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## International Politics Media and Conflict

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### **Abstract:**

*Nation States (in the sense of government endeavor to attain the legitimacy and political stability especially in the Third World in their quest for socio-economic development) are endowed differently with resources. These resources, which are in various forms, and are at different levels, are needed by others for their power, development and survival. Thus the interdependent nature of the relations among nation states (asymmetry in some cases) necessitate the need for states to strategize their policies vis-a-vis others. This must be done in an international environment of the ever-present threat of war and destruction. Scholars in Peace and Conflict research are well aware of the communications revolution and the media is often mentioned as an important factor. Having said this, like many policy-makers, the media is either assumed to be all-powerful or irrelevant. There are relatively few systematic studies concerning the media and conflict, although interest and the number publications concerning the issue continue to increase and accumulate. Causes of conflict are often divided up into root causes and direct causes. Root causes are related to causes that stem from long-term, large-scale structural factors and these may not always be manifest. Economic factors and political structures are often considered typical root causes. Direct causes resemble trigger events such as, a sudden change in policy, an economic downturn, or a symbolic threat. Reactions as a result of direct causes are more immediate. Root causes are present in all phases of a conflict, including before a conflict escalates to violence and exists even when the conflict is latent. For example, a certain group may be marginalized or excluded from participating in a political system but until voices are heard that contest this exclusion the conflict is not manifest. It is in such situations that conflicts or tensions may be submerged, to successively escalate and transform a latent conflict into a manifest and violent conflict.*

**Keywords:** International politics, media, conflict

### **1. Introduction**

Nation States (in the sense of government endeavor to attain the legitimacy and political stability especially in the Third World in their quest for socio-economic development) are endowed differently with resources. These resources, which are in various forms, and are at different levels, are needed by others for their power, development and survival. Thus, the interdependent nature of the relations among nation states (asymmetry in some cases) necessitates the need for states to strategize their policies vis-a-vis others. This must be done in an international environment of the ever-present threat of war and destruction.

In a world where absolute sovereignty, independence and self-isolationism, do not exist, the unfolding of events and phenomena transforming the international society have made it even more challenging to international relations itself.

In this unit, we shall examine the boundaries of international relations in its attempt to capture definitions that are much more universal. This will expose the meaning and the nature of the subject, its relevance to the student in terms of objectivity and the overall assessment of the unit self-assessment exercise, Tutor Marked Assignment (TMAs) and references for further reading are inclusive in this study.

#### *1.1. Meaning*

No nation is an island. Because domestic policies are constantly affected by developments outside, nations are compelled to (rather than sit on the fence or out-rightly isolate themselves) enter into dialogue with target or initiating entities or form alliance(s) for the purpose of enhancing their status quo, or increasing their power or prestige and survival in' the international system.

Because international relations are in transition following emerging realities in the international system, it has

become complex and even more difficult arriving at a more universally acceptable definition of the subject. But this is not peculiar to international relations as there are more intense disagreements over the definition of political sciences itself. Nevertheless, scholars have persisted in their attempt to define international relations. Trevor Taylor (1979) defines International Relations as 'a discipline, which tries to explain political activities across state boundaries'. According to Ola, Joseph (1999), 'International relations is the study of all forms of interactions that exist between members of separate entities or nations within the international system'. International relations are thus concerned with every form of interaction between and amongst nations. Such interactions can also occur between corporation and social groups. Examples are interactions between member states of the OPEC or the International Human Rights Commissions. The moment such interactions cross a state boundary it is of interest to the study of International Relations. International relations recognize and respond to the fact that the foreign policy goals that nations pursue can be a matter of permanent consequences to some or all of the others. Seymon Brown (1988) thus defines international relations as 'the investigating and study of patterns of action and 'reactions among sovereign states as represented by their governing elites.'

Some scholars see power as the key to international politics. Thus, they define international relations as the subject that deals with those relations among nations, which involve power status. As Stanley Hoffman writes 'the discipline of international relations is concerned with the factors and the activities which affect the external policies and power of the basic units into which the world is divided.' Thus, international relations are concerned with all the exchange transactions, contacts, flow of information and the resulting behavioral responses between and among separate organized societies. International relations could encompass many different activities- social, economic, religious and so forth in so far as they have implications for international political relations in the words of Karl Wolfgang Deutsch (1968), 'An introduction to the study of international relations in our time is an introduction to the art and science of the survival of mankind. If civilization is killed in the nearest future, it will not be killed by famine or plague, but by foreign policy and international relations. "The point expressed here is that we can cope with hunger and pestilence, but we cannot deal with the power of our own weapons and our own behavior as nation states. It is important to note that since the end of World War 1, nation states have possessed unprecedented instruments for national action in the form of ideologies and weapons, and they have become even more dangerous vehicles of international conflict, carrying the potential for its escalation to mutual destruction and ultimate annihilation. The nation state holds the power to control most events within its borders, but few events beyond them.

It is thus decisively important for the student of international relations to understand that the world of today is marked by two factors. One fact has to do with the nature of power in the age of the atom; the other concerns the interdependence of mankind in an age of the individual.

### *1.2. Nature International Relations*

International Relations, like the world community itself are in transition. In a rapidly changing and increasingly complex world, it encompasses much more than relations among nation states and international organization and groups. It includes a variety of transitional relationships at various levels, above and below the level of the nation states. International relations are a multidisciplinary field gathering together the international aspects of politics, economics, geography, history, law, sociology, psychology and more. It is a meta-discipline.

### *1.3. Scope of International Relations*

It is known by now that international relations encompass a myriad of discipline. Attempts to structure and intellectualize it have often been thematically and analytically confined to boundaries determined by data. This segment of the unit will address the core concepts of international relations with their thematic headings i.e., International Organization, International Law, Foreign Policy, International Conflict, International Economic Relations and Military Thought and Strategy. International/Regional Security, Strategic Studies, International Political Economy, Conflict/War and Peace Studies, Globalization, International Regimes.

These have been grounded in various schools of thought (or traditions) notably Realism and Idealism. These headings as stated above are not exhaustive. Besides, each of them has its basic books which can be referred to as supplements. It must be borne in mind that each or a combination of these headings form part of the considerations that joggle for position in a nation's foreign policy formulation and conduct. The schools of thought are treated in subsequent units

### *1.4. International Organizations*

The evolution of international organizations dates back to medieval history, and the modern pattern of international organization has been evolving ever since the nation states system emerged several centuries ago and especially since the Congress of Westphalia of 1648. Westphalia has come to be a term used for separation of the domestic and international spheres such that states may not legitimately intervene in the domestic affairs of another, whether in the pursuit of self-interest or by appeal to a higher notion of sovereignty, be it religion, ideology, or other supranational ideal.

International Organizations are trans-national organizations created by two or more sovereign states regardless of their geographical locations, cultural, political, economic, social or religious differences. Their accredited representatives represent articulated national interests of member states when they meet. Members gather to promote international solidarity in matters that serve the interest of mankind. Such interests would include: health, protection of the flora and fauna of the earth, education, monetary, trade, intellectual property protection, and so forth.

International organization is a product of three lines of development: that humans should live in peace and mutual support that the big powers have a special responsibility of maintaining order, and the growth of specialized international organizations to deal with narrow nonpolitical issues.

The rapid growth of all types of international organizations stems from increased international contact among states and people, increased economic interdependence, the growing importance of transnational issues and political movements, the inadequacy of state-centered system for dealing with world problems, small states attempting to gain strength by joining together.

International organizations seek to achieve different common goals in pursuit of aims and objectives and in so doing, like nation states, are drawn into the international relations domain. International Organization can be categorized as global e.g. The UN, or Regional EU, AU, OAS, ECOWAS, SADC, ASEAN, SARC. All of these have diplomatic implications when it comes to structures, and institutions not only for foreign policy implementation but also as instrument or vehicle for conducting foreign policy.

#### 1.4.1. International Law

International law is a set of agreements and rules generally recognized by nations as governing their conduct towards each other and towards each other's citizens. International law is primarily the body of rules accepted by the general community of nations as defining their rights and the means of procedure by which those rights may be protected or violation of them redressed.

Felix Oppenheim, a political theorist, defined international law in 1905 as 'The name for the body of customary and conventional rules which are considered legally binding by 'civilized states' in their intercourse with one another'. The expression 'civilized states' was used to distinguish the politically independent European nations from the then colonized Third World Countries. In recent times and as the colonies became independent political units; the United Nations replaced the words 'civilized states' with 'peace-loving states.' As all the pursue

#### *1.5. Foreign Policy*

Foreign policy is essentially the instrumentality by which states influence or seek to influence the external world and to attain objectives that are in conformity with their perceived national interest. Foreign policy is conditioned by environmental or systemic characteristics, actions by others, which impinge on the interests or values of a state or groups of states, and domestic social and economic needs.

Foreign policy as a concept of international relations is being structured into factors, processes, dynamics and goals. These are treated in greater detail in Module 2 and Module 3.

#### *1.6. International Conflict*

This refers to an act of conscious disagreement between or among different states. It involves the attempt by one state to neutralize the other through maiming -or incapacitation usually over the control of scarce resources. Conflict is an inescapable by-product of societal complexities and irreconcilable antagonism found among humans. This is most pertinent and prevalent in the realm of international relations.

#### *1.7. International Economic Relations*

IER involves how different states relate with one another in economic activities. This involves the examination of the methods and instrumentalities by which states carry on business with each other. A state perceives its international economic interest on the basis of a set of ideas or beliefs about how the world economy works and what opportunities exist within it. Economic factor is thus a major determinant of a nation's foreign policy.

War and armed conflict all have at least one thing in common: violence, which like no others means destroys everything from, people, crops, infrastructures and other material resources to institutions, including education, and political will, hope, and trust. Armed conflicts are the root cause of poverty, which causes suffering, is disastrous for economic development and deprives people from basic needs. Although, it may often be tempting to generalize and assume that all conflicts are the same, the reality is very different. Particularly for those involved, as a British correspondent aptly expressed it, 'All war is local.'<sup>1</sup>

Armed conflicts today, usually do not take place between two armies; the most devastating ongoing conflicts are civil wars. Furthermore, this often takes place in countries undergoing major political changes, such as countries that have taken steps towards democratisation. In other words, today's post-Cold War world looks different from previous eras. One replaced two superpowers and the acceleration of technological advancements continues to transform some of the basic characteristics of political communication. Full-scale nuclear war seems like less of a threat today, but instead smaller, particularly vicious and more difficult to solve, conflicts that to a higher degree implicate civilians as combatants and as victims pose the biggest threat.

Democracy has been heralded as prime mechanism for societal development and conflict management. The right to credible information and freedom of expression are essential to ensure accountable and transparent governance and to make it possible for all parts of a population to have access to, and participate in, the political development of a country. These elements are also important in order to promote constructive communication, to decrease perceptions of threat and zero-sum politics and create more stable and sustainable political structures. Most importantly is the realisation that any

<sup>1</sup> Martin Bell as quoted in Carruthers (2000), p.13.

attempt to promote peace and prevent violent conflict requires active participation, including all societal actors, a multilateral approach and long-term commitments.

As media initiatives in conflict management continue to increase, so too does the need for a more comprehensive and global understanding of this aspect and conflict management. Understanding how the media works and the dynamics of armed conflict are both complex and important issues. It is essential to develop this knowledge because; intertwined, political conflict dynamics and the media create a distinct domain of consequences and opportunities. Unfortunately, although relevant experiences and research continue to increase and accumulate, the state of research today concerning this topic is still embryonic.

After a general description of some post-Cold War conflict characteristics, this paper attempts to give a basic overview of issues addressed in the study of conflict; issues related to general conflict escalation dynamics and conflict management with particular emphasis on the media's role in these processes. Therefore, the aim is a general theoretical one and not specifically focused on third party interventions, although it contains important implications for intervention. As the point of departure is a conflict theory perspective emphasis is on defining conflict dynamics. Consequently, media usually refers to news media communicated through mass mediums such as radio, press, television, internet, etc.

This will be done first by placing media into theories of conflict escalation, thereby outlining some of the important links between the two. Followed by discussions of research and observations pertaining to the international media, and then national media's, conflict management role in pre-, during, and post violent stages of a potentially violent conflict.

## 2. Conflict in a Post-Cold War Setting

### 2.1. End of an Era

At some point or other in their histories most peoples have experienced war. Notwithstanding, although to many it may not seem that way, war is unusual. To give an example, ethnic relations are often assumed to be inherently conflictual, but the reality is the opposite. It is generally estimated that there are between 3,000 and 6,000 ethnic minorities in the world, of these groups it was assessed that a small percentage were considered at risk for escalation to armed conflict. Between the years 1990-1998, of the groups considered potentially at risk, only 27 resulted in war (Öberg 2002). At one point or another virtually all armed conflicts have seemed impossible to resolve, and yet they have come to an end. Unfortunately, there are no statistics for wars that have been successfully prevented or where escalation of violence was avoided. Nevertheless, the numbers in this case, whether large or small, would not make it any less significant.

The end of the Cold War had important consequences for the future. There are of course differences of opinion and lively debates as to the scope and importance of these changes, but this does not make them any less relevant. It meant the triumph of democracy over socialist ideologies and the withdrawal of superpower support to client regimes and resulted in the termination of some other ongoing 'hot' wars. It also meant the end of the threat of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) due to the nuclear arms race. On the other hand, new conflicts emerged and with the nuclear arms race at an end surplus nuclear weapons flooded the international market.

Globalisation is a reoccurring catchphrase to describe the changes that are taking place in the post-Cold War, due to technological and communications advances, but which are ultimately difficult to pinpoint. New technologies and increased access to them undisputedly means new tools and methods that can be used for many different purposes. What we do not know, and what many disagree upon, is the extent to the effects of globalisation. Is it a question of politics as usual (but with new techniques), or, as many claim, also a fundamental change in social relations? The following section will attempt to give some answers to this question after a general overview of armed conflicts worldwide.

### 2.2. Global Overview

The euphoria and optimism at the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall did not lead to the elimination of armed conflict. Nevertheless, the total number of conflicts today remains at a significantly lower level than at the end of the Cold War.<sup>2</sup> According to the Conflict Data Project (CDP), it is estimated that for the year 2001 there were 34 ongoing armed conflicts in the world. A number that roughly reflects the average number of ongoing conflicts recorded since the mid-1990. Although to many this may seem a depressingly persistent number, on closer examination it becomes clear that all wars are not alike, not inevitable and do come to an end. For example, in the year 2001 alone the armed conflicts in Eritrea-Ethiopia, India (Manipur), Sierra Leone and Uzbekistan were taken off the CDP list of ongoing conflicts.<sup>3</sup> The results of another survey of violent conflicts (not restricted to battle-related deaths as is the CDP<sup>4</sup>), which includes other forms of violence such as violence against unarmed civilians, displays similar trends but concludes on a somewhat more

<sup>2</sup> At its peak the total reached more than 50 ongoing armed conflicts. For the whole period recorded, from 1946 to 2001, the immediate years leading up to the end of the Cold War and those just after constitutes the peak in ongoing violent conflict (Eriksson 2002, p.7) A steep drop in the number of ongoing conflicts then followed this peak and since then the average number has been somewhere between 30 to 40 conflicts a year.

<sup>3</sup> The CDP list of armed conflicts for the period 1946 to 2001 can be found on either of these two websites: [www.pcr.uu.se](http://www.pcr.uu.se) and [www.prio.no/jpr/datasets.asp](http://www.prio.no/jpr/datasets.asp)

<sup>4</sup> While the CDP does differentiate between relative intensity of violence, in terms of the number of battle-related deaths (minor conflict, intermediate conflict or war) it does not include all forms of violence. An armed conflict includes any violent conflict starting from 25 deaths a year and when that toll reaches 1,000 deaths, within the space of a year, it has reached the most extreme category: war (Eriksson 2002, p.5). Although the majority of armed conflicts do not reach 1,000 battle-related deaths a year, 24 out of the 34 active conflicts this year have at some point in their histories reached the 1,000-death level.



positive trend. Although, the magnitude of violent conflicts rose steadily from 1950 to the mid-1990's, it has fallen by around half since then and self-determination demands have been settled more often than they have generated conflict (Gurr, Marshall & Kholsa 2000).

On the other hand, what this does not say is that the challenges faced when trying to prevent or resolve internal conflicts is quite different from conflicts between states.

Internal conflicts have dominated since the end of World War II, with interstate conflicts becoming less and less frequent. In terms of major armed conflicts since the end of the Cold War, with the exception of three interstate conflicts, they were all fought within the confines of state borders either for control of the government or control of a particular territory.<sup>5</sup> (Eriksson 2002, p.71) Internal conflicts are often more complex and difficult to solve than inter-state conflicts (Zartman 1995). Despite some positive indications the total number of armed conflicts is still relatively high, the number is twice as high as in the beginning of the Cold War. Furthermore, the survey predicts that 33 states are 'at serious risk of armed conflict and political instability for the foreseeable future, and 46 others where the factors of stability and instability exist in a volatile balance (Gurr, Marshall & Kholsa 2000, p.2).

This general statistic overview of armed political conflicts provides a basic understanding of the situation today and some of the trends that dominate. However, it gives only hints at what these numbers may represent in terms of destruction, human lives and suffering. Several scholars have insisted on the fact that globalisation has led to important qualitative changes in the purposes and dynamics of violent conflict. Some, such as Mary Kaldor, argue that it is the revolution in information technology during the 1980's and 1990's, that has led to a particular type of globalisation, which, in turn, has led to the need for a redefinition of what we think of as war. What the total number of armed conflicts does not tell us is the intensity of the violence, *where* armed conflicts are fought, *why*, nor *how* they are fought, *who* does the fighting and who the victims are.

*Where* do most conflicts occur? While violent conflict exists in all Four Corners of the world, there are two regions in which violent conflicts predominate and where the most intense fighting prevails. Since the end of the Cold War, Africa and Asia are the regions with the highest concentration of violent conflicts. Africa is the most war-torn continent with a total of 19 major armed conflicts<sup>6</sup> in the last 12 years (Eriksson 2002, p.73). However, this has not always been the case and it may be wise not to forget that both World Wars took place in the Western World. The number and intensity of armed conflict oscillates, as do the characteristics of violent conflicts, not only from one region to another but also in terms of why and how violent conflicts are fought.

*Why* are armed conflicts fought? This question is of course akin to the causes of conflict and cannot be answered simply and will also be discussed later. The reasons behind a conflict always lie in a complex combination of root and direct causes. In other words, it is not possible to give one answer. However, the basic cause of a conflict is related to scarcity of some resource, be it power or material resources. The CDP divides these into two main categories: territory and government. Up until the end of World War II it is generally assumed that geo-political conflicts over territory were predominant. Today, the majority of wars are fought over government and since the end of the Cold War this trend has intensified (Eriksson 2001). In terms of what non-state actors claim to be the principal reason for armed conflict (control of the government) there has been resurgence in the importance of identity politics. With the end of the Cold War most ideologically motivated conflicts decreased dramatically to be replaced by conflicts based on identity. According to Kaldor, the identity politics of today are different from previous eras (such as the nationalism that dominated the two World Wars). It is not linked to 'a notion of state interest or to some forward-looking project or ideas about how society should be organized'<sup>7</sup> and they tend to be more 'fragmentative, backward-looking and exclusive'.<sup>8</sup> The armed conflicts being referred to are the numerous ethnic conflicts that erupted just after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Also, identity is both national and transnational due to factors like influential Diaspora communities and the use of electronic media.

*How*, or the means with which, wars are fought in asymmetric conflicts also differs from the conventional conception of war. These means can be described as guerrilla warfare, which was developed as a way of getting round the massive concentrations of military force characteristic of conventional war. '[I]n guerrilla warfare, territory is captured through political control of the population rather than through military advance, and battles are avoided as far as possible.'<sup>9</sup> Another characteristic that relates to non-state actors is that they must get, and rely on, other financial sources such as the black market or, simply, plunder and often financial support comes through external sources. In these scenarios, financial sources can only be sustained through continued violence, so that a war logic is built into the functioning of the economy (Chabal & Daloz 1999). This is particularly true in societies that have poor socio-economic conditions and, thereby, a war economy becomes an important cause for the perpetuation of violent conflict.

*Who* are the actors in today's conflicts? Usually, a differentiation is made between primary actors and secondary actors. Primary actors are actors between which the basic incompatibility exists, whereas a secondary actor refers to those involved in the conflict, but in a more peripheral manner. There are at least two primary actors in a conflict. In the majority of today's conflicts, they are usually comprised of a state and at least one non-state actor. The world is host to countries and states of all different sizes, strengths and types. However, an important defining feature of a state is that they are

<sup>5</sup> The CDP defines two main categories of conflict incompatibilities: 'either government (type of political system, the replacement of the central government, or the change of its composition) or territory (a change from one state to another in the control of territory in an interstate conflict or demands for secession or autonomy in an internal conflict).

<sup>6</sup> A major armed conflict is defined as 'a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory over which the use of armed force between the military forces of two parties, of which at least one is the government of a State, has resulted in at least 1000 battle-related deaths in any single year.' CDP 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Kaldor, p.6.

<sup>8</sup> Kaldor, p.78

<sup>9</sup> Kaldor, p.7

recognized internationally as representatives of their citizens and have the sole legitimate right to use force. In contrast, non-state actors are usually not recognized internationally and do not have the legitimate right to use force. They often are highly decentralised in their military organisation. In addition, they can include a wide array of groups, spanning from 'freedom fighters' with significant public support to a disparate range of paramilitary groups, local warlords, criminal gangs, police forces, and mercenary groups.

Who are the *victims*? The dramatic increase in the number of refugees and displaced persons is an important indicator of conflict dynamics and can partly be explained by the fact that a significant part of the violence is directed against civilians. Many argue that this is like a reversed version of earlier wars where soldiers were the primary victims. The most drastic figures claim that 90% of those killed in armed conflicts are civilians.

According to UNICEF figures, whereas only 5 per cent of the casualties in the First World War were civilians, by the Second World War the proportion had risen to 50 per cent, while 'as the century ends, the civilian share is normally about 80 per cent'.<sup>10</sup>

There are several important arguments that recommend caution at taking these figures at face value. However, even if it can be argued that these figures are somewhat exaggerated it still points to and suggests important new trend in post-Cold War armed conflicts. When war is not confined to two government armies, it becomes much more difficult to differentiate between who is a civilian and who is a soldier: who is friend and who is foe. A very sad and troubling fact related to this, is the increase in the number of child soldiers.

### 2.3. Post-Cold War Characteristics and Peace Research

The study of violent conflict is, in academic terms, a relatively new subject and emerged as a discipline in its own right sometime in the 1940's as a reaction to the destructiveness of the two World Wars. The conventional conceptions of what characterises a war were modelled on these historical experiences. Crudely summarized, according to this view a 'typical' war included two legitimate state armies on the battlefield pitted against each other and the one who killed the most soldiers won. Government soldiers were the primary targets and intended victims of the violence.<sup>11</sup> This perception of violent conflict is only relevant today in a small number of cases. One way of describing this shift is that it relates to two predominant changes in the characteristics of armed conflicts today, which have also increased the role of the media. Assuming that actors operate within a societal context, which largely determines their perception of what alternatives are open to them, the first relates to the actors themselves and the second to strategy.

The overwhelming majority of wars are fought within states, usually between the state and at least one other actor. It is usually not a question of two legitimate armies against each other, but of predominantly asymmetric (meaning an important power imbalance between the primary actors) power relations. It is important to mention this because the conventional perception of armed conflict is often still predominant among some decision-makers (often military) and are encoded in international law. Leading to a lack of international conflict management instruments and institutions designed to deal with most of the conflicts that are present today. Techniques and efforts at outlining appropriate conflict management principals are ongoing and evolving.

Secondly, unlike the conventional understanding of war, in which the goal is the capture of territory by military means and where battles are decisive encounters of the war, winning the 'hearts and minds' of the population is more important. In this sense the asymmetric civil conflicts of today are different.<sup>12</sup> The majority of violent conflicts are asymmetric in character, and most of these take place within state borders. What is important to point out, particularly in relation to the role of the media is that this asymmetry is in terms of material and military capabilities but also, less tangible components such as legitimacy. Thus, a rebellion is a dual protracted struggle, striving for both ends and means: a struggle for attention, redress, and legitimacy, inseparably interwoven with a struggle for the power to pursue those ends.<sup>13</sup>

Because a state is almost always militarily superior, non-state actors are more dependent on psychological warfare, which entails influencing the attitudes and perceptions of a population. As such, a battlefield in the traditional sense is not a particularly appropriate arena in which to compete over the ability to be able to mobilize audiences. Therefore, the media dimension has become increasingly important and it is no coincidence that media assistance emerged, and has been increasing in importance, since the end of the Cold War (Price & Thomson 2002). Training personnel on how to best interact with the media has now become an integral part, at least, of Western military development.

The media has a very complex role to play that, unfortunately, is often taken for granted by political decision-makers and the military. Statements claiming the media's impressive effects are often heard from decision-makers. Political practitioners, and even researchers, most often assume the effect of news media in political conflicts. An example of the extent is reflected in a 1995 survey, in which 64% of American military officers still believed that media had the prime responsibility for ruining the war effort in Vietnam (Taylor 1997). Today most Defence Ministries, particularly in the Western countries, have public relations and media specialists. In light of this it is surprising, and perhaps even alarming, that relatively little in terms of research and resources has been allocated to improve our understanding of the media's role in armed conflicts and democratising states.

<sup>10</sup> As quoted in Miall, Ramsbotham & Woodhouse, p.32.

<sup>11</sup> Although, it is true that it was during the Second World War that massive bombing of civilian areas was introduced as a strategy.

<sup>12</sup> However, it should be pointer out that certain groups that are more 'criminal' in their goals and only interested in power for a very limited group of people may not necessarily be interested in winning the 'hearts and minds' of a population, terrorizing them may be enough.

<sup>13</sup> Zartman, p. 7.

Another aspect that has important consequences for media in violent conflict pertains to the recent surge in democratisation. It began before the end of the Cold War, but since then a 'fourth wave' of democratisation has begun (Ottaway 1997). Democratising states are involved in a complex process of re-adaptation of traditional political structures and attempting to incorporate democratic institutions and norms. Incorporating an editorially and economically independent, responsible and pluralistic media is essential to democratisation. Political change often stimulates hopes and provides unique opportunities for different, and often previously marginalized, groups in society to influence political dynamics. While on the other hand, those who have controlled power may find it difficult or inconceivable to let go. Often letting go may even be a question of threat to individual security.

### 2.3. Media in Peace Research

Scholars in Peace and Conflict research are well aware of the communications revolution and the media is often mentioned as an important factor. Having said this, like many policy-makers, the media is either assumed to be all-powerful or irrelevant. There are relatively few systematic studies concerning the media and conflict, although interest and the number publications concerning the issue continue to increase and accumulate.

At one end of the spectrum, roughly the one that represents the more traditional school of thought, media and the communications revolution is mainly seen as a technological revolution with important implications for warfare technology and strategy. In other words, having access to high-tech media equipment gives a military advantage, which may require strategic adjustments. But other than that, armed conflicts are basically the same and if changes have occurred it is not due to the media itself, but rather, to changes in systemic power balances.

At the other end of the spectrum (as reflected by Mary Kaldor's arguments discussed earlier), related to the discussion concerning globalisation, scholars claim that conflicts today are fundamentally different in nature and that these changes are directly related to the communications revolution and the media. The state as a political entity has largely played out its role and government armies, territorial boundaries, and nations are useless because communication between peoples cannot be confined. Other political actors are quickly replacing states including the media, transnational companies, non-governmental organisations and other informal transnational networks. What both of these extremes have in common is the acknowledgement that the communications revolution does have consequences for national and international conflict; the question is how important these changes are in relation to the previous, or the more traditional, understanding of violent conflict dynamics.

Despite the attention and importance accredited to the media, compared to other disciplines the connection between media and conflict has been neglected. While the number of studies and the volume of research concerning this issue continue to accumulate, most researchers still complain of the lack of a concerted effort at creating a unified field of study. There has been an important increase in data availability but this has not been accompanied by an adequate improvement in theoretical, methodological, or even statistical quality. This is particularly true when it comes to the media in internal conflicts.

The great majority of studies focus on international media in conflict, and comparatively rarely on national media. Furthermore, there is a flagrant predominance of research concerning specifically Western and international media even though a majority of these studies claim that the relevance of this media is greatly exaggerated. However, the 90's did produced research that focuses on non-Western media. In these cases it is primarily media in Asia and in Latin America (Carruthers 2000).

Apart from a few exceptions, such as Gadi Wolfsfeld's research, little deals directly with generalizing the role of domestic media in internal conflicts. The reasons that lie behind this are varied, some related to the academic field itself and others related to the complicated nature of the media's role in political conflicts. Part of this lack of can be explained by the fact that it is only until relatively recently that the importance of the media in violent conflict has been taken into account: typical of new fields of research is a lack of systematic empirical material to work with. However, at this stage there are a multitude of case studies and people with extensive experience. Thus, more effort needs to be put into comparing these experiences and at developing theoretical frameworks.

The other major reason for the relatively poor state of research concerning the media in violent conflict is due to the complex nature of the role of the media itself. In other words, it should not be forgotten that the military, socio-economic, political or other specificities of a particular conflict context largely determines the role that different media play in any phase of a conflict. Nevertheless, having said that there are underlying similarities, and also assumptions of how the media operate in conflict environments, being able to identify similarities and tendencies is vital for successful conflict management.

### 3. Conflict Dynamics and the Media

What then do we know about the causes and dynamics of violent conflicts? And how, and when, are the media most involved? Although, there are similarities between conflicts, little can be said with exact certainty: Mainly because the cause and dynamics of any violent conflict is the result of a complex combination of many different factors. Some of these factors can be recognised in several cases, while other factors are specific and the result of a particular societal and historical context. Apart from the use of violence, conflicts and processes of conflict escalation vary greatly in intensity and scope. They are not all the same and have very different consequences for a society and must be considered from within their own societal contexts.

The causes and dynamics of a conflict can be found at different levels of explanation. Having the tools to distinguish between these differences and to confront erroneous and simplistic assumptions is essential for analysis and a better understanding of a conflict, which is essential for any type of intervention. The media's role, as an arena and as an

actor in its own right, is just as complex a question and often also riddled with simplistic assumptions. After a brief definition of conflict, the following section takes into account previous research and general conclusions concerning the media in conflicts, and then highlights a selection of particular conflict dynamics in which the media seem specifically important.

### 3.1. Some Basic Concepts

Generally speaking, conflict exists and is a pervasive feature in all societies. In a properly functioning society, political conflicts are solved without the excessive use of violence, yet when this line is crossed it fundamentally changes the dynamics and usually makes resolution more difficult. Thus, armed or violent conflict in this context refers to the use of violent means on a larger societal scale.

Causes of conflict are often divided up into root causes and direct causes. *Root causes* are related to causes that stem from long-term, large-scale structural factors and these may not always be manifest. Economic factors and political structures are often considered typical root causes. *Direct causes* resemble trigger events such as, a sudden change in policy, an economic downturn, or a symbolic threat. Reactions as a result of direct causes are more immediate. Root causes are present in all phases of a conflict, including before a conflict escalates to violence and exists even when the conflict is latent. For example, a certain group may be marginalized or excluded from participating in a political system but until voices are heard that contest this exclusion the conflict is not manifest. It is in such situations that conflicts or tensions may be submerged, to successively escalate and transform a latent conflict into a manifest and violent conflict.

The basic components of a conflict can be summarized to include four crucial components. Together these components make up a political conflict, which can escalate to armed conflict. Apart from the *incompatibility*<sup>14</sup>, which is where the heart of the issue lies, the three other components are the *actors*, and the actors' *attitudes* and their *behaviour*. Actors are often separated into primary and secondary actors. *Primary actors* are the most important; because it is between these that the incompatibility lies.

For there to be conflict there has to be an incompatibility and for it to be an armed conflict actors' behaviour has to be manifest and violent. More traditional perceptions of armed conflict focus primarily on military actors, incompatibilities, behaviour, and power based on threat. However, in the post-Cold War context, military and coercive power based on threat are to an increasing degree considered less desirable than '*soft power*'; Power based more on the ability to attract attention and to convince others and/or getting them to agree to norms and institutions (Nye 2001). However, this by no means implies that one has replaced the other. The reality is quite different, but what is important is that even military and purely selfishly instrumental political actors have to take this into consideration. It also means that non-military intervention and other societal actors, such as the media, have an increasingly important role to play.

Three of these factors (incompatibility, behaviour, and attitudes) act as mutually reinforcing in a conflict dynamic, where neglecting to address one of the aspects will increase the probability that a conflict will escalate to violence, persist or re-erupt. In other words, even if the incompatibility itself seems solvable, the sustainability of any successful conflict management will depend on the attitudes and the behaviour of the actors. Actors in a conflict will only trust each other based on expectations and perceptions of behaviour and attitudes.

Attitudes are essential, and the media's role in conflicts is closely related to this component, though it is often more difficult to pinpoint their exact effect. They either result or lie as a background to violent behaviour and/or, vice versa, violent behaviour alters attitudes and predispositions. The conflict component related to attitudes encapsulates the psychological aspects and those related to '*soft power*' resources such as the credibility of actors and the legitimacy of norms. Internal conflicts are usually more difficult to solve than conflicts between states, precisely because they involve whole societies and deep-rooted psychological effects. Conflict management that aims at sustainability cannot focus exclusively on the basic incompatibility or root cause, but must address the dynamics related to attitudes. The media is both a particular arena and an actor in its own right particularly influential in this type of dynamic process.

### 3.2. Some General and Common Characteristics

Studies done on media's role in armed conflict have come to varying and contradictory conclusions. However, some common observations have emerged. To reiterate, particularly in Western countries, an overwhelming majority of decision-makers and political elites are convinced of the influence of the media. This, in itself, is an important enough reason not to neglect the role of the media in political conflicts even if it is admittedly difficult to make generalisations. Political decision-makers at national and international levels increasingly take into consideration, and cater to, national and international news media. Generally civil society and grassroots level political actors do not have the same influence or access to the media arena. The reasons for this are manifold.

It is difficult to pin an exact date for when the communications revolution began, but it is during the last couple of decades that this technological development, and spread, has accelerated dramatically (Taylor 1997). For Western, industrialised and urban parts of the world the increased access and pace of communications technology is evident in day-to-day life. Therefore, many believed that this reality was global, but a more realistic picture depicts a more complex reality. The gap between media and technology haves and have-nots is still considerable and there is no doubt that industrialised countries have an enormous advantage. Furthermore, contrary to what many initially argued, access to the most advanced technology is not necessarily becoming cheaper and more accessible (Carruthers 2000).

<sup>14</sup> An incompatibility is defined as a 'severe disagreement between at least two sides, where their demands cannot be met by the same resources at the same time. [...] Positions are incompatible. There is some form of scarcity' (Wallenstein 2002, p.35) whether it is material or otherwise.



However, this does not mean that accessibility is not continuing to spread even if this is happening more unevenly than initially assumed. Furthermore, having access today may mean something different than previously because, 'today, the human mind is exposed to modes of political influence that are more pervasive, insinuating, and sophisticated,'<sup>15</sup> varied and immediate. So, while, the Zapatistas in Mexico may not all have had unlimited access to the Internet, the access they did have and the way they chose to use it resulted in significant international support. On the other hand, it should be pointed out, as the recent events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 proved again, political actors with enough will do not necessarily need the most advanced technology. It is not the sophistication of the technology itself that produces an impact. This and wide media accessibility is particularly important to keep in mind, if the aim is to include rural and illiterate parts of a population. The fundamental role that the radio has played bears witness to this.

In Cambodia the UN successfully set up Radio UNTAC as an alternative source of credible news and information that 'made the 1993 elections possible and led to a 95% turnout,' despite counter-measures to terrorise the populace into rejecting the polls (Neumann in Price 2000). In Rwanda, *Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines*, was a key instrument and catalyst to genocide and in Liberia (before it was forced to shut down) STAR Radio managed to successfully combine peace broadcasting in a post-violent conflict phase as well as promoting media development.<sup>16</sup>

Apart from the actual accessibility to communications technology the political structures in a society largely determine what role the media can play both as an arena and as an actor. External interventions and operations that focus on their own capacities without relating them to the political context of the conflict in which they have to navigate, and studies that focus exclusively on media exposure and audience effects without taking into consideration the political and socio-economic context in which media operate, miss a fundamental part of the dynamics involved.

First, and above all, media should be considered as a medium of communication in which various actors in society communicate with other groups. This includes political activists, decision-makers, journalists themselves and larger society level audiences. When considering media, and particularly news media in tension areas, media structures usually reflect the political structures existent in the society at large. In other words, generally speaking, news media should be seen as an arena and journalists who are active in, and shape, that arena are themselves a product of a social context. Therefore, media are *not neutral observers*, endowed with the special capacity to view the world objectively. However, to avoid misinterpretations, it should be pointed out that stating this does not rule out impartiality and honesty in reporting.

Secondly, another common observation, are the often close ties between the media and the state, political elites and economic decision-makers. Simply put, in a given society political power can usually be translated into power over the media (Wolfsfeld 1997). The fact that this is the case for both consolidated and non-consolidated democracies highlight the importance of promoting editorially and economically independent news media. The relationship between media and political structures is intricate and while owner and control issues play an important role, there are also more subtle influences that generally give *authorities important advantages* (Wolfsfeld 1997).

For one, state actors are usually considered more credible and, therefore, more newsworthy. 'When asked about their choice of sources most journalists mention two criteria, namely, authority and credibility.'<sup>17</sup> Credibility is very much based on the authority of an individual, given established actors such as political elites and decision-makers an advantage. There are many examples in the media that exemplify this. For example, journalists are usually reluctant to question validity of information and the credibility of state leaders. Because decision-makers are often the most important sources of information, they have the ability to control the availability of information (van Ginneken 1998).

Political activists, elites and decision-makers have always played a central part in all societies and histories. The basic explanation is that, usually, elites have more ready access to resources and also have the know-how and ability to effectively make use of them. In poorer countries where significant parts of the population are illiterate and perhaps more preoccupied with having to worry about securing basic day-to-day needs for survival, educated elites are particularly important. Subsequently, elite beliefs and attitudes concerning politics and political participation, their actions and behaviour have a determining influence. Influence, both in preventing violent conflict and promoting representative political systems and in conflict escalation and encouraging repressive politics. While root causes and structural characteristics provide a context, 'elite decisions and actions are usually the catalysts that turn volatile situations into violent confrontations.'<sup>18</sup> However, elites do not act in a vacuum but are subject to the cultural and societal structures in which they operate (and often from which they themselves come).

In the run up to a violent conflict a critical role of the media is its ability to mobilise large groups of people. Mobilization that can lead directly to violence, just as well as mobilization that leads to peaceful development and/or resolution. Important in this dynamic is to remember that any political conflict includes a dual struggle for control over material as well as non-material resources, such as credibility and legitimacy. A credible actor is more likely to be able to mobilise support from a wide audience. The more credibility an actor has and the more legitimate the cause, the less likely it is that the actor's behaviour and/or claims will be questioned. This explains the often-observed impulse of authoritarian states, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo as one of many, to give an impression of being democratic at least in name. Particularly in a domestic setting, the media is a key factor in the struggle for credibility between conflicting actors and for legitimacy between conflicting causes.

They are often referred to as '*weak states*.' A weak state is not weak in military terms, but above all, it relates to the state and state institutions' lack of popular legitimacy. This lack makes states and political actors in these contexts particularly sensitive and vulnerable and may incite them to rely more heavily on force and threats of violence. The

<sup>15</sup> Thompson & Price, p.1 in Price 2002b.

<sup>16</sup> See Fondation Hirondelle's web page, <http://www.hirondelle.org>

<sup>17</sup> Jaap van Ginneken, p.88.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, p.23

defining element of a weak state is that the biggest threat to security comes from within its own borders, and as a result police and military are often much more present in the everyday lives of citizens. Either the regime feels threatened by its citizens or citizens feel threatened by the regime. Weak states are also more vulnerable to external political and economic influences (Ohlson & Söderberg 2002). In other words, the lack of legitimacy is distinctive to weak states and makes them more vulnerable to escalatory media effects.

### 3.3. Some Causes of Mobilization and Escalation to Violence

A conflict often arises due to feelings of *frustration*, in which the basic needs of a group are perceived as not being met. An important cause for conflict exists when a group feels excluded from being able to take an active part in a political system or not having access to certain resources. Ethnic conflicts are often characterised by this aspect. In this case, the goals (or scarce resource) in question are also tied to dignity and identity. Having some access to political power is a means to secure the dignity, identity and security of a particular group.

Related to causes based on frustration is the idea of '*relative deprivation*', also a common explanation for escalation to armed conflict. It specifies that some types of frustration seem to be more conducive to escalation than others. The claim is that groups who have lost political and/or economic power in relation to what they have become accustomed to are more likely to resort to violence. For example, according to statistical studies, latent ethnic conflicts were most likely to escalate to violence when the autonomy of a group was removed (Gurr 2000).

Media *framing* gives a basic image of the other actors, as well as defining the incompatibility and interpreting their behaviour. Framing influences an audience's expectations, which will ultimately determine who or what actions are considered credible and legitimate. In this sense it can enforce and communicate norms. There are, for example, claims that international media influences audiences in other parts of the world by promoting certain norms and expectations. For example, how the media chooses to frame these issues can result in the media acting as either a catalyst to escalation or de-escalation. It can either magnify the importance of an actor's behaviour, giving positive or negative connotations, or vice versa. Media framing can also influence, or is the result of attempts by political actors to manipulate levels of credibility and legitimacy.

Through *agenda-setting* functions and framing, the media can also be a catalyst to reducing or creating a 'legitimacy gap' (Ohlson & Söderberg 2002). As soon as a large enough percentage of the citizens perceive that they have a right to expect more (or less) from their government, the state will lose legitimacy. Not having access to credible information on important societal and political issues can be an important catalyst to the creation of a legitimacy gap. This explains why certain governments despite obviously heavily censored media and autocratic character continue to make efforts to legitimate their power in public media discourses (Hurd 1999). The bigger the legitimacy gap (difference between citizens expectations and behaviour of the State), the weaker the state, and easier it is to mobilize against a regime.

Once mobilisation has occurred a conflict can escalate to become violent. Armed conflicts are the result of a dynamic relationship that 'escalates by discrete movements across a series of steps, or thresholds, marking distinct levels of hostility and violence.'<sup>19</sup> In terms of conflict escalation there is a clear and important distinction between what can be termed as 'normal' politics and when this breaks down. Normal politics breaks down when the political actors start to pursue policies that contain no element of compromise or conciliation and which appear to be 'totally exclusive and mutually contradictory'<sup>20</sup> (Gormley-Heenan 2001).

As mentioned earlier a root cause for conflict can often be found in widespread feelings of frustration linked to, for example, relative deprivation related to needs and/or a legitimacy gap between the state and the populace. However, much like poverty, this alone is not a sufficient explanation. Key mobilising actors or events can play a determining role in transforming political tensions into overtly violent conflict.

While there are often groups or actors primarily motivated by prospects of economic gain and political power only for their own benefit and who are willing to use violence in the pursuit of those ends, for a conflict to be widespread other factors also have to be present. Widespread frustration and fear can easily be used by ill-willing elites to mobilise a population. In societies that are not volatile these actors are basically criminals and it is virtually impossible for them to mobilise support based on a political claim. However, where there is a weak political system or a 'legitimacy gap' they can often recruit and mobilise support successfully.

The problem with self-interest oriented actors is that they often thrive in situations of violence and insecurity and, therefore, often have an interest in the continuation of insecurity and violence (Chabal & Daloz, 1999). On the other hand, it is also argued that it may be easier to resolve conflicts between interest oriented elites because the incompatibilities are not based on needs and deep-rooted emotions (Miall et al. 1999).<sup>21</sup> It is also often stated that internal conflicts, unlike international conflicts between states, are more difficult to solve because attitudes are a more pervasive part of the basic incompatibility. Unlike interests, needs are non-negotiable and, therefore, conflicts based on needs are likely to be intense and vicious.

Research shows that political groups tend to move from non-violent protest, to violent protest, to outright-armed conflict in an uneven escalation process that takes many years in most cases (Gurr 1993). Initially, political groups that question the authority of the state are willing to compete within the established government rules. In other words, it is usually possible to identify escalation long before violence breaks out. Media can act as an important indicator of changes

<sup>19</sup> Dixon, p.656

<sup>20</sup> Bernard Crick as quoted in Gormley-Heenan, p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> Needs are defined as the result of grievances resulting from need deprivation.

in a given situation. The media's capacity to operate as a credible information source is one important indicator (censorship, security of journalists etc.), as is the level of propagandistic or partial and emotive connotations used in the framing of the news. An escalations process is often visible, at the very least to people with local connections. Changes in behaviour and attitudes, in many cases are preceded by acceleration in the de-humanisation of other groups and is often evident in the media. Once a process of de-humanisation has begun, empathy with opposing groups becomes increasingly difficult (Spillmann & Spillmann, 1991).

This can be compared to situations of rising tensions in a society. Once threats are made and weapons drawn, crossing the threshold to use violence fundamentally changes the characteristics of the conflict and usually leads to more suffering, insecurity and cripples the function of society. When physical security is at stake it also becomes much more difficult to come to a compromised resolution that will be supported by all parties involved. As mistrust becomes rampant the ability to believe in common interests and to conceive of alternative perceptions and possible solutions, becomes increasingly difficult.

Violence usually results in the need to allocate blame and once a perpetrator is identified the process of building an enemy image begins. This includes a process of dehumanisation of the enemy that amplifies the difficulties in trying to manage the conflict or resolve the incompatibility. However, because conflicts are interactive and dynamic processes they do change; Meaning that changes in dynamics also provides openings and opportunities for conflict management and transformation (Dixon 1996).

It is rare that armed conflicts end in the way intended by those who initiated them. A typical miscalculation relates to the duration and the costs of war. Despite history's proof of the contrary, decision-makers usually chose to ignore the fact that the odds of victory and a 'quick clean' war are less likely than winning a lottery. An important reason for this is the common perception, before violence has been initiated, that in the long run it will be more profitable. Nevertheless, more often than not, armed violence, not to mention the human suffering and destruction involved, usually increases the complexities and creates a dynamic that makes it even more difficult to solve an incompatibility. Violence often creates other and new incompatibilities, multiplying the tasks at hand.

A conflict that escalates from being between a number of interest-oriented actors to mobilising large populations by creating insecurity and *fear*, runs the risk of making a conflict more difficult to manage. A fundamental aspect of conflict dynamics, related to attitudes and psychological factors, are the *perceptions of threat* and fear. Although, some actors may be more instrumental and calculating, for a conflict to escalate to include important parts of a population it is the result of a combination of emotional reactions, beliefs and calculation. On the other hand, it is too simplistic to assume that escalation to violence cannot be the result of rational calculation. It is quite the contrary, rational calculation can inadvertently lead to conflict.

The *security dilemma* is one such process that can lead from escalation to armed conflict and in which the media has a crucial role to play. Perceptions of threat and fear are central to this process whereby actors inadvertently create threats while trying to secure their own safety. It is a negative dynamic where parties fearing for their own security take precautions to protect themselves. If weapons are readily available this can be translated into the procurement of arms. The opposing side will observe this build-up of weaponry and may perceive this as a threat and react in the same manner, creating a vicious circle. The argument is that while both are acting in an effort to protect themselves their respective behaviour and the way it is perceived is a catalyst to increasing feelings of insecurity and escalating fears. This also increases the perception of the need for a pre-emptive attack. There are several recent examples of armed, and particularly, violent conflicts in which media were used for this purpose.

If media participate and continue to portray other groups as less human and threatening and individual communication between them is discouraged, the primary result is a that it is exceedingly difficult to get the parties to agree to any attempts at resolution. Once stuck in such a dynamic, any conciliatory behaviour will not be interpreted as such. The risk is that it becomes more and more difficult to solve the basic incompatibility and peace agreements will more easily be broken.

An important domain of research in communications research is the study of audiences and effects of *media exposure*. While, some go so far as to claim that media exposure and its effects on opinion are negligible (Gurevitch 1982), an others claim the opposite (Chomsky 1988), most of this research is not concerned with armed conflict, but with opinion formation in a Western or international context. In sum, research concerning the effects of media exposure show that these effects are often more complex and less direct than often assumed.

Despite the widespread belief among political decision-makers and the military of the pervasive power of the media (Taylor 1997), audiences rarely act as uncritical 'passive sponges.' News is filtered through people's belief systems and previous experiences and in relation to other information. This is particularly true in countries in which the media has low credibility due to, for example, a high level of state censorship or simply a lack of resources or access to information. Although, it may be difficult to assess media's effect on audience perceptions, most researchers agree that the media has an important agenda-setting function, nationally and internationally. International and national media, and the way they function, has important but different implications for internal conflicts in the pre-, during, and post-conflict phases.

According to many media studies, it may be wrong to assume that the media has a direct influence on opinion. On the other hand, there seems to be widespread agreement concerning the media's agenda-setting influence. In other words, the media largely determines what issues are, and are not, treated in the public arena. However, determining what people think about may not be less important than influencing opinions, particularly in a situation of insecurity and limited information. One of the drawbacks of previous research on audience effects is the almost exclusive focus on opinion and attitudes as opposed to emotional responses. In a recent study that focused on the emotional responses of individuals living in a society wracked by violent conflict, results showed overwhelmingly that television broadcasts of political

violence and national threats considerably increased levels of anxiety (Slone 2000). This has important implications for escalation. For one, the link between anxiety due to fear and the security dilemma is fairly evident. There are many recent examples of conflicts in which various media have played a key role in magnifying anxiety and feelings of insecurity. Even if audiences can resist intended meanings, in a situation where safety is concerned there is sometimes a tendency to take precautions with a worst-case scenario in mind. Media that insist on security issues and threats may act as a catalyst and create an involuntary build-up of arms, transforming a hypothetical threat into a reality. Where there is a lack of alternative media actors may feel even more obliged to act on the information even if they do not necessarily believe it.

Summarized, the media constitutes an actor in itself or an arena that can be used as a conduit to influence political dynamics particularly those related to credibility and legitimacy. The media are particularly important when, setting the political agenda, accelerating and magnifying political success and failure (as in for example peace processes), and 'they can serve as independent advocates for victims of oppression, they can mobilise third parties into a conflict, and they are central agents in the construction of social frames about politics'.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4. The Media's Role in Conflict Management

##### 4.1. The Media Arena

Conflict over the media is an important dimension of any conflict. One way to view it is like a particular arena in which actors compete to control or influence the media in various ways in order to secure or gain political influence (Wolfsfeld 1997). It is an essential arena where success in winning the 'hearts and minds' of the target audience can be crucial. It is a continuous dynamic competition that involves, above all, being able to communicate to the audience (or prevent from communicating) in an attempt to promote their version of the story. For example, in order to be able to point out who is 'good', who is 'bad' and thereby justify policies and actions.

There are two dimensions needed in order to understanding how political conflicts can influence competition over the media, one *structural* and one *cultural*. In the structural dimension the competition is over access to the media. The cultural dimension is the competition over frames, which serves to remind us that political contests are just as much related to struggles over meaning in which success within the media can lead to higher levels of political support (Wolfsfeld 1997). In other words, the struggles over meaning are directly related to the struggle over actor credibility and who has the most legitimate cause. Having access depends on having physical access and control over the media, usually political and economic elites have an important advantage. It is also based on the level of dependence between the political actors and the media. As communication with a mass audience has become more important in democratic or democratising states, and media is the primary means of communication, so too has the dependence of political actors on the media (or vice versa).

Actors who compete over the media usually assume that success in controlling access automatically leads to success in the second, the cultural or framing dimension. In societies where the media is heavily controlled by the state or by other interests this is usually the result. However, as media become more independent this becomes more difficult: the more independent media is the less prone it will be to manipulation from outside actors. The relation also works in the opposite direction, the particularities and characteristics of how media functions at all levels will have important implications for how a conflict is played out between the primary parties in a conflict. For instance, under certain circumstances media can act as an advocate for groups that do not ordinarily have access to media. It is more and more common to see images of demonstrations from distant countries in which demonstrators have gone through the trouble of writing signs and slogans in English, in the hope of getting their message across to an international audience. Another way of doing this is by orchestrating dramatic events designed to catch the attention of sensation seeking international media.

'Reputation becomes even more important than in the past, and political struggles occur over the creation and destruction of credibility.'<sup>23</sup> The perceptions and expectations that an audience has in relation to a political actor is what gives them legitimacy and credibility. In the case of a democracy, it is primarily the public that can grant credibility and legitimacy to an actor. With the legitimacy of a mass audience, the capacity to mobilise increases and is an ultimate goal in the competition over communication media. Similarly, but negative, is also the capacity of the media to de-mobilize (or paralyse) an audience by, for example, instilling fear or hopelessness.

External actors to a civil conflict should be well acquainted and aware of the political structures, and, more particularly, the credibility and representativity of political elites vis-à-vis other actors. This requires in-depth knowledge of the society and local contacts. Taking into account the relative legitimacy and representativity of political actors is particularly important in non-democratic states because, in the information age authoritarian states are more threatened by credible information than are democratic states (Nye 2001). Democratic state institutions and norms are ideally self-correcting and more flexible when it comes to political power shifts and avoiding violent conflict. The media play a crucial role in a democratic system's self-correcting mechanism, and while public information may have dramatic consequences for any democratically elected government per se, it does not threaten the political system. In a non-democratic system, the political structures and institutions are often more personally dependant on those who hold key decision-making positions. Meaning that a threat to the credibility of those in power also implies a threat to the legitimacy of the whole political or governmental structure. External support to non-representative and non-democratic actors could have detrimental effects, or vice versa.

<sup>22</sup> Wolfsfeld, p.3.

<sup>23</sup> Nye, p.357



#### 4.2. The Role of the International Media

There are a multitude of case studies and analyses on the effect of international media on policy-making and intervention. What first comes to mind are phenomena like the CNN-effect and its influence on Western foreign policy in issues of intervention. This is no doubt, in part, a result of the impressive images in the 1990's in war-torn Somalia of large international media crews already mobilized and patiently awaiting the arrival of the intervention troops. However, the number of conflicts that get substantial international media attention is very small. And when this does happen it usually occurs when the conflict has escalated to critical levels of violence, making the validity of international media in prevention highly questionable. However, short of military intervention, international media attention can have important consequences for a conflict.

What constitutes news is always the result of a selection of certain facts and the overlooking of others. 'The news media bring some features of 'reality' to our attention, placing them in the light, whereas most of the rest is kept in the dark.'<sup>24</sup> The number of events and social dynamics that could be news is difficult to fathom and cannot be summarized in a couple of minutes, seconds or even hours a day. And it is important to remember that the accumulated glimpses, given in the reports of the international media, portray the world, as it should *not* be, rather than how it is. Particularly, international television media often focus on events and actor behaviour, while rarely explaining the attitudes, perceptions and socio-economic reasons leading up to a violent event. In relative terms, in-depth reporting is marginal and the number of Western foreign correspondents stationed in non-Western parts of the world is small. It is also rare that the international media reports successful conflict resolution and peace-building processes. This is partly understandable, due to time constraints and the magnitude of potential news in the world. Unfortunately, however, these tendencies are just as much a result of a choice of certain news criteria above others, which have come to dominate the character of international media reporting to an increasing extent.

In most situations of rising tension, before a conflict has passed the threshold to violence, international media has little interest or use for these news stories. As Jakobsen argues, it is usually after some sort of trigger event, like 'an exodus of refugees or a massacre' that is also sufficiently photogenic and dramatic, that the international media takes notice. As such violent conflicts seem to irrupt from out of nothing, a complete lack of rationality, which would make it equally impossible to see the way out of a violent confrontation. This may be one of the reasons explaining the common tendency to view violent conflict as something more or less inevitable and constant, like a natural catastrophe. Once international media does show interest in a conflict it is unfortunately usually when the critical preventive moment has passed.

However, several cases seemed to point towards the international media being able to pressure governments into intervene militarily. On closer examination of the cases, Western governments' policy decisions tended to precede international media pressure (Robinson 2002). In other words, several researchers conclude that the effect of the international media is greatly exaggerated, even if it does seem to have an influence under certain circumstances. Notably, it can have significant influence but only when a government is unsure as to which policy road to take. Furthermore, Jakobsen argues that, 'media generated pressures are likely to result in minimalist policies, which are primarily aimed at demonstrating to their action-demanding publics that 'something is being done' so that ground deployment can be avoided.'<sup>25</sup> He refers to these as mere 'gesture-politics' but there are also numerous examples where, for example, mere international recognition of a non-state actor has had determinant consequences.

There is a danger of putting too much focus on the importance of outright military intervention. The ability to significantly influence politics in a violent conflict cannot be reduced to military intervention. Firstly, the mere possibility or expectation and potential of having the world's major powers intervene in a conflict is in itself an influential factor. This is particularly the case in internal conflicts where non-state actors cannot win a military victory and in which diplomatic and external political support may be crucial. Secondly, the international media does affect Western governments' foreign policy when it comes to economic support. There is a 'clear correlation between media coverage and funding levels in humanitarian emergencies'.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, this also results in that budget for long term projects, in many 'forgotten' conflicts, get rerouted to conflicts with high international media attention. It is also in these situations, when donors all rush to the same conflict, that the most acute coordination problems arise.

International media attention in post-violent conflict phases is often also non-existent. Moreover, if it is present it tends to have a negative impact, at least in the short term. Studies concerning the effect of the media on Peace Settlements exemplify this negative tendency. This is most obvious in peace processes for example. Peace processes are usually characterized by a long, drawn-out succession of tedious meetings and, furthermore, some secrecy is often a prerequisite for success. This does not make good material for, in particular, television media and most often the media tends to magnify the failures (Wolfsfeld 1997). Taking it a step further, after a peace agreement has been reached, it seems that, 'most stories concerning long-term development and nation-building projects focus on miss-management, fraud and corruption, lack of meaningful evaluation criteria, and so on.'<sup>27</sup>

International media, as it works today, has a negligible or negative influence on violent conflicts in the pre- and post-violent conflict phases. Negligible effect, because in most cases internal conflicts do not get substantial media attention in these conflict phases. The negative influence, of the international media is closely related to its preference for sensationalist events and its increasingly 'infotainment' orientated news reporting (Wolfsfeld 1997).

<sup>24</sup> van Ginneken, p.23.

<sup>25</sup> Jakobsen (2000), p.136.

<sup>26</sup> Jakobsen (2000), p.139

<sup>27</sup> Jakobsen, (2000) p.138.

Although authorities and elites exert considerable influence over the media the international media can mobilise third party support for victims of violence and oppression. The media is often blamed for giving too much attention to political groups capable of capturing the media's interest with spectacular behaviour. It is true that media, particularly television media and perhaps international media, depend on spectacular events in order to keep their audiences interested. As such it creates a potential venue for certain actors that may not otherwise have access to extensive media exposure, for better or for worse.

On the other hand, research seems to suggest that these effects (at least in the short term) are less pervasive than is often assumed. Although, spectacular acts of violence may be rewarded with media attention it does not necessarily mean that the publicity will not be detrimental to the actor in question. One reason is the importance of legitimacy. For example, it is not uncommon for actors who use excessive violence against civilian populations to lose support. Islamic extremists in Algeria, after repeated allegations of excessive violence against defenceless civilians, have lost much of the public support, which they may have had from the results from the 1992 democratic elections. As studies have shown, actors using legitimate coercive tactics will maximise their gain.<sup>28</sup> For example, from the point of view of international media, 'groups whose goals are more reformist than revolutionary, and whose actions fall into what the news media regard as reasonable dissent, will find it much easier to promote their frames to the media than those who violate these norms'.<sup>29</sup> Yet, violation of norms is often what makes behaviour spectacular.

International media in the violent phase of a conflict can exert positive pressure and have negative consequences. In one conflict that received considerable media attention, parties in the conflict repeatedly fired on them in order put pressure on international decision-makers. In these circumstances, accurate reporting is essential, but often due to a lack of time and accessibility, it is difficult to verify information. One aspect that this reflects is that parties who are willing to shot at themselves for the cameras are probably also more dependent on, and vulnerable to, international media pressure. Contrary, to some of the negative effects on peace processes, with the eyes of the international media fixed on the parties in a conflict, actors may be more reluctant to break agreements (Jakobsen 2000).

They can also contribute by informing and supporting democratic values, in general and in the case of an intervention. It can play a particular role in promoting independent media and journalism based on sound journalistic principals. It is often more difficult for national media to be economically and politically independent of the regime. Meaning that in the violent phase of a conflict it is exceedingly difficult for national media not to get sucked into the conflict. In such situations, international media could act as a temporary as an alternative to national media in conflict situations where the national media is seriously crippled. One way of doing this is, not only mediating information that would otherwise be censored, but also act as a guarantee for local journalists (Okere 1996). However, in order to do this credibly, the international media itself should be structured according to democratic principles, which is not always the case.

#### 4.3. National Media Initiatives

Statistics of ongoing armed conflict show that most are internal and the incompatibility is about control of, or access to, government; a reflection of the observation that societies in the midst of political change are those that are most prone to violent conflict. (Mansfield & Snyder 1995) Today these changes take the form of attempts to transform an autocratic form of government to a democratic one, because a democratic society promotes positive (more stable and just) peace and more legitimate political structures. More specifically, from a conflict management perspective, democracy as a political structure has the ability and the mechanisms to control shifts in power without resorting to violence, interaction between political decision-makers and society serves as a self-correcting mechanism of sorts. However, as even the European experiences show, the road to peace and a consolidated democratic political system is often a long and difficult one. Certain principles concerning the media's role in this process are fundamental, but there is no one formula for democratic transition or of how a democracy should be composed.

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a greater involvement of civilians in armed conflicts. Not only are civilians more often participants in the armed conflict (as combatants but unfortunately more often as victims) but also as potentially active spectators. As democratisation emphasises the role of civil society and public opinion, and the communications revolution has provided a medium with which to communicate mass opinion, media audiences can be mobilised to have an active influence in a conflict escalation, and conflict management and prevention. As such the media arena is a key conduit, and journalists are crucial actors, in shaping and characterising the relations between political decision-makers and the other parts of society.

This is also reflected in the general perception of what is considered the most desirable course of societal development. Whereas in previous decades media was seen merely as secondary to socio-economic development, today the media is not only perceived as being 'for the people' but, more importantly, 'by the people'. The top-down approach where a population was being spoken to, is completely outdated and, furthermore, there is empirical evidence that more independent news media is having a positive influence and promoting democracy even in the poorest countries (Hydén 2002). Despite economic decline it is during the last decade that, [m]edia independent of government have emerged in virtually every sub-Saharan country. What was once a media desert has become a landscape flourishing with newspapers, radio and television stations, many of which have a very distinct perception of their own role in the process of creating and sustaining an element of political pluralism.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Schoppa, p.206. The level of violence that is considered legitimate varies from case to case.

<sup>29</sup> Wolfsfeld, p.47.

<sup>30</sup> Hydén & Leslie, p.11, in Hydén, Leslie & Ogundimu 2002.

These developments are important and hopeful, also suggesting that media can have positive influences even in countries with rudimentary communications technology. Encouraging and promoting these initiatives is essential for long-term sustainable media development and conflict prevention within a democratic framework.

Benin is one of the poorest countries in Africa and has had a history of ethnic tensions, and yet it managed to successfully democratise in the early 1990's without resorting to violence. It is also one, of the handful, of countries on the African continent that is considered as having a free press.<sup>31</sup> In other words, despite being one of the poorest countries in the world, change did not result in armed conflict. Another important example, usually perceived as miraculous, is the South African experience.

Two specific functions of the news media in a political structure are essential to conflict prevention and democratic development. One is as a medium of communication between elected governments and their constituents, and the other, is as a guardian of transparent and accountable politics. Particular to any stable and representative state is the importance of creating a legitimate government, in the eyes of the greater majority of its citizens. Meaning that the emphasis is less on coercive or material power, but rather in the ability to mobilise social support based on trust or mutual understanding. The most essential dimension in a political power struggle is located in attempts to legitimise power. The media play an active role in determining who is given access to this process and in defining what is legitimate. Because, most research concerning the media and political conflict has been done in democratic states knowing to what extent this is true also in authoritarian states may seem less evident. In a study done on the media in authoritarian Chile during the 1970's and 1980's, results indicated that even in states where media is heavily controlled by the state, the media has considerable influence (Halpern 1994). Media and the public political arena are central to any political conflict, which involves democratic norms. Since democracy has been heralded as the best way to promote more just societies and peace, the media has a particularly important role to play in conflicts related to democratisation.

As of yet we know relatively little of the media's role in internal violent conflicts, but generally speaking when a conflict is violent it is very difficult to promote most societal developments, including media development. When media interventions in conflicts have taken place, it is usually directly after cessation of violent behaviour. These periods are particularly volatile and a completely independent media (if one actually exists) can be very vulnerable. Groups have not been disarmed and the memory of violence and injustices are far from resolved. In other words, media's role as an important actor in conflict management is very different during and directly after the violent phase of a conflict.

In the pre- and post-violent phases of a conflict, ensuring that national media can fulfil its role as a credible source of information and guardian against corruption is essential. This should also be done in such a way that the media is perceived as a legitimate representation of the concerns of all levels of society, to ensure active and constructive communication between decision-makers and civil society. However, there are always difficulties and risks involved in promoting a more active and democratically independent media. Particularly if this is done exclusively by external parties and without taking into account the distinct history, culture and socio-economic dynamics that makeup the backdrop to a conflict. Another difficulty, which is at least as important, is that conflict management priorities and needs are not the same in all phases of a conflict cycle.

In an earlier section, attention was brought to the fact that most ongoing internal conflicts take place in 'weak states.' Models of democratisation, media assistance and intervention are often modelled on the experiences of the Central and Eastern European experiences<sup>32</sup>. However, there is an inherent danger in directly applying the expectations and assumptions derived from the positive experiences of the media's role in Central and Eastern Europe democratisation. The democratisation experiences in Central Eastern Europe are very different from the complexities of the political situations in weak states with colonial histories. For one, in contrast to Radio Free Europe's radio broadcasts into Poland during the Cold War, which are considered to have had positive and considerable influence in the mobilisation of Polish civil society, most conflicts today occur in countries that lack societal cohesion, a strong civil society and national identity.

To exemplify, although the Soviet Union was not seen as a legitimate representative by an important part of the local populations in Central Europe, the nation-state itself was more or less legitimate. In other words, these countries often had a higher degree of social cohesion and a more developed sense of the nation-state than is often found in most weak states. In addition, people in Europe had a basic level of formal education and the greater majority were literate, which is often not the case in many Asian and African countries. This is a particularly important aspect in order to understand the aptitude of people to resist media that are above all tools for propaganda. In the case of Chile, when the media were under the auspices of a military dictatorship, it was found that literacy and a basic level of education were crucial in order for people to know where and how to find alternative sources of information (Halpern 1994).

Most conflicts today take place in Asia and Africa. Assuming that countries in Africa always have some form of unified national identity is not unproblematic. Peoples with colonial pasts have usually not had the luxury of time to develop territorial borders based on social geography. As in Africa, where they came about purely artificially, cutting through and dividing one ethnic population while mixing a multitude of other extremely diverse populations and making the creation of a national identity particularly difficult. The official language in Nigeria is English, but there are at least four other major indigenous languages (Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo and Fulani) and a total of more than 250 ethnic groups. Having said this however, diversity in itself is not negative, as the examples of the United States and Canada show; diverse populations can of their own accord create and feel that they belong to a national identity. In other words, societal cohesion and national identities are fragile in weak states, making the task of creating a representative and legitimate political system

<sup>31</sup> According to the Freedom House survey 2002. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/ratings/index.htm>

<sup>32</sup> See for example, Price (2002a).

particularly precarious. On the other hand, with in-depth and local knowledge of a society it should be possible to more or less assess the potentials of a given civil society.

Ethnicity is often blamed for the occurrence of violent conflict. However, ethnicity itself is little more than any other characteristic and not uncommonly a result of constructed and manipulated identities. An important aspect related to mobilising groups is the ability to use symbols and myths that stir up strong emotions. The three-way civil conflict in Georgia that erupted at the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union is an example of mass-led nationalist mobilisation that led to violent conflict (Kaufman 2001). Incumbent leaders in each of the groups initially tried, without success, to restrain mobilization and prevent interethnic violence. 'Violence quickly resulted anyway because hostile feelings and attitudes led groups to rule out compromise.'<sup>33</sup> As Georgia and other conflicts show, nationalist sentiments based on zero-sum perceptions of state power can be significant catalysts to violent conflicts. More importantly, if groups within civil society do not adhere to the principal of solving conflicts without the use of violence, and there is a situation of insecurity, the risk for escalation intensifies. Making it especially easy for selfishly motivated leaders to succeed in manipulating and mobilising populations to commit widespread violence. In other words, while the media can play an important and constructive role in conflict management, media that encourage similar zero-sum attitudes do not.

This example is to illustrate the danger in another tendency, which is to assume that civil society is already to some degree inherently peaceful and democratic. This assumption is particularly dangerous during, and directly after, the violent phase in a conflict. Violence breeds fear and hatred in all parts of society, and as in the case of a security dilemma, even measures seen as purely defensive can lead to disaster. In other words, some argue that although elites often play a key role, under certain volatile situations, violent conflicts can erupt between groups at a civil society level regardless of whether or not it is seen as being in the best interest of the actors. This suggests that it is imperative to encourage basic principles that ensure that media can avoid getting caught up in these types of escalation dynamics. Internationally supported journalistic principles, such as defined in The Declaration of Rights and Obligations of Journalists or the 'Munich Charter,' are important instruments to assist in the difficult balancing act, which these situations usually entail.

This argument is also backed-up by conclusions made on the basis of research concerning the observation that democratic countries are less prone to violence than non-democratic countries. The realization that democratic countries do not engage in violent conflict against each other, led to an upsurge in research that tried to pinpoint why. Generally speaking, the debate has been between whether democratic *institutions* or democratic *norms* are more important. Although debates in the social sciences rarely come to a full stop, a basic conclusion is that while institutions are needed to hold it all together, norms were the basic building blocks and therefore essential (Russett 1993). Because democratic norms are fundamental and often associated to Western experiences, it is important not to forget that the role of the media, and of civil society, in democratising states is compatible with other political cultures and histories.<sup>34</sup> Together, even Western states are a collection of widely varying adaptations of democratic norms and practices.

Democratic norms create expectations of how a state should behave in relation to the population, that grassroots level and decision-making elites perceive control of the state *not* as part of a zero-sum game is essential for successful democratic transition. However, this is often something that is difficult to accept in situations where zero-sum attitudes have dominated for a long time. The military's position and more particularly their attitudes towards the media's role, in the political structure is an important element that should not be overlooked. In many non-consolidated democratic states, it is very difficult for the military and other decision-making elite to get out of the habit of assuming that media independence is secondary to military concerns, even during periods of relative calm (Okere 1996). The military of any country have a very special role in society. Even in democratic societies, when there is a serious security risk, the right to information may be considered secondary to military objectives. But a democratic system with and economically and editorially independent media that functions according to professional ethics and standards is much better equipped to ensure that this never goes beyond a critical limit.

There is another danger related to the media's enhanced role in internal conflicts. On the one hand, the consequences of democratisation lead to new opportunities and greater potential for the role media can play in societies undergoing transitions. It is undoubtedly not a coincidence that as democratisation spreads and the potential of the media increases, so too has the military's interest in the media. Although, this does not have to be an indication of something negative. Ultimately, it depends completely on the nature of the relationship between the military and other societal actors. On the other hand, this also means that there is a greater possibility that independent media are viewed as a security risk. When one considers the increased importance of credibility and legitimacy and that the media is a primary public arena where actor credibility is put to the test, it is not surprising that independent media is perceived as a serious threat. Authoritarian states have more trouble creating credible information and are more threatened by it (Nye 2001). Benin, South Africa, Mali, and other countries both in Asia and South America are examples that prove that freedom of expression and should not, per se, be perceived as a threat to political stability. Rare are the cases of countries with a free press where violent conflict and political stagnation prevail.

Actors who have an interest in the escalation of a conflict often do not want different groups to communicate. It is not the hard-line and intolerant actors who are the first victims of violence, 'often, among the first civilians to be targeted are those who espouse a different politics, who try to maintain inclusive social relations and some sense of public morality.'<sup>35</sup> In a polarised society those who prefer more extreme and violent options seem to persevere, particularly when key moderate figures have been eliminated. This has implications for conflict dynamics because it increases the

<sup>33</sup> Kaufman, p.86.

<sup>34</sup> For an interesting discussion on Islam, political legitimacy and definitions of civil society see: 'Civil society and Islam: a sociological perspective', Archives of European Sociology, Vol. 37, No.5, pp. 613-633, by Masoud Kamali.

<sup>35</sup> Kaldor, p.9



likelihood of escalation and decreases the likelihood that parties will manage to break the conflict cycle between incompatibility, attitudes and behaviours. Promoting communication between the parties, at all levels of society, in a civil conflict is particularly important for at least two reasons. The first is that, 'in internal conflicts more than in interstate wars, defeat of the rebellion often merely drives the cause underground, to emerge at a later time.'<sup>36</sup> Another argument is that the media can provide an alternative venue of non-violent communication channels, a method that is better because it is an extension of normal politics. It is not communication through the exclusive use of force. Parties that agree to negotiate are taking a step towards 'normal' politics.

An independent media that represents all different parts of society can serve as a safety valve to ensure that communication does not break down completely. To do this effectively media have to be editorially and economically independent. One cannot assume that economically independent media will automatically lead to an active civil society and editorially independent media. The media development in China is an example of this, where the media has become economically independent of the state, but it has not resulted in an editorially independent media (Howell 1998). Economic and market interests do not necessarily coincide with democratic political norms.

As mentioned earlier, when violence is committed there is a need to allocate blame. This is also based on basic feelings of fear, feelings that journalists themselves are not immune to. They also come from a socio-economic and political context that implies certain beliefs and preferences. Armed conflicts involving consolidated democracies also point to the strong tendency for journalists and editors to side with governments when a threat is present. In other words, when there is a threat of violence, it is often very difficult to be completely impartial. Even democratic media to some degree, whether it is imposed by the state or journalists who self-censor their media coverage, tend to censor news reports when they themselves are involved in armed conflict (Carruthers 2000). This tendency was present during the Falkland/Malvinas war and also in the war in Iraq in the beginning of the 1990's.

From a conflict management perspective, in a number of cases, it was found that under certain circumstances partial (but credible) actors were more effective in positively influencing communication between conflicting parties (Wehr & Lederach 1996). Another example is the results of the opposing media strategies used by Germany and Britain during the Second World War. The German state opted for a media that was dominated by propaganda, while the British state chose a semi-censored and partial, but truthful media. While the German media had to struggle to maintain the attention of its own public audience, the British media managed to gain an international reputation for being honest and truthful, while maintaining the trust of the British public. Apparently, the BBC even had eager listeners in Germany itself despite severe penalties attached to listening (Carruthers 2000). Although they were assumed to be partial, the BBC was the preferred source of information due to their credibility as honest journalists. Media neutrality is not essential, credibility, per se, or 'truthfulness' in the case of the news media is more important than claiming to be neutral or objective.

To conclude, general knowledge concerning the media's role in conflict management in internal, civil conflicts is embryonic. However, based on certain general tendencies in the post-Cold War era some conclusions can be made. In the long-term, freedom of expression and an economically and editorially independent media is an essential component of a functioning democratic system. News media with the capacity to give credible information in order to able people to make well-informed choices is paramount. However, particularly in the short-term, directly prior to and after violent phase of a conflict, it is equally important that the media should encourage tolerance and a willingness to solve conflicts at all levels without resorting to violence.

Media intervention initiatives such as peace broadcasting have this as a primary goal for intervention. Among others, the horrifying experiences in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia point towards the need for peace broadcasting under certain circumstances and to the importance of adhering to professional journalistic standards and ethics. Such initiatives can also function as a complement to media coverage (such as international media) that concentrates exclusively on dramatic, negative events largely ignoring background history and news of constructive behaviour. They can also have an important alternative influence because peace broadcasting specifically targets parts of society through, among others, cultural programmes. For example, the programmes specifically for children in conflict-torn societies, such as the initiatives by *Search for Common Ground's* Macedonian children's programming or *Children's advocacy* in Tajikistan.<sup>37</sup> However, because the very purpose of peace broadcasting is to influence people's attitudes, there is an inherent risk that these media can be perceived as propagandistic. This suggests that, in a long-term perspective, peace broadcasting should not be seen as an alternative to replace credible and independent news media as a source of information. Ideally, a developed and pluralistic media space can provide alternative and complementary perspectives that together create a more accurate picture of problems and solutions to political conflict.

Media could be used, in such post-violent conflict situations, to inform and explain to different parts of a population how and why democratic principles proscribe certain behaviour. This implies a long-term commitment. The ability to build up credibility at a local level, or any level, takes time, willingness and commitment. The international community could play a crucial role by strengthening international instruments to ensure the safety and respect of journalists. On a national level, third party initiatives could play a crucial role by supplying alternative sources of credible information. Since credibility and legitimacy are such critical factors, external media initiatives cannot be designed with only short-term perspectives in mind. If a conflict management initiative in a weak state has a limited time period, exit strategies that take into account priorities for long-term media development are crucial.

<sup>36</sup> Zartman, p.3.

<sup>37</sup> Internews Central Asia, [www.internews.org](http://www.internews.org)

## 5. Conclusion

To conclude, in today's conflicts media have a pivotal role to play, as an arena and as an actor in the political system. Influence of the media is closely related to the conflict dimensions pertaining to the communication of attitudes and perceptions that influence legitimacy and credibility in any political system. These dimensions are particularly important in weak states and democratic transitions, where a transfer of power has to be made from certain elites' groups to include all actors in civil society. Most research has focused on the influence of Western media in conflicts, such as the international media, or on media's influence on Western policy-makers. However, most conflicts occur in domestic political settings where there are signs that the means of mass communications continue to increase in importance, suggesting that continued efforts are needed to understand the role of national media in violent conflict.

International and national media have very different roles to play. However, in terms of media intervention, there are indicators that under certain circumstances international and national media may be able to complement each other. While international media has the most important potential influence in conflicts in the violent phase, and at a decision-making level, national initiatives are most effective for long-term, sustainable conflict management in pre- and post-conflict phases. International media can have an effect on elite decision-making, but these cases are marginal and only under particular circumstances and for short time periods.

National media and media initiatives that aim to operate within a country have more potential in terms of sustainable conflict management, particularly in the pre-violent and the post-violent phases of a conflict. Unlike international media, national media is part of a society and, therefore, has the means and potential to play an active and sustainable role. It can either act as a catalyst in escalation to violence or to long-term sustainable conflict management and societal development, meaning that caution and insight is needed. More importantly, media has the potential to play a constructive role in conflict management and prevention, by encouraging democratic principles, supplying credible information, and acting as a guardian of transparent politics.

## 6. Recommendations

A description of post-Cold War conflicts characteristics was made in order to situate the role of the media in the dynamic processes related to violent conflict and escalation. This was followed by a discussion of conflicts dynamics specifically relevant to media as an arena and as an actor in conflicts. Finally, the potential conflict management role of the international and national media was discussed, and from this a couple of key factors or recommendations were extracted.

- More research is needed to illuminate the relationship between the media and internal conflict. For conflict management objectives, it is particularly important to increase knowledge of a *national or local media's role in conflict* management during periods of democratic transition.
- For media to have a sustainable conflict management role, the encouragement of national media development could ensure that media play an independent role in promoting democratic principles, supplying credible information, and monitoring accountable and transparent governance. An important way of doing this is by promoting a *representative, editorially and economically independent media* as necessary and key instrument of democracy. Independence can ensure the media's capability to resist manipulation by selfishly motivated actors and credibly act as a watchdog for transparent governance and to resist other inflammatory escalation pressures. Another important aspect for media development is to concentrate on media (as for example radio) that has *the capacity to reach the largest and widest spectrum* of societal groups. Generally promoting literacy can also be vital in order to provide populations with tools to assess the credibility of information and to look for alternative sources.
- Giving priority to credible and legitimate media is crucial to a constructive, long-term and sustainable conflict management role of the media. Both in the promotion and development of national or local media as for external media interventions. Therefore, it is imperative that the basic journalistic ethics and professional standards are adhered to. The international community could play a significant part in promoting credibility. For example, by *encouraging adherence to professional journalistic standards* and by *promoting the safety and freedom of independent journalists*, particularly local journalists.
- Promotion of media credibility based on 'truthfulness' rather than objectivity is more realistic and sustainable. Media are already part of social political context and, therefore, never completely neutral, but this does not mean that media cannot behave impartially and according to certain guiding principles. Experience and research have shown that credibility and truthfulness are more important than neutrality or objectivity.
- In extremely volatile situations, usually directly prior to, or after, higher levels of violence, media interventions focused particularly on reducing perceptions of threat and zero-sum attitudes may be necessary. Encouraging the respect and understanding of the media as a crucial element and actor in a political system not based on zero-sum perceptions of power, is particularly important in democratising states. However, these initiatives should *not be considered as alternatives to replace long-term media development*. When outlining policy and implementing such short-term initiatives, long-term objectives should also be kept in mind.
- Before external involvement it is vital that thorough assessments and analyses of the local situation are made. Including assessments of *information needs*, the level and characteristics of *media freedom, sustainability and legislation*, and the role and *security situation of journalists*. Equally important is to have an idea of audience composition, with particular emphasis on widespread and *common attitudes and cultural symbols, related to political structures* and actors.

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## Appendix

### Media Violence

- What is Media Violence? Media violence – the depiction or dissemination of violent or other explicit material or images in a manner that is considered harmful to viewers through media sources such as television, radio, music, film, literature, comic books, and videogames.
- Interesting Statistics. In 1950, only 10% of American homes had a television and by 1960 the percentage had grown to 90%. Today 99% of homes have a television. In fact, more families own a television than a phone. •54% of U.S. children have a television set in their bedrooms. Children spend more time learning about life through media than in any other manner. The average child spends approximately 28 hours a week watching television, which is twice as much time as they spend in school. The average American child will witness over 200,000 acts of violence on television including 16,000 murders before age 18.
- More Facts Polls show further those three-quarters of the public finds television entertainment too violent. When asked to select measures which would reduce violent crime ‘a lot,’ Americans chose restrictions on television violence more often than gun control. Television alone is responsible for 10% of youth violence. Modern music lyrics have become increasingly explicit concerning sex, drugs, and violence against women. Americas youth are also exposed to violent words, music, and images on the Internet, where there are more than 1,000 websites espousing radical hate and bigotry and violence.
- Studies have shown that there is a likely correlation between aggressive behavior and time spent watching television. π The existing research shows beyond a doubt that media violence is linked to youth violence. As one expert concludes, ‘To argue against it is like arguing against gravity.’ π More than 1,000 studies on the effects of television and film violence have been done over the past 40 years. The majority of these studies reach the same conclusion: television and film violence leads to real-world violence. π Violent video games have an effect on children similar to that of violent television and film. Some experts suggest an even greater pernicious effect, concluding that the violent actions performed in playing video games are more conducive to childrens aggression. As one expert concludes, ‘Were not just teaching kids to kill. Were teaching them to like it.’ π5. Critical Response to Media Violence
- Video Games π Radio π Music π Comic Books π Television π Film π6. Forms of Media Violence
- Examples of Media Violence Video games that encourage violent acts such as murder, assassination, rape, womanizing, and arson (Counter-Strike, Doom, Grand Theft Auto, Wolfenstein 3D) Columbine killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold as well as Virginia Tech massacre killer Seung-Hui Cho were both known to be avid fans of video games. Several unsuccessful lawsuits by parents of Columbine victims against video game manufacturers were filed as a result by parents of some of the victims
- 8. More Examples Former rap artist Eminem was accused of homophobia, violence against women, and misogyny with violent lyrics in songs such as ‘Kill You’, and ‘Kim. Rap artist 50 Cent released albums entitled Get Rich or Die Tryin and The Massacre under the label Murder Inc. Records. John Wagner’s graphic novel A History of Violence depicts many scenes of violent and gruesomely horrific images.
- Critics say that the MPPA (Motion Picture Association of America) and the FCC (Federal Communications Commision) enforce a lax film and TV rating system that allows for much sex, violence, and perversion to still be viewable on screen. π More gore, blood, realistic injuries, and torture (Saw, Hostel, Texas Chainsaw Massacre, Fight Club, Kill Bill, The Matrix, Seven, Rambo) π9. Violence in Film and Television
- Kill Bill π10. Movie Example
- Add new or existing filtering technologies to computers and Internet websites so that youth cannot access such sensitive and harmful material π Harsher fines for television stations and other individuals who broadcast violence in a lascivious manner π stricter ratings guidelines π Censorship π11. Solutions to Media Violence
- Do you think violence portrayed by the media directly influence individuals to commit crimes and other violent acts? π When does censorship cross the line as an infringement of our right of freedom of expression? π What types of restriction should the government impose to protect viewers from the harmful effects of media violence? π12. Discussion Questions