

The Role Of Media In Tourism Security
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15 June 2010. International Summit on Tourism Safety & Security,
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Introduction

Selamat pagi and Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to begin by thanking the organisers the Egnatia group for inviting me here today. I hope my presentation this morning will inject some value added into the discussions and give us all some food for thought on what is clearly a very significant issue on the global agenda.

It was a fascinating day yesterday. I must say I learnt a lot about how the safety and security industry works and how you help to make the world a better and safer place. It is clearly to me we have many common interests in making the world safer and more secure and protecting the freedoms that we cherish.

But I also left with some trepidations and concerns. What I heard underscored my view that the role of the media in travel & tourism may shift directions and future relations between the media and the security apparatus may well become more adversarial. This may not necessarily be what you want to hear but it's important to say it nevertheless. Indeed, the subject of my talk "The role of media in improving tourism security" is best served by giving it a much broader context. There are clearly issues involved that deserve much greater scrutiny, and it's in both our interests to give them an airing.

In that sense, I am what you may wish to call an early warning system. The role of a truly independent media is to take nothing at face value, but to question, question, question. It is to act as a check and balance mechanism and help protect the same freedoms we all value.

Indeed, this is the age of the early warning system. Just as you depend on quality intelligence to provide you early warning of impending attack, so too I am an early warning system of a different kind. After 1997 Asian economic crash, local banks set up an early warning system to ward off currency attacks. After the December 2004 tsunami, the region's governments set up an early warning system to alert us to killer waves. In health and wellness tourism, one of the biggest demands is for a simple medical check up, which is actually nothing more than people seeking early warnings

of looming health problems. There is no reason why this pursuit of early warnings should not apply to the role of the media in travel & tourism security, too.

What do we have in common

Let me begin by asserting that we both have common interests in maintaining safety and security, as well as a healthy travel & tourism industry. At a broader level, we also have an even more fundamental interest in protecting the freedom and democracy that terrorists seek to destroy. Preserving freedom and democracy means adhering to some fundamental processes of human rights, accountability and transparency, rule of law, the right to be held as innocent until proven guilty, and most important, the right to be considered equal under a country's constitution. We all want a safe and secure world, but even more important we need a fair, free, just, democratic and balanced world. In terms of definitions, that is the difference between wants and needs. Although we may be in different professions, our goal is the same. We must never lose sight of that.

Curiously, we also have another thing in common. Like doctors and lawyers, we both make money from someone else's misery. If the world is in a state of peace and quiet, we both go bankrupt. Mayhem and conflict helps sell our products. It's not what we want, but such is the reality. At the same time, let us also admit that we both have an image problem. Not too many people like either the security apparatus or the media. In fact, with some good reason, people are actually scared of us. We are seen as a necessary evil that people have to live with.

Areas in which interests diverge

That's where our commonalities end, and some differences begin to set in, as well as the adversarial nature of our professions. My job often requires me to question the security and safety industry in both the public and private sectors about lapses, inconsistencies and accountability. Security and safety is necessary but there is a price to be paid in terms of loss of privacy, racial profiling, discrimination, costs. Yes there is a huge price to be paid in terms of the economic damage done to companies and countries when violence strikes, but there is an even bigger price to be paid by the innocent members of general public in terms of the impact when yet another round of counter-terrorism safeguards are rolled out.

Questioning authority is becoming necessary because if there is one thing we know well in journalism is that people in authority lie. Be they public or private sector officials, everyone has an interest in seeking to make themselves look good, play the blame game, find scapegoats, manipulate information, fudge investigations. You know this to be true, too. For example, take the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Even we who are not in the oil business would have great difficulty believing what BP is telling us. Already the estimates about the amount of oil spilling into the Gulf have been changed thrice. Add to that the lies told by executives of Goldman Sachs, Merrill Lynch and others, and you begin to understand the far-reaching consequences of the media becoming victims of spin doctors and gullible toadies of the establishment.

And when the security apparatus becomes an accomplice in the effort to mislead the public, trample on human rights and suppress democratic freedoms, the terrorists can claim victory. If terrorists make us live in fear, both of them and the security authorities, they win.

Yesterday, Mr Duffell said discrimination is one of the main reasons why people will not travel to a country. Then, Mr. Clancy showed pictures of camera work by suspected terrorists staking out Wall Street. However, I see it quite natural for a genuine tourist visiting New York for the first time to take a picture or a video of an icon like Wall Street. I challenge anyone to tell me what is wrong with that. But I can guarantee you that if that tourist is a swarthy, black haired man with a bushy moustache, he is more likely to be questioned than a white Caucasian. And if his name turns out to be Mohammed or Abdulla, you can be damned sure he will have a one-way ticket to Guantanamo bay.

If that person then gets released, and decides to complain to the media, or sue, it is my job and that of the democratic apparatus in any free country to hold someone accountable. There are many times in history when the media has played a good watchdog role. I personally have been hugely inspired by the role of the U.S. media in bringing the Vietnam War to an end. Watergate was another landmark in the annals of good journalism. Today, unfortunately, we have this creature called “embedded journalist”. These so-called journalists are a far cry from those gutsy jourmos who exposed the lies of the five o’clock follies of Vietnam. If journalists had done their job, the lies told to the world about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq would have been exposed, and thousands may still be alive.

Today in the U.S., many companies that also profit from war, conflict and mayhem also own the media. Boeing now makes more money as a defence contractor than by selling commercial aircraft. And let’s face another fact. There are plenty of rogues in both our midst. There are media which seeks to divide people and pit them against each other. There are security people who do the same. If either of them wins, a new era of police states will dawn.

My background

Before I go any further, I want to share some values that I hold dear.

I am a proud product of India, the land of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi’s revolution began in South Africa because he refused to yield, like Rosa Parks in the United States, to the revolting system known as apartheid, a system that was known for heavy handed usage of security measures. Gandhi then returned to India and led the revolution that ended British colonialism through largely non-violent means. He then became the victim of a terrorist, assassinated by one of his own. Why? For seeking to live in peace with India’s Muslims and prevent the division of the country. Gandhi was the role model who inspired leaders like Nelson Mandela whose release marked the end of the apartheid era, many years after Gandhi’s death.

In my school days, I studied and was very heavily influenced two very famous pieces of English literature, the George Orwell classics *Animal Farm* and *1984*. Both remain the world's most foremost pieces of writing against authoritarianism and the way it creeps into societies and how its leaders lie, fudge, deceive and manipulate public minds either when seeking power or after gaining it. It's most memorable lines: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."

Journalistically, I have mentioned two events that inspired me in my formative days, Vietnam and Watergate. But there is another event that will remain in my memory forever.

In the early 1990s, as a travel journalist, it was the thrill of my life to cover the joint press conferences of the Palestinian, Jordanian, Israeli and Egyptian tourism ministers talking of the peace process and how that would transform the middle east. These press conferences were given at ITB and world travel markets, the two biggest travel shows. In November 1995, thanks to the peace process, I was in Tel Aviv attending the annual convention of the International Hotels & Restaurants Association. From my seat just a few metres away, I heard keynote speaker Yitzhak Rabin, the former Israeli PM, explain passionately that the reason why he was embarking on the peace process is so that young people of Israel and the Middle East would not have to fight and die in more Arab Israeli wars. Two nights later, one of those young people whose life he sought to save shot him, a fundamentalist fanatic terrorist named Yigal Amir. Like the man who shot Gandhi, Amir also was opposed to the idea of making peace with people in his midst. Had Rabin lived, and peace prevailed in the Middle East, I would wager that much of the terrorism you see today would not exist.

Today, that is one fundamentalist fanatic terrorist who can claim victory. Prove me wrong.

There were many events last century that changed the course of history. I happened to be present at least one of them. To pass on the lessons I have learnt from these events is part of my responsibility as a journalist, both to the travel & tourism industry as well as future generations.

Define safety and security

Yesterday there was some discussion about the definition of safety and security. Let me give you my own definition of safety and security.

Safety is what is built into the system – internally designed and implemented. An airplane is designed to be safe to fly, carry huge loads of people and cargo over thousands of miles through storms and turbulence. Security is the external threats that the aircraft has to be protected from. Another example, our human body is designed to be safe, its internal antibodies and defence mechanism keeps us safe from the many diseases in the air, through years of life. If we learn judo or karate, that is how we safeguard our security against external threats.

Broader Definition of security

But for the purpose of this talk, I will broaden the definition of both safety and security to include human security. Eventually, all forms of security impact on travel & tourism.

In doing so, allow me to draw on the national security strategy outlined last month by President Obama. According to the preamble, The National Security Strategy is guided by a clear understanding of our increasingly interconnected world where the free flow of information, people and goods continues to accelerate at an unprecedented pace promising new opportunities while simultaneously posing challenges that no longer recognize borders: global networks of terrorists and criminals, threats in space and cyberspace, a degrading climate, and technologies with tremendous destructive power. The response systems and international architecture of the 20th century, designed for another time, are buckling under the weight of these new threats. The Strategy is a blueprint for pursuing the world that we seek by outlining a strategy to rebuild our foundations, promote a just and sustainable international order, strengthen and integrate national capabilities, all while advancing American interests, security, prosperities, and universal values.

So, the question of security in order to protect universal values are inter-related. My role as a journalist is to try and ensure that ever creeping demands of increased security do not conflict with those values.

There are also other broader human security issues, and Mr Duffell and various others have referred to them. SARS, tsunami, financial collapse and pandemics are all threats to human security that do not directly relate to violence. And tourism security and human security cannot be segregated from each other.

Let me give that a broader context. Yesterday, we spent a lot of time on statistics. Here's one more set for you to ponder. On May 30, 2010, at 10:06am, the National Priorities Project Cost of War counter – designed to count the total money appropriated by the U.S. for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars – reached the \$1 trillion mark. What Can You Get For \$1 Trillion?

\$1 trillion would give the maximum Pell Grant award (\$5,500) to all 19 million U.S. college and university students for the next 9 years.

294,734,961 people with health care for one year, or

21,598,789 public safety officers for one year, or

17,149,392 music and arts teachers for one year, or

7,779,092 affordable housing units, or

440,762,472 children with health care for one year, or

137,233,969 head start places for children for one year, or

16,427,497 elementary school teachers for one year, or

1,035,282,468 homes with renewable electricity for one year

I would wager that kind of outlay would make the world a very safe and secure place by simply making it a better place. Let's also put the terrorism threat into perspective – thousands of people die in road accidents by drunken driving. Millions more die in just normal crime. Proportionately, how much money must be spent to prevent these deaths?

It is the job of the media to raise these questions. The public must also question the many factors surrounding violence and conflict. The defence and security industry is the biggest business in the world. The more the world spends on arms, ammunition, and security; especially countries that can least afford it, the less they have to spend on education, health, and infrastructure. That is a formula for revolution and its first cousin, terrorism. I have just seen an example of that in Thailand.

The role of the media

Hence, the media's role is to raise inconvenient truths, challenge conventional wisdoms, and seek accountability and transparency. In some respects, we are both in the business of prevention and cure. However, I would submit that a free and independent media which does its job well as a check and balance mechanism on authority plays an equally important role in creating a safer, just, peaceful world than the security apparatus.

Indeed, threats do not always come from the conventional "terrorists". Threats are also coming from governments and the security apparatus itself. For example, the media plays a major role in exposing corruption. However, we pay a price. On June 3, the UN announced that 77 journalists were killed last year, up 26 per cent over 2008. Many of the murders were related to investigations into corruption, organized crime and political misdeeds. Abductions of journalists and other media professionals also continued in 2009, a practice that forced 157 journalists to seek exile in other countries, according to Frank La Rue, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

I like to believe that those journalists died in defence of rule of law, good governance and democracy. Yet, someone had them killed. This clash is set to continue. Disinformation and propaganda are tools of conflict. If, in times of conflict, the first casualty is truth, the second casualty are those who try to tell it.

Symptoms and cause

I would argue, ladies and gentlemen, that we are like doctors being asked for a solution to a medical problem. However, it appears that we are focussing on the symptoms and not the cause. Throwing a CCTV camera or policing system may make some impact, no doubt. But the Obama strategy clearly established the deeper causes of insecurity. The Berlin wall may have fallen but new walls have emerged in their stead. Globalisation is widely believed to have created a more insecure world. It has made it easier for financial terrorist to operate. So who is going to protect us from

rogue traders and currency speculators, like those who attacked the British pound in 1992 and Thailand in 1997 and all the others being arrested today for fraudulent dealing. These people are not referred to as “financial terrorists” for nothing.

And there is more to security threats than just terrorism. Are paedophiles a threat to Thailand’s national security, yes? What about the mafia gangsters and others. These people can walk into our countries without visas, because developing countries need their tourism dollars. Why can’t the governments of the developed countries track them with the same gusto as they go after terrorists?

Discrepancies in travel & tourism e.g. stupidity

The travel & tourism industry is arguably the most important area where this check and balance mechanism needs to be implemented in order to avert that nightmarish world of the book 1984. And here it is time to raise some questions, which perhaps some of you can help me answer.

Has the world become a safer place? You saw the figures yesterday showing that more than 300 incidents of terrorist violence this Jan May alone? So the first question that comes to mind is how come these attacks are occurring, in spite of all this security and safety measures? Add to that the attacks such as the shootings at the British beach resort and the guy who flew his plane into the IRS building in Austin Texas as well as the recent attacks by Maoist Naxalites in India, and that number goes up.

If those stats prove that the world is no really safer than before all these measures, I can also prove that the increasing aviation related security measures progressively are becoming irritating, frustrating and aggravating. In the early days of tourism development, growth was generated by removing impediments to travel. Now it’s the opposite. Adding impediments in the travel chain has become the norm, all in the interests of safety and security.

Then there are huge inconsistencies in the way security and safety is handled, which could be classified into the “stupidity” category mentioned by Dr Tarlow. Many years ago, this began with just x-ray machines and pointy and sharp items. Even then, there were stories of knitting needles being taken away from grandmothers. Now it’s gone into body scanners, water and gels. Water is available on the plane. Why is it removed?

In some places, only one handbag is allowed as cabin baggage. In others, they don’t care. In places like transit, they make you go through the x-ray machines again. In some places lighters are removed from checked-in baggage, in others they are not. These full body scans are to protect us from whom? Shoe bombers and underwear bombers? We also have iris scans, electronic chips, RFID and tracking devices, and more. Yesterday, you heard Greg mention the fact that the question: “Are you carrying any pornography?” has cropped up on Australian immigration cards.

Inside the airport terminals, people are made to take off their watches, belts and shoes. Outside I see aircraft parked on tarmacs, in full view of the access road. Sometimes aircraft taxiways straddle highways, which would make crossing aircraft sitting ducks. Hotels now make people open their car-boots. But blasts from high power explosives can take away an entire building from 100 metres away. What's the point of all these checks.

Moreover, if people are checked before boarding planes, why aren't they checked before getting on trains and buses worldwide? Why don't we have to put our bags through x-ray machines at just about every railway station and bus-stop in the world? Why not the same level of checks in convention centres, hotels, cinema halls?

Are the rules of the games applied uniformly, as befitting democratic traditions and values? Take the issue of racial profiling – a system that has virtually no checks and balances. People are being detained without recourse to legal advice. If we get on to watch lists, there is no saying when we get taken off. No one is told anything. Recently, one of India's most famous actors, a Muslim, was held up for “additional questioning” upon arrival in the U.S. There was outrage in India. The blogosphere lit up with questions about whether American officials should be subjected to the same scrutiny when they arrive in India, including Hillary Clinton.

I mentioned visas. Many developing countries have to go overboard to allow visa free or visa-on-arrival access to citizens of developed countries. Why can't we get visas on arrival at US, European, Australian and Japanese airports? Now, the U.S. wants everyone to submit the names of air-travellers to the U.S. 72 hours before departure. If the U.S. wants to single out someone for additional questioning, shouldn't they have a right to be told before they travel? If they have a visa, why was it granted in the first place? The U.S. is known to have denied visas to people because they are outspoken supporters of the Palestinians.

Yesterday, I raised the issue of the Mossad hit squad. The British and Australian governments have protested the use of their passports for carrying out this act of state terrorism, and expelled Israeli diplomats. However, one prominent Australian newspaper columnist actually supported the assassination. Who will protect us against hit squads? And if one supposedly democratic country can do it, why can't others?

There is also a tendency to play up terrorism by Muslims over others. Why? There has been Sri Lankan, Irish, Nepalese, Basque and Colombian terrorism. In India, Sikh terrorists killed former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Tamil Tiger terrorists killed her son Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The Maoists are blowing up trains and buses too. But they don't get much international media coverage. The Indian media seldom refers to the Maoists as terrorists but rather as rebels or separatists. In Thailand, the red-shirts burned 35 buildings in Bangkok. The Thai government called them terrorists. Western governments referred to it as acts of arson arising from a domestic political confrontation.

Add to that additional concerns about eavesdropping on mobile phones, interception of emails and privacy questions facing Google and facebook and one needs to ask where is all this going? Where are the checks and balances in the system? Who monitors them? What recourse do justice do people in free democratic societies have?

Conclusions

So, ladies and gentlemen, the role of the media in improving tourism security is more, far more, than just alerting the travel & tourism yet another threat or making them buy another piece of whiz bang technology or helping destinations recover from an attack. It needs to focus on the cause, not the symptoms of terrorism and violence. Hypocrisy, lies, double standards, lack of transparency and accountability all strike at the heart of those democratic values we hold so dear, and buttress my conclusion that the public, like in “Animal Farm” and “1984”, will eventually decide that a line has been crossed somewhere and that the price it is paying in terms of loss of freedoms is not worth it any more.

Along the way, the security industry will need to decide whether they are part of the solution or have inadvertently become part of the problem. Next year will mark the 10th anniversary of 9/11. So far, Osama bin Laden is proving to be just as elusive as those weapons of mass destruction that were supposed to be a “slam dunk” certainty. Both are catastrophic failure of the intelligence agencies and security apparatus. Is someone going to be held accountable?

Today, many Muslims fear a security check at an airport in a supposedly democratic country far more than in Burma or China. But like Mahatma Gandhi, sooner or later, they and the people of developing countries will fight back. Demographically, that’s where the young people are, and I don’t think it will be possible to fool all of them all the time. It will not be long before travel advisories are imposed by developing countries against developed countries. Accountability will become a two-way street. That’s when the tide will turn, big time. Mr Obama’s reference to universal values will prevail, and a just and sustainable world order will emerge. Only then will the world, as well as the travel & tourism industry, become a safer, more secure place. Like Gandhi and Rabin, I am idealistic enough to believe that. I just hope I don’t suffer the same fate.