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Top security spokespersons from the UK, USA and Tunisia shared 24 September their experience with the leading Tunisian media actors and media regulators in a one-day roundtable debate which attracted substantial media coverage.

How to report on security issues, conflict and extremism was the topic of the second in a series of MDI's broader multi-stakeholder debates that are part of the project '[Responsible and Free Reporting on Security Issues in Tunisia](#)

'. The event was organised in partnership with the National Union of Journalists of Tunisia, whose president Néji Bghouri welcomed the guests by calling for the introduction of a code of ethics to guide reporters in covering such issues. 'We are very proud that the Revolution brought us Freedom of Expression. But, with the freedom comes responsibility', said Bghouri. 'For the time being we ask journalists to at least be cautious when approaching covering security issues; which terminology, which sources to use, how to check them. But, a more systematic approach is needed'.

Lieutenant-Colonel Mark Wenham, Chief Military Public Affairs Officer for the British Armed Forces and also formerly NATO, emphasised the importance of sharing information with reporters. 'But, we should do it without compromising operational security, which comes as a

very challenging task, in particularly when dealing with embedded journalists', said Wenham. 'We pride ourselves on being exact and credible, though sometimes not fast enough by journalists' standards. It takes us quite a bit of time to get a full briefing on an 'incident' while journalists are chasing me for the confirmation of what they've heard and the comment. Everybody wants to be fast.' Wenham talked about 'winning the hearts and minds of local people' as an important part of the military spokespersons' communication campaign. 'This is different from working with media' added Wenham.



Deputy Superintendent John Daley, a spokesperson for the Boston Police talked about 'the partnership between media and the police'. 'We have to constantly adapt in aim to keep this partnership going smoothly. The biggest lesson we learnt from the Boston bombing is the power of social media – from 10,000 users before the event it went up to 500,000 within the first five hours after the incident. In 'old times' journalists providing positive stories will be given more access. When the internet appeared, we had to change this and find different ways to serve all media, not only the friendly ones. Transparency became our basic principle'.

Dominique Thierry, MDI Programme Director and a former correspondent for Radio France insisted on the difference between 'information' and 'communication'. 'Both, journalists and security personnel are working for the good of the public, but, while one, the journalists, are seeking information, the security spokespersons are communicating that information often by 'spin-doctoring' it. So, the journalists should be careful in recognising and challenging the spinning,' commented Thierry.

Mokhtar Ben Nasr, a former spokesman of the Tunisian Ministry of Defence talked about

balancing the right to know and the obligation not to compromise security. 'The pressure is on both sides – the media and the security personnel. Both need to be trained in how to cooperate. Our journalists often publish information which can put our forces in danger when we chase terrorists. The Code of Ethics can help both sides.'

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