Impartiality: 4.2)

11.2.2 We will respect human dignity without sanitising the realities of war, terror, emergencies and similar events. There must be clear editorial justification for the use of very graphic pictures.

(See Section 7 Privacy: 7.4.38 - 7.4.44 and Section 5 Harm and Offence)

11.2.3 We will ensure, as far as is reasonably possible, that next of kin do not learn of a relative's death or injury from any of our content.

### 11.3 MANDATORY REFERRALS

*(Mandatory Referrals are part of the BBC's editorial management system. While they will not, in themselves, meet the Principles in the Editorial Guidelines, they are an essential part of the process to ensure compliance and must be observed.)*

#### **Referrals to Director Editorial Policy and Standards**

11.3.1 Any proposal to attend an event staged by proscribed organisations or groups with a known record for mounting acts of terror must be referred to a senior editorial figure or, for independents, to the commissioning editor. Referral must also be made to Director Editorial Policy and Standards.

(See 11.4.9)

11.3.2 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 Director Editorial Policy and Standards.

(See 11.4.10)

11.3.3 Any approach from the Secretary to the Defence Advisory Notice Committee<sup>1</sup> must be referred to Director Editorial Policy and Standards.

(See 11.4.20)

11.3.4 Any situation where BBC staff or anyone else engaged in content production for the BBC may have obligations under the Terrorism Acts must be

---

<sup>1</sup> Sometimes also referred to by its former name of the D-Notice Committee.

referred in good time to Director Editorial Policy and Standards and Programme Legal Advice.

(See 11.4.21)

11.3.5 Any proposal to approach an individual or an organisation (including an individual member of the organisation) responsible for acts of terror to participate in our output must be referred in advance to Director Editorial Policy and Standards.

(See 11.4.21)

### ***Other Referrals***

11.3.6 Any proposal to broadcast material recorded at legitimate events when paramilitary or other groups with a known record of violence or intimidation stage an appearance must be referred to a senior editorial figure, or for independents to the commissioning editor, who may consult Director Editorial Policy and Standards. For example, violent animal rights campaigners will fall into this category.

(See 11.4.11)

11.3.7 Any proposal to broadcast recordings made by perpetrators of a hijacking, kidnapping, hostage taking or siege must be referred to a senior editorial figure or, for independents, to the commissioning editor.

(See 11.4.17)

11.3.8 Any request by the police or others for a complete news black-out on stories relating to hijacking, kidnapping, hostage taking or sieges must be referred to a senior editorial figure, who may wish to consult Editorial Policy.

(See 11.4.18)

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

(See 11.4.22)

## **11.4 PRACTICES**

### **Accuracy and Impartiality**

11.4.1 When reporting war, and in the early stages of covering national and international emergencies (including acts of terror, disasters and major accidents), it is particularly important to give the source of information and material from third parties, particularly when there are conflicting claims. 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.

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.

11.4.2 When reporting demonstrations, disturbances and similar events, we should treat estimates of involvement with due scepticism, report wide disparities and name the sources of the figures. We aim to offer a comprehensive and impartial view of events. 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.

(See Section 3 Accuracy: 3.1 and 3.4.11 - 3.4.12)

11.4.3 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 the relevant authorities to identify the kind of major incidents requiring a special response. However, we must make the appropriate editorial judgements to ensure accuracy and independence.

(See Section 11 War, Terror and Emergencies: 11.4.18)

### ***User Generated Content***

11.4.4 In times of conflict, there are special sensitivities for example about the security of operational military plans, avoiding naming casualties until next of kin have been informed, and handling unsubstantiated rumours. This applies particularly to user generated content when users normally expect their material to be published as soon as it is sent to us.

At such times, we may publish additional guidelines to the effect that:

- we will concentrate comment and debate about the conflict in a limited number of spaces, with additional hosting and moderation, to maintain a full debate
- we will be prepared to switch to pre-moderation if necessary
- we may ask for claims or statements by third parties to be attributed so that their status becomes easier for our users to evaluate
- we may link from such statements to relevant stories written by the BBC News site so that users can more easily compare them.

(See Section 11 War, Terror and Emergencies: 11.4.7 and Section 7 Privacy: 7.4.38 - 7.4.44)

(See Guidance online: User Contributions in News Output and Moderation, Hosting, Escalation and User Management)

### ***Use of Language***

11.4.5 We must report acts of terror quickly, accurately, fully and responsibly. Terrorism is a difficult and emotive subject with significant political overtones

and care is required in the use of language that carries value judgements. We try to avoid the use of the term "terrorist" without attribution. When we do use the term we should strive to do so with consistency in the stories we report across all our services and in a way that does not undermine our reputation for objectivity and accuracy.

The word "terrorist" itself can be a barrier rather than an aid to understanding. 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". We should not adopt other people's language as our own; 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.

11.4.6 For similar reasons, it is also usually inappropriate to use, without attribution, terms such as "liberate", "court martial" or "execute" in the absence of a clear judicial process.

(See Guidance online: Language when Reporting Terrorism)

### **Identifying Victims**

11.4.7 When people have been killed, injured or are missing, it is important that, as far as is reasonably practicable, next of kin do not find out from BBC output. We recognise that, when names are not given in our reports, there may be 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 they find out through the media.

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.

(See Section 11 War, Terror and Emergencies: 11.4.4 and Section 7 Privacy: 7.4.38 - 7.4.44)

### **Demonstrations, Disturbances and Riots**

11.4.8 Comprehensive coverage of demonstrations, disturbances and riots is an important part of our news reporting. However, in addition to the specific guidelines concerning accuracy and impartiality (see 11.4.2 above), 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
- 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.

## Staged Events

**11.4.9 Any proposal to attend an event staged by proscribed organisations or groups with a known record for mounting acts of terror must be referred to a senior editorial figure or, for independents, to the commissioning editor. Referral must also be made to Director Editorial Policy and Standards.**

**11.4.10 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 Director Editorial Policy and Standards.**

**11.4.11 Any proposal to broadcast material recorded at legitimate events when paramilitary or other groups with a known record of violence or intimidation stage an appearance must be referred to a senior editorial figure, or for independents to the commissioning editor, who may consult Director Editorial Policy and Standards.** For example, violent animal rights campaigners will fall into this category.

## Threats and Hoaxes

11.4.12 If we receive a bomb warning or other credible and specific threat, whether by phone, fax, email, text message, 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.

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

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

11.4.15 We must take care not to identify individuals or organisations, who would not otherwise be in danger, as possible targets unless there is an overriding editorial justification. For example, this may include companies or employees engaged in testing on animals or undertaking work for military establishments.

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

## Hijacking, Kidnapping, Hostage Taking and Sieges

11.4.17 In cases of hijacking, kidnapping, hostage taking, sieges, bombings or other similar events, we must be aware that anything we broadcast may be seen or heard, either directly or indirectly, 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

(See Section 8 Reporting Crime and Anti-social Behaviour: 8.4.15 - 8.4.19)

- we do not broadcast any video and/or audio provided by a perpetrator live on-air
- **we broadcast recordings made by perpetrators only after referral to a senior editorial figure or, for independents, to the commissioning editor**
- 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 otherwise risk showing distressing material that is unsuitable for live broadcast.

11.4.18 When reporting stories relating to hijacking, kidnapping, hostage taking or sieges we must listen to advice from the police and other authorities about anything that, 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.

**Any request by the police or others for a complete news black-out must be referred to a senior editorial figure, who may wish to consult Editorial Policy.**

(See Section 11 War, Terror and Emergencies: 11.4.3)

## National Security and Counter Terrorism

### *Official Secrets Act*

11.4.19 The Official Secrets Act affects our ability to report on some matters relating to security and intelligence issues. Content producers should consult Programme Legal Advice when handling material that falls, or might fall, within its terms.

### *Defence Advisory Notices*

11.4.20 Defence Advisory Notices provide guidance about defence and counter-terrorist information which if broadcast might damage national security. They cover the publication of material including highly classified codes and ciphers, information not widely in the public domain about key military facilities and installations and information relating to UK Security and Intelligence Services and Special Forces.

The standing Defence Advisory Notices can be read on the DA Notice System website.

The system is voluntary, it has no legal authority and the final responsibility for deciding whether or not to broadcast rests solely with us. Content producers should seek senior editorial and legal advice at an early stage when handling material that falls, or might fall, under the Notices. **Director Editorial Policy and Standards must be informed of any approach from the Secretary to the Defence Advisory Notice Committee<sup>2</sup>.**

### ***Terrorism Acts***

11.4.21 There is a legal obligation under the Terrorism Acts 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. **Any situation where BBC staff or anyone else engaged in content production for the BBC may have obligations under the Terrorism Acts must be referred in good time to Director Editorial Policy and Standards and to Programme Legal Advice.**

**The Acts also outlaw certain national and international organisations described as ‘terrorist’ groups, making it illegal for them to operate in the UK. An up-to-date list of the proscribed organisations is maintained on the Home Office website. Any proposal to approach one of these organisations (including an individual member of the organisation), or any other individual or organisation responsible for acts of terror, to participate in our output must be referred in advance to Director Editorial Policy and Standards.**

### **Hostile Environments, High Risk Activities and Events**

11.4.22 **Any proposals to work in hostile environments, on high risk activities or high risk events must be referred to Head of Newsgathering and BBC Safety’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, or public disorder. It also includes areas with extreme climate or terrain. The BBC keeps a list of hostile and dangerous environments on Gateway.

---

<sup>2</sup> Sometimes also referred to by its former name of the D-Notice Committee.



## Section 11 - War Terror and Emergencies

'High risk activities' include criminal investigations involving covert surveillance or recording and/or confrontation of terrorists, serious criminal or extremist or violent political groups.

'High risk events' include riots, civil disturbance or extreme public disorder, terrorist or armed criminal incidents such as hijacking or sieges as well as any event involving chemical, biological or radiological (CBR) substances, outbreaks of serious diseases and pandemics, or extreme climatic events such as hurricanes, severe floods, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.