

Chapter 11

Peace Reporting



In a conflict, the media may be used to engender hopelessness, militarise society, and even provide direct instructions to kill

MEDIA IS INEXTRICABLY BOUND UP IN WAR. When the first shot is fired, truth, it is often said, is the first casualty, as competing sides manipulate the media to mobilise populations, hide the grim realities of death and atrocity, and demonise their opponents.

Consider some of the ways the media is exploited in current conflicts:

- A guerrilla group stages a provocation, which they know will bring a violent government counterattack against villagers, and which can then be exploited through the international media to draw attention to their cause.
- A NATO official tells a press conference that his missiles have precision accuracy, obscuring the inevitable “collateral” deaths of the very civilians the intervention is supposed to be “liberating”.
- An extremist religious group detonates a bomb on a commuter train in the heart of a major western capital - for the precise purpose of spreading “terror” through the horrible images of mutilation and destruction that will be immediately flashed around the world.

When the fighting stops, partisans continue to fight their battles over the airwaves and in the newspapers, competing for advantage, justifying their campaign, and undermining moves towards peace and reconciliation that may cost them their ill-gotten profits and positions of power.

Even before the conflict begins, war-driven governments exploit state-controlled media to lay the foundations for violence, pumping out noxious hate speech, bogus history and mountains of lies. The national struggle (and inevitably the pre-eminent leader) is glorified, while fear and hatred of the “enemy” is fuelled. The media is used to engender hopelessness, militarise society, and even provide direct instructions in the means and strategies of killing.

These grim scenarios are played out inexorably, time and again, wherever conflict arises. Fierce professional and academic debate rages over the role western media has played during the many international military interventions. Over the past decade, the abuse of local media to drive genocide, especially in Rwanda and the Balkans, has drawn particular attention, demonstrating the media’s enormous potential for evil.

If the media is so tied to war, can it also contribute to peace?

But if the media is so tied to war, can it contribute to peace?

The question is a difficult and under-researched one, that is highly controversial among journalists. Traditional professional scepticism leads many in the media to oppose any concept of the media seeking to play any role at all. Discussions about “peace reporting” seem to many editors and reporters to push journalism across the line from being a neutral observer in society to emerging as a direct actor. Even if for good intentions, this “instrumentalisation” of the media is still seen as a dangerous violation of core professional principles. Propaganda for peace is still propaganda.

Yet journalism should be a responsible and concerned profession, and many reporters and editors, and several media-development organisations such as IWPR, have begun to think about the question, and formulate ways that media can maintain its core professional standards while also actively contributing to the resolution of conflict.

Various studies have broken down potential responses in different ways. A recent review by the government-funded think tank United States Institute for Peace refers to structural,

content-specific and aggressive media interventions. A report by the Canadian group Institute for Media Policy and Civil Society (IMPACS) outlines five types of intervention, from basic training through to peace programming, such as soap operas and other cultural outputs which promote positive messages. Even major mainstream media have experimented with new strategies to increase the input of “local voices” in the content of their stories and, through so-called public journalism, in setting news agendas.

The Institute for War & Peace Reporting was established to provide a platform for responsible local journalists in crisis areas who are so often locked out of local and international debate over conflict issues in their own countries.

IWPR groups its concept of peace reporting into three categories: strengthening individual skills, building institutional capacity and setting content agendas. It is the third category which forms the bulk of this chapter.

Strengthening Skills

The heart and soul of good conflict reporting is solid

IWPR was established to support responsible local journalists so often locked out of the debate

journalism - fact-based, moderate in tone and balanced in choice of sources and subjects. In that sense, this entire handbook is about developing the core professional skills for operating sensitively and constructively in conflict areas.

Once in a conflict area, two overriding principles apply. First, do your homework, read a lot, speak to official and non-official sources and ordinary citizens, and know as much as you can about a region and its people (and if at all possible its languages) before you set pen to paper, begin to hammer the keys or stand before the camera.

Second, believe nothing you have not seen with your own eyes, and be especially sceptical of official statements. The daily press conference through which military leaders pronounce on their successes in the field and the atrocities of their opponent can never be trusted without first-hand witness. The best and bravest of correspondents are the ones who skip these regular charades and risk frontline reporting from the field.

Building Capacity

Professional and creative journalism which can engender responsible and constructive debate cannot thrive without

strong institutions to sustain it. This includes: 1) vibrant media organisations free from political control, 2) responsible official and nonofficial bodies supporting media freedom, and 3) a vigorous civil society sector from which to draw ideas and information and through which to debate with the wider society.

Building this capacity involves reforming media legislation and regulatory and bodies, strengthening the professionalism of existing media institutions, and establishing sustainable media support institutions for training and lobbying, such as media training and monitoring institutes, free speech groups and journalist associations.

A range of international organisations specialise in various media capacity-building components, and there is an energetic international freedom of expression community. (See the reference notes to this chapter.) Some focus on reforming state broadcasters, others on building independent and community radio stations, still others on elaborating legal frameworks or establishing journalist unions.

The freedom of expression community is especially important to provide a global network to raise an immediate alert when reporters are attacked, and to provide financial and legal support

and increase political pressure, for example to secure an early release from unjust imprisonment. Media monitoring is sometimes criticised as a censorial or regulatory effort but in fact provides important base-line research to track performance and hold up a critical mirror to help a responsible media community do better.

IWPR capacity building has focused on establishing and reforming media organisations, assessing local needs and evaluating media projects, launching and strengthening media training, research and monitoring groups, and training local trainers to sustain long-term skills development on the ground.

Setting Agendas

Beyond basic journalistic skills and ethics, there are many conflict-sensitive approaches that can be taken in choosing topics, developing a reporting strategy and structuring the presentation of voices within a story. The main thrust of these is to move beyond the locked-in pessimism and polarisation of much reporting on conflict. The goal is to search for alternative voices and what IWPR calls cross-community dialogue, to build bridges across confrontation lines, identify areas of agreement

rather than discord, and highlight positive, often nonofficial, developments on the ground.

An agenda-setting approach is not about propaganda. It does not mean supporting one side against another, or necessarily becoming a direct partisan in anti-war debates - indeed, an understanding of theories of just war is also important.

Rather it recognises that in reporting news the media also makes the news. The media creates a real-time record of history which has the power to determine not only the public's understanding of events and issues but also what it actually defines as news itself.

Journalism is faced with the conundrum of the nuclear physicist: you cannot measure an atom, because the very effort causes it to move and hence changes the atom's dimensions. Similarly, in reporting conflict, journalists have a responsibility to:

- Understand how much their involvement may influence events;
- Dig beneath the surface of entrenched warring positions;

The media has the power to determine what the public actually defines as news itself

In a world of conflict, an agenda-setting approach seeks to provide a modicum of balance for the other side of the story

- Question whether they are being exploited by media-savvy players in a conflict to promote one side's war aims.

For the mainstream of media coverage, war is sexy and peace is a bore. It is just this intoxication that Chris Hedges, an award-winning correspondent for *The New York Times*, had in mind when he entitled his cautionary memoir *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*.

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Understanding Conflict

A financial journalist must know something about economics, and a legal correspondent should have a basic comprehension of the law. Similarly, in order to cover war, it is important to understand the nature of conflict. This means breaking out of the confines of day-to-day coverage and making an effort to comprehend what drives conflict, and what the resolution of conflict actually means.

Conflict analysis (or “peace studies”) suggests that conflict is natural and common but that it does not always spell violence.

A review of other peace processes reveals that conflicts can, in fact, be resolved peacefully, although rarely easily. Managing conflict is part of resolving it, and the process of working towards peace is itself critical to building the constituencies on the ground for a durable, long-term solution.

At the same time, beware of anyone who suggests that violent conflict is inevitable. Violent conflict happens for reasons, and is driven by people. Sometimes a leader or a government provokes conflict as a means of securing or maintaining control. A primary cause of conflict is scarce resources, where power and wealth are unevenly distributed and there is a long history of past grievances or antagonism. This indicates that violence between “historic enemies” is not inevitable but can be avoided by addressing an imbalance of resources, or a monopoly on political power, driving the underlying dispute.

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The following, drawn from a valuable recent report by the Canadian group IMPACS, is a classic example used to describe the possible outcomes of a conflict:

There is an orange on the branch of a tree. The tree is located in one garden, but the orange is hanging from a branch that reaches into the neighbouring garden. Each neighbour believes he should have the orange. Conflict study teaches that there are four possible outcomes:

| OUTCOME | EXAMPLES |
|--|--|
| <p>One side wins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) might makes right b) legal resolution c) chance d) compensation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) neighbours fight for the orange b) property law determines who gets the orange c) neighbours flip a coin over the orange d) one gets the orange, but pays the other 5p |
| <p>Withdrawal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) walk away b) elimination c) delay | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) both parties turn their backs on the orange b) they destroy or give away the orange c) they put the orange in the freezer |
| <p>Compromise</p> <p>dividing the resource</p> | <p>parties agree to cut the orange in half or squeeze it and share the juice</p> |
| <p>Transcendence</p> <p>innovative solutions</p> | <p>cut the seeds out of the orange, plant them and start a plantation – new business, new income, more resources</p> |

A good example of conflict resolution is the peace process in Northern Ireland. For many, many years the conflict was framed as an irresolvable confrontation of “Catholics vs. Protestants”. Any moves towards self-control for the former (and ultimate linkage with the Irish Republic) was seen as a loss of control for the latter (and the British union itself), and a risk of their livelihood, culture and life. Meantime the violence continued.

The Good Friday Agreement that emerged in 1998 was a product of the Irish government distancing itself somewhat from the Republican movement and the British government distancing itself from hard-core Unionists. At the same time, moderate groups on each side were supported and legitimised, sparking the successful moves for peace. The process has run into consistent problems, but the underlying cycle of violence-revenge-further violence with no solution in sight has been broken.

When there are only two parties to a conflict, it can often escalate into a zero-sum game in which each side only sees the black or white possibility of victory or defeat. Any success for one side comes at the direct cost of the other. Conversely, when there are more players or stakeholders the chances of a peaceful

A journalist covering conflict needs to understand the meaning of violence

resolution increase. Outside mediation seeks to break down the causes of conflict and identify ways that both sides can reach a compromise, satisfying basic needs while avoiding the descent into violence, which is inevitably a defeat for both sides. Indeed, if war is often defined as the failure of politics, the mitigation of violence is its ultimate success.

Types of Violence

The responsibility of a journalist covering conflict also involves understanding the meaning of violence.

Again, there is a large body of specialist research to draw on here. Some research divides violence into three types: direct violence (hitting, shooting, rape etc); cultural violence (hate speech, xenophobia, religious justifications for war etc); and structural violence (apartheid, colonialism, occupation etc).

There are both visible and invisible effects of violence. The journalist can observe most obviously the killed, wounded, raped, tortured and displaced. But beneath the surface can be hatred, xenophobia, desires for revenge and a whole range of emotions that can lead to further violence. Structural change - such as the

eradication of a language and a culture – may be harder to recognise and may occur over extended periods of time.

Certain forms of violence contravene international humanitarian law, even in times of war. The Crimes of War Project was founded to educate journalists about violations of the laws of war, to help journalists comprehend the scale of violence they may witness. As Roy Gutman, the Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter who initiated the project, has explained, seeing an army shell a church or other historic site which is sheltering civilians is bad enough; but understanding that such an attack represents a violation of the Geneva Conventions raises it to another level of importance - elevating what may seem a routine article into a breakthrough report on a major shift in the tactics and implications of the conflict. (See chapter 12)

Simplistic use of ethnic or religious identifications can be highly provocative

Framing Conflict

Reporting in a crisis area begins with the fundamental question of how a conflict is framed. Short-hand references are inevitable in journalism. But simplistic use of ethnic or religious identifications, or open use of concepts of “us and them”, can be highly provocative. In war reporting, such abbreviated terminology, thoughtlessly used, can contribute to a sense of polarisation suggesting that conflict is inevitable.

In the Balkans in the mid-1990s, most reports referred to conflict between “Serbs”, “Croats” and “Muslims”. The majority of the soldiers on the various sides were indeed ethnically Serb or Croat, or religiously Muslim. But such phrasing, without any qualification, created a dangerously simplified picture, enforcing arguments that the dispute was based on “ancient ethnic animosities” among historic and irreconcilable enemies.

In fact, many Serbian and Croatian citizens strongly opposed the war, and their governments bent on prosecuting them. The “Muslim side” was, albeit to a decreasing degree, nevertheless ethnically mixed, with Croats and Serbs serving in the

internationally recognised government in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo. Many people in the former Yugoslavia rejected ethnic identification altogether or had mixed parentage. Further complicating the picture, Muslims chose a new term by which to be identified, “Bosniak”, in an effort both to strengthen their own national identity under siege but also to undermine the sense of a religious motive to what they argued was essentially a war of territorial conquest.

The war on the ground was thus accompanied by a fierce debate over how it should be defined, and as the understanding of the definition shifted, so did the understanding of the possibility of finding solutions.

The goal of sensitive reporting is not to adopt one side over another. Many reporters have come to argue that, faced with genocide, journalists are bound to do precisely that. Others have suggested that journalists in fact have a duty to represent the unrepresented side - namely innocent civilians not associated with any warring group. This means framing stories in the context of real people - ie, not just leaders, experts or diplomats. This can often graphically demonstrate the damage done to all parties in violence.

Most important, however, is to strive to present the complexity of the situation, even within the constraints of limited space and inevitable journalistic short-hand. The aim is not to be used as a propaganda instrument for one side or the other. And, of course, it is clearly a more accurate reporting of the reality on the ground.

Emotional Language

War is highly emotionally charged, and journalists are subject just like everyone to strong feelings. But the basics of responsible journalism demand that reporters absolutely avoid:

- Hate speech
- Dehumanising language
- Incitement to violence

Such language is seen in coverage of conflicts around the world and it is all too easy to slip into it when a journalist feels that his or her community is under threat. But calling for the extermination of the enemy, referring to opponents as subhuman, or directly rallying people to violence is well outside

the bounds of responsible journalism. Indeed, international war crimes courts have raised the question of whether media which directly contribute to the use of violence may be prosecuted for war crimes.

Even words in regular usage can be inflammatory. The common terms “terrorist” or “freedom fighter” are loaded with connotations. Phrases such as “armed fighters”, “insurgents”, “rebels” or “guerrillas” tend to be more descriptive and less emotional. Find neutral, non-pejorative terms that avoid taking sides.

Overly emotive images should also be used with extreme care. In television or news pictures, it is important not simply to go for the goriest pictures. Journalists need to have respect for the victims on all sides of a conflict and to understand the emotive power of such images and the further violence they could spark.

As a print outlet, the temptation is sometimes to follow the television news. But print has the ability to dig deeper and provide broader context, and need not descend into sensationalism or gratuitous coverage.

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One rule here is to use special care when publishing images and reports about atrocities by the other side. A primary responsibility of a free press is to challenge its own government, and this applies even, or especially, in times of war.

Again, this is not to say that the media should become propagandists for peace. But by recognising their responsibility, journalists can help contribute to an environment of greater understanding and indirectly prevent tensions flaring even more.

The Cynicism Trap

In the cold light of dawn, when international mediators fail to bring the parties to agreement and the competing spokesmen rush to the microphones to denounce the recalcitrance of their opponents, headlines habitually declare: “Peace Process on Verge of Collapse as Fighting Flares”.

Yet a week, or a month, or two months later, another meeting is held, and a few more issues are agreed even if an overall settlement is still not reached.

Two years into a peace settlement, when the interim government is deadlocked and localised conflict erupts, again

the headlines confidently announce that the country is “sliding into new war”.

Yet again, after much haggling and unpleasantness, a new compromise is reached, a different faction leader is appointed acting prime minister and a localised peace deal is agreed.

Journalists covering conflict are constantly asked to predict the future, and as in the above examples, pessimistic assessments always win the biggest headlines. Indeed, journalists are professional cynics.

Obviously, there is no point in downplaying the gravity of any situation, nor in accepting at face value yet another “condemnation of the violence” by a United Nations Security Council unwilling to take stronger action, or a bland and meaningless “statement of principles” put forward by an ineffectual peace process which is indeed going no where. If you are on the ground and are convinced a massacre is imminent, by all means report it.

But a generally negative approach, often as not proved wrong as proved right, contributes to the pessimism that itself can fuel conflict. And it also misses key aspects of any successful

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process of conflict resolution. A peace process by definition will be difficult and face many setbacks. But the process itself is meaningful, drawing parties together to establish a rapport, and often purposefully addressing minor issues first to build confidence before a global settlement addressing the core issues of the conflict can be reached.

A focus on the fragility of a “top down” peace accord often also distracts journalists from the more gradual, less exciting but ultimately essential “bottom up” successes achieved by the development community and civil society, as a bridge is re-opened, a community centre established, and slowly, family by family, refugees return. These developments, too, are part of the process, drawing support away from the warlords and increasing the constituency among the population for peace.

It is always wise to avoid being pulled into the cynic’s trap of making dire predictions. An agenda-setting approach highlights the deeper reality of a peace process and provides balancing perspectives of incremental, but sometimes no less important, successes on the ground.

Responding to Crisis

A bomb goes off, a president is assassinated, an atrocity emerges – these are charged moments when it is critical to maintain professional standards.

Victims speak out with real anguish, political figures hurry to make condemnatory statements, and competing media rush off confident, sharply worded stories.

This is a time of great risk for a responsible journalist. The facts are unclear, responsibility is uncertain, and there is no way to comprehend the real meaning of the incident in such a chaotic environment.

With so many people expressing categorical views, it may be hard to resist the “obvious conclusion” - eg, that one ethnic group mounted a deliberate attack on another - even if no one has any facts to prove it.

Such irresponsible reporting can directly lead to further violence, as emotions are enflamed, and society is ripe for revenge actions.

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In such circumstances, it is essential in your reporting to:

- Stick to known facts and make clear what cannot be confirmed;
- Tone down emotion and highlight those in society seeking to do the same;
- Speak to all sides and break through obvious stereotypes;
- Explore the complexity of the story, rather than easy conclusions;
- Maintain perspective on the incident, however tragic.

Reporting the Peace

Even amid war, there are signs of civil society activity, of development, of hope. While it is the journalist's duty and natural instinct to report on the "factions" involved in a conflict, it is essential to look at the broader society. There is very rarely a 100 per cent pro-war bloc in a country, but reporting exclusively on the active conflict and those behind it only contributes to the impression of a totally militarised society.

Responsible journalism means reporting on parties and activities opposing the war, highlighting groups and individuals who contradict war-mongering stereotypes, featuring examples of cross-community collaboration and peace-building bridging the conflict divide.

Inevitably, extremists grab the headlines. Moderates are usually in the overwhelming majority on the ground but tend to receive less coverage. An article highlighting a call for violence may be more eye-catching than a feature on civil society groups working against it. But such reports also legitimise the radicals, and obscure alternative options.

Accurate reporting should aim to represent the relative weights of the various actors and their opinions, and seek an overall balance. Even while a global settlement may remain elusive, remember that the process of peace building is an important part of achieving a long-term resolution, and localised agreements, field development projects and indeed the reduction or absence of violence are all positive signs.

Once the war ends, the international rat pack departs, contributing to the impression of a world in constant conflict

Some experts in conflict studies believe that an aggressive approach to balanced reporting naturally assists peaceful resolution. This is simply a matter of a journalist doing his or her job properly since portraying more complexity and more sides of a conflict contributes to the understanding of prospects for a peaceful solution.

Notably, once war ends, the international rat pack departs, and coverage of a country which has been in crisis falls off. This contributes to the impression of a world at war in which conflict cannot be resolved. An agenda-setting approach returns to the region, to highlight reconstruction and development, not glossing over the inevitable setbacks and difficulties but also illustrating that the country has moved beyond violence.

Editorial Selection & Deployment

Imagine you are the editor of a daily newspaper in the Middle East and are trying to find the front page lead and headline for Monday's edition. The weekend has brought a slew of major events:

- There were five suicide bombings in three days, killing nine Israeli citizens and wounding dozens of others;
- Israeli security forces sealed off many Palestinian towns, which means thousands of Palestinians could not get to their work;
- The Palestinian and Israeli prime ministers met, reaching no concrete agreement but committed to hold further talks in future.

Which is the top story? The usual rule is, "If it bleeds, it leads." The pressure to react to daily violence can be hard to resist when competing media are running their own banner headlines about the latest atrocities. But against a background of daily violence, a major effort at peace is arguably the bigger story. If you take into account the fact that the meeting between the

prime ministers is their first in years, the case for its importance becomes clearer still.

There are other issues of editorial selection and planning to consider, too. Covering a hard news story can be easier than covering a soft story. The first tends to write itself. So, too, journalists tend to concentrate on covering wars, fighting and famine but sometimes shy away from the later story - the reconstruction or life after the conflict. There are especially difficult choices here, especially as the reconstruction story may take more resources from a tight editorial budget.

Indeed, just how you deploy your reporting resources is crucial. The number of reporters available to cover a story is always limited, but part of being a responsible journalist is to realise that deployment is potentially a very subjective decision. So when deciding how to use reporting resources, it makes sense to make a special effort to expand on the number of angles for your coverage of a conflict, and make allowances for reporting the peace.

Cross-Community Reporting

War is about division. People are divided, bridges are destroyed, countries are torn apart.

The information war is specifically intended to drive apart people who have lived side-by-side for ages. As communications links are severed, perspectives from the opposing capital are no longer reported, voices from across the confrontation line are silenced, and the frightening impression is created of the opponent as some subhuman “Other”.

A cross-community approach to conflict reporting seeks to bridge such divides. The strategy can involve complex reporting projects, assembling journalists from different ethnic, national and religious groups, and even across frontlines, to undertake in-depth reports and investigations together. An extensive article highlighting human rights violations on both sides can serve to underscore how each side is suffering, and feeling remorse. If it is produced by journalists from both communities it will serve to build confidence.

Dialogue projects can bring together individuals from across the conflict divide to debate issues, argue differences and locate

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solutions. Special publications or documentaries can blend different viewpoints in an exchange or dialogue format. In the simplest form, cross-community reporting can simply mean taking the effort to syndicate reports between countries or regions in conflict, to break down the blockade of information, analysis and viewpoints from across the border.

Any cross-community project requires careful editorial handling, and often sensitive personal communications. Participants identified to participate in such projects are asked to take a positive approach, which includes using moderate language, avoiding emotionalism and stereotyping, and demonstrating sensitivity and respect for colleagues, and people as a whole, across the conflict line.

Where possible, cross-community projects benefit from personal meetings among the participants, to build confidence, air issues and identify common approaches. Media often seek to raise publicity for their output, and public meetings (safety and security concerns allowing) can be important mechanisms following production to bring participants and other civil society and even official representatives from different

communities together to discuss and debate the results - the media itself serving as a platform for civil society mediation.

IWPR's editorial strategy is based on a cross-community approach, seeking to draw participants and contributions from all sides, and all communities, in a conflict, providing opportunities for them to work together in an environment of mutual trust, and sharing perspectives by disseminating their reporting in all areas throughout the conflict region.

Such approaches can offer not only essential information but also fresh and often positive perspectives. They can also serve an important demonstration effect, building confidence that supposed enemies can still communicate together professionally and often find many points of agreement.

Case Studies

A few examples from IWPR's recent experiences provide useful illustration of creative cross-community reporting strategies.

Rioting in Macedonia. The Republic of Macedonia, a former Yugoslav state, is a fragile country with a significant minority of ethnic Albanians.

Reflecting typical conflict fever, the article was a tract, more than a report, and had not sourced anyone from the other side

In 2001, rioting broke out in the town of Bitola, after the killing of Macedonian soldiers. A local Macedonian journalist, writing for IWPR, sought to justify the rampage in his report, utilising common stereotypes about Albanians and seeking to support the integrity and sovereignty of the Macedonian state.

This was a tract, more than a report. And he had not interviewed any of the shopkeepers, whose stories had been demolished and who were all Albanian.

A series of exchanges with an IWPR editor provided what was effectively on-the-job training, challenging the journalist to view the event from different prospective. As the Macedonian had no connections with Albanians, and was viewed with suspicion by the local community, the IWPR home office helped open doors for him locally, so that he would be received by Albanian sources.

On this basis of this fresh reporting, the journalist went back and drafted an entirely different, and far more professional, story. Much editorial and training time was required, but the challenge of continuing to work with the local reporter - rather than just spiking the article and moving on - paid off. The final article was finely balanced and calm in tone, and uniquely for a Macedonian

journalist was translated into Albanian and published by the Albanian press as well, a significant breakthrough that contributed to communication and confidence.

Dialogue in the Caucasus. Abkhazia is an unrecognised breakaway entity which was a full part of the Republic of Georgia until a bitter local war in the early 1990s. Since then, the border has been firmly closed, and official and nonofficial communications between Tbilisi and Sukhumi, the respective capitals, cut off. The lack of communication sustains misunderstanding and mistrust, and is a major obstacle to reaching a political settlement to the dispute.

Working with local journalists and civil society groups, in spring 2003, in partnership with an international conflict resolution group Conciliation Resources, IWPR established a new monthly newspaper, *Panorama*.

A unique collaboration across the conflict divide, the paper engages both Abkhaz and Georgians, with the mission to produce one newspaper, while being published in two languages, Georgian and Russian.

The project has been a breakthrough, especially in providing a framework to allow normal people to receive information from across the conflict border, and the publication, while a modest initiative, has become increasingly valued, especially in Abkhazia.

War Crimes in Croatia. Vukovar, a town in Croatia, was the scene of horrible atrocities at the early stages of the wars of Yugoslav secession, when Serbian paramilitary forces and the Yugoslav army undertook a series of brutal attacks.

On the 10th anniversary of these attacks, IWPR launched an extensive cross-community reporting project, bringing together Serbian and Croatian journalists to investigate those crimes and the long-term impact.

The project took extensive work, and some careful handling, to encourage the team to work together in good faith. But the results were well worth it.

Most notably, the team of journalists in Serbia were able to locate a number of Serbian soldiers who had taken part in those attacks. They spoke remarkably openly about what they had done, and expressed heart-felt regret about the events.

Due to its unique position, IWPR was able to secure publication for the breakthrough report in leading newspapers in both Croatia and Serbia. Serbian readers were able to read reports about their government's crimes, as written by Serbian journalists, while Croatian readers were able to hear for the first time about the remorse of common Serbian soldiers.

Both audiences saw that joint work by Serbians and Croatians, even on sensitive topics, was possible, contributing to confidence on both sides. A Serbian editor, who had been resistant to the project in the first place, even found himself being congratulated for his bravery in publishing such a bold investigation.

These are just some examples of the creative way in which a cross-community approach can produce journalism at the top level, while also making a direct contribution to bridge-building and conflict resolution.

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Just War

Many wars are explained on the basis of preventing atrocity, righting a wrong or halting a worse outcome. Often these are justifications for public consumption obscuring more concrete reasons, such as to secure power or territory.

Yet western philosophical, religious and legal theories do allow for the concept of just war, where certain criteria have been met. These include:

- **Last resort** – all non-violent options must have been exhausted before the use of force can be justified.
- **Legitimate authority** – even just causes cannot be served by actions taken by individuals or groups who do not constitute an authority accepted by those within and outside the society as legitimate.
- **Redress** – a just war can only be fought to redress a wrong suffered, particularly in self-defence.
- **Success** – war is only justified if it has a reasonable chance of success; death and injury in the service of a hopeless cause are not morally justifiable.

- **Establishing peace** – the ultimate goal of war must be to re-establish peace, and the peace that is established must be preferable to that which would have prevailed had the war not been fought.
- **Proportionality** – the violence used must be proportional to the injury suffered, and legitimate authorities must only use the level of force requested to achieve the limited objective of redressing the injury suffered.
- **Discrimination** – weapons must discriminate between combatants and non-combatants, civilians are never permissible targets of war, and every effort must be taken to avoid killing civilians. Civilian deaths are justified only if they are the unavoidable result of a deliberate attack on a military target.

Clearly, these principles set a very high standard for justifying the use of violence, and a review of the theory provides a useful guide against which to judge the claims often made by governments who take their countries into war. The principles alone provide a strong foundation for an agenda-setting approach into the causes and consequences of conflict.

Six Core Duties

Six core duties for responsible peace reporting:

1. Duty to understand conflict:
 - We have an obligation to study and understand conflict and conflict resolution generally before reporting on it.
 - We should understand how conflicts develop and how resolutions can emerge; we should know about the “rules of war” as well as something about peace studies and the evolution of resolutions.
 - This is the same with any specialised or “beat” reporting.
2. Duty to report fairly:
 - We have an obligation to report on the conflict fairly and in a balanced way.
 - We must make every effort to report the complexities and opinions of all factions and sub-factions in a conflict.
 - We should always make our own allegiances clear. As journalists, we must let the reader know where we stand if we are on any one side.

- Again, this is true of any type of reporting journalists do.
3. Duty to report background and causes of a conflict:
 - We should accurately represent both the legitimate and perceived grievances of all parties.
 - We must remember, and remind our readers, that even perceived grievances are important to perpetuating and resolving conflicts.
 4. Duty to present the human side:
 - We have an obligation to represent the trauma and the human stories of victims in a balanced, professional and non-exploitative manner.
 - This is an obligation we have not only to those people we are reporting on but also to our readers.
 5. Duty to report on peace efforts:
 - We should report on the efforts of those working on peace and reconciliation every bit as much as those who exacerbate a conflict.
 - We should actively seek out sources outside the primary

belligerents, especially those who break from simplistic, bipolar interpretation of events. This expands our understanding and our readers' understanding of the conflict.

- This does not mean taking sides or “propagandising for peace”; it simply means reporting on peace efforts as well as war efforts.
6. Duty to recognise our influence:
- We should always be aware that our reporting will affect the conflict and the lives of people in it.
 - We should be ever vigilant to avoid being used by one side or the other in their war efforts and to expose attempts at media manipulation.

EXERCISES

The following exercise involves a fictional country. Review the background and specific events in each scenario. Then discuss your views and how you would handle the stories in question.

Background: The Abedarians and the Cedaroons live together in a small mountainous country. Tensions between the communities have increased recently, mostly due to increasingly limited resources like arable land and access to clean water. Unemployment is very high among young men in both communities, and violent clashes have occurred between individuals of the two groups in the streets of the capital.

Scenario one: At a large public rally in the capital, a Cedaroon leader says that all Abedarians are “vermin”.

- You are a journalist working for a national radio station. Do you report the speech? If so, how? Is there a difference between hate speech and incitement?

Scenario two: At a cabinet meeting, an Abedarian government minister calls Queen Cedar, the 14th-century ruler considered by Cedaroons the “mother of all Cedaroons”, a “whore”.

- Do you report that particular comment? Does it depend on how the comment was intended (as an insult, as a joke, etc.)? How would it fit in with the rest of your coverage of that cabinet meeting - would it form the lead of your story?

Scenario three: An Abedarian leader makes a public speech to a large crowd, calling on all Abedarians to “eliminate the Cedaroon problem once and for all”.

- What would be your radio station’s approach to this speech?

Scenario four: In a private interview with you, a Cedaroon leader hands you a list of ten ethnically Abedarian villages that he says should be “Cedarised” as soon as possible. “Actually,” he tells you, “this is only ‘re-Cedarisation’, because these villages have always been traditionally populated by Cedaroons.”

- As a journalist, how do you approach this interview? Do you report this list and the names of the villages on it?

ADDITIONAL READING AND REFERENCES

IWPR's website contains many links to issues surrounding peace reporting. See www.iwpr.net; click through to training pages.

The Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society (IMPACS) is a Canadian group producing valuable thinking on the relationship between conflict and media, some of which has contributed to this chapter. See www.impacs.org

International Media Support undertakes assessments of media needs in areas of crisis and transition, and has published a recent report on conflict reporting. See: www.i-m-s.dk

The United States Institute for Peace publishes regular reports on conflict issues, including the role of the media. See www.usip.org. A recent report, in association with the media development group Internews (www.internews.org), reviews media interventions (search on “vulnerable societies”).

Article 19 is a London-based group specialising in legal frameworks for free media. www.article19.org. See in particular their important books on media and conflict in Rwanda and the Balkans.

The Committee to Protect Journalists is a leading press freedom group. www.cpj.org. See also the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (www.ifex.org), which has membership groups around the world.

The International Federation of Journalists is an umbrella for journalists unions around the world, and helps build journalist associations. www.ifj.org

Index on Censorship is a venerable publication and also a busy website highlighting issues of censorship and free expression. www.indexonline.org

The International Center for Journalists is a US-based organisation providing training and other international media development programmes. www.icfj.org

The International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) is an implementor of U.S. development programmes with a profile in media activities. www.irex.org

Search for Common Ground is a conflict-resolution group engaged in many media and peace building projects around the world. www.sfcg.org

Foundation Hironnelle undertakes media and peace-building projects. www.hironnelle.org

The Panos Institute undertakes a wide range of research, training and other journalism support programmes. www.panos.org.uk

International Crisis Group provides excellent regular analytical reports and recommendations on crisis issues around the world. www.icg.org. The Open Society Institute, the foundation of philanthropist George Soros, provides a wealth of information about transitional societies, much drawn from its extensive international programming. www.soros.org.

Human Rights Watch (www.hrw.org) and Amnesty International (www.amnesty.org) are the leading international human rights groups, providing regular reports on violations in crisis areas around the world.

A large number of organisations seek to strengthen peace building in conflict areas around the world, and provide information and analysis on peace processes as well as on conflict resolution generally. These include International Alert (www.international-alert.org), Conciliation Resources

(www.c-r.org), the European Centre for Conflict Prevention and Transformation (www.conflict-prevention.net), the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (www.prio.no) and the Oxford Research Group (www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk).

Reporting the World promotes debate over media coverage and conflict, largely focusing on the responsibility of the international media. www.reportingtheworld.org

For the abuse of media in the extreme, see *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*, by Philip Gourevitch (Picador). Mark Thompson's *Forging War: The Media in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Article 19), and his *Forging Peace: Intervention, Human Rights, and the Management of Media Space*, co-authored with Monroe Price (Indiana University Press), provide important in-depth studies.

Please note that there are countless excellent groups doing media, media development and crisis and human rights oriented reporting, and this is a highly selective list just to get you started. In particular, this list does not include the hundreds of local human rights groups which demonstrate such bravery, or the vigorous local media institutes on the frontlines. The single best resource is your own initiative, plus www.google.com.