

Editorial

Perhaps there is no field of human interaction as active, vivid, and influential as media. It is not only its influence on audiences, but also how it can be used in politics that give media its significance in our social and political progress. This role of media has long been acknowledged. When it comes to peace and conflict or war and stability, media has always been the tool to shape our perceptions. It follows naturally then that when conflicts are to be prevented or when peace is to be built, actors and politicians invest in media to control what 'facts' are presented and how 'realities' are being constructed.

Conflict prevention is essentially a down-top process that can never succeed if ordinary people lack motivation for living in peace and preventing violence. For such a process to succeed, audiences should not only freely express their interest in peace, but they should also be directed to understand others and to building on shared interests. It is from this particular angle that the role of media in conflict prevention attained major significance in the last decade or so. It was the shrewd abuse of media in zones of conflict where media was used by one or more conflicting party to instigate hatred and violence, that the reaction came strongly from experts and journalists alike that media role in building peace should be highlighted and advocated.

In the context of this lively debate over media role in zones of conflict, this issue of ConflictINFOCUS is an attempt to shed light on some arguments and views on media role. In the section on international developments, this issue is not addressing any international development but is rather shedding light on a paper on Peace-Building Media in the Middle East that will be shortly published by RCCP. The paper addresses structural and content factors that can affect the potential growth of Peace-Building Media in the Middle East, and provides a related content analysis of Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya live political programs that addressed the political process in Iraq in 2005.

In the interview section Tête-à-Tête , Dr. Richard Eisendorf shares his insights on the structural environment of media in the Middle East, factors that limit Middle East media from an active role in regional development, and the potential of its role in building peace in the region.

In the Forum, Mr. Ibrahim Mehmeti from the Search for Common Ground in the Balkans shares one successful example of how media projects can foster peace and understanding in zones of conflicts. Mr. Mehmeti's article is of particular interest since it comes from the NGO sphere, which proved to be the perfect intervener for media development in zones of conflict.

As a journalist, Mr. Ahmad Maslamani's article addresses role of Arab media in conflict prevention from the perspective of Arab journalists. He reviews certain political aspects that enhance the biased nature of Arab media in relation to various regional dynamics. This is done after presenting a map of conflicts and another of satellite media outlets in the region and describes. Mr. Maslamani concludes his article with a note on what is needed to enhance Arab media role in conflict prevention. ■

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PEACE-BUILDING MEDIA IN THE MIDDLE EAST: THE CASE OF AL JAZEERA AND AL ARABIYA

Neven Bondokji*

As a multifaceted long-term process, conflict prevention requires contingent efforts of all social, cultural, and political dynamics in zones of conflict. News media in particular have attained significant interest by actors due to its recognized effect in shaping political attitudes and behavioral and cognitive patterns of audiences. This role becomes crucial in contexts of conflicts where parties, whether governments or non-state actors, try to manipulate the media to send across their messages or to exercise their influence on audiences. There have been many examples of media abuse in contexts of conflict. This abuse of media has led to the rise of the concept of Peace-Building media (PBM). This has been addressed generally and with reference to particular regions or conflicts. But the share of Arab media in this attention has been marginal so far.

In an attempt to fill in this gap, the Regional Centre on Conflict Prevention will shortly publish a paper titled 'Peace-Building Media in the Middle East: the Case of Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya.' The paper investigates potentials for PBM in Arab private space media through a number of theoretical chapters and an experimental chapter of content analysis of selected programs of Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya. The theoretical chapters review the concept of PBM, related structural and content factors, and current and required PBM interventions in the Middle East. The content analysis chapter is an exercise designed to show how content clues of conflict can be analyzed in Arab media, and provides an example of PBM training needs assessment. The paper analyzes content of live political programs only that addressed the political process in Iraq in 2005. This choice is dictated by the need to link coverage of the top all-news channels of a recent and crucial conflict in the region. In this way, the paper expands the concept of PBM from the local or national level to a regional one. Despite this overall framework of analyzing PBM potentials and training needs, each chapter analyzes one aspect of Arab private space media that can be read separately and/or in the overall context of PBM.

The Concept of Peace-Building Media

The first chapter presents an overview of the concept of PBM, its historical development, and major criticisms to the concept. As several regions are suffering ethnic and internal conflicts, it is observed that the media is encouraging hatred and violence by spreading hatred messages. Clear examples of such hatred messages came from the Balkans and Rwanda. It became evident then that 'objective reporting' is ineffective to counter 'hate journalism'⁽¹⁾. In response to this decay in media's role in enhancing peace and stability, the term peace-building media or peace journalism came under spotlight.

McGoldrick and Lynch explain, 'Peace journalism seeks to minimize the rift between opposed parties by not repeating 'facts' that demonize or set the stage for conflict'. Based on this understanding, peace journalists seek truth, minimize harm by understanding consequences of their reporting, and understand their role as peace-builders⁽²⁾. This also means that media highlights non-violent approaches and gives equal weight to both war and peace news items.

Few experts have clarified concrete characteristics of hate journalism, which once detected in a media outlet, the need for PBM training is established. Content clues of conflict are clarified in the USIP report Use and Abuse of Media in Vulnerable Societies. 'Clues to conflict' are divided into structural and content factors. The former include reach, diversity, and ownership of media outlets; skills of journalists; and legal aspects of media freedom and protection. Content factors are those that create fear and those that create resignation⁽³⁾. PBM interventions have also been mapped out⁽⁴⁾, while Ross Howard suggested a clear design of PBM interventions. Howard describes five types of interventions: rudimentary journalism training, responsible journalism development, transitional journalism development, media-based intervention, and intended outcome programming. Each is designed to meet certain needs and describes intervention mechanisms and training tools⁽⁵⁾.

The first chapter⁽⁶⁾ also reviews the arguments for and against PBM particularly objectivity and selectivity. A number of journalists assert that objectivity as defined in journalism classics is unachievable⁽⁷⁾. 'Objectivity' is manipulated by factors like access of information, media legislations, goals of media outlets, personal background of journalists, and time pressures. Each of these is addressed extensively to support the cause of PBM. More than objectivity, it is selectivity that determines what

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- (1) Hate journalism can be defined as reporting that stresses group differences, dehumanize others and use stereotypes to inflame conflict and encourage violence.
- (2) McGoldrick, Annabel & Lynch, Jake. 'What is Peace Journalism?' Activate. IMPACS, Winter 2001, p. 6.
- (3) Frohardt, Mark and Temin, Jonathan. 'Use and Abuse of Media in Vulnerable Societies' USIP Special Report 110, October 2003, p. 3-8.
- (4) One example is Howard, Ross et al. The Power of the Media: A Handbook for Peacebuilders. Utrecht: European Centre for Conflict Prevention, 2003.
- (5) Howard, Ross. An Operational Framework for Media and Peacebuilding. Canada: IMPACS, 2002.
- (6) The actual organization of chapters in the published paper may change slightly compared to what is described here.
- (7) Several such arguments by journalists are cited in Gowing, Nik. Media Coverage: Help or Hindrance in Conflict Prevention? New York: Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, September 1997.

and how content is presented to audiences. Selectivity is, however, dictated by the market value of news. It is well established now that conflict and violence sells in media. Conflicts are immediate, stunning, and catchy. This represents the major challenge for PBM. Peace does not sell; peace is boring; peace is a long-term process. For PBM to flourish, media outlets should acquire the skill to sell peace.

Structural Clues of Conflict

The second chapter examines structural aspects of Arab private space channels. The discussion on both structural and content factors are based on 'clues of conflict' as discussed in the Use and Abuse of Media in Vulnerable Societies and the five types of interventions discussed by Howard in An operational Framework for Media and Peacebuilding. These factors are discussed with a particular emphasis on the most influential Arab all-news space channels Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya. Structural clues are reach and accessibility, plurality, and the legal environment.

The paper reviews a number of statistics and facts about the expansion of private space channels and the general mistrust of Arab audiences in government owned media, which has led to the wide acceptance to private media. The paper analyzes factors that make Al Jazeera audience range from 30-50 million viewers⁽⁸⁾, and explains how Al Arabiya comes in second position after Al Jazeera among the 13 all-news Arab private space channels⁽⁹⁾. The paper also clarifies how factors like the political orientation of audiences, and channels' own political affiliation determine size of audience.

The paper then discusses a number of legal aspects that affect media freedom and performance in the region in general and the effect of these factors on the Arab private space media in particular. These include media legislations, legal protection of journalists, and professional unions and associations of journalists. In addition, it reviews some facts about Arab and external pressures on these channels. In this regard, the paper argues that if PBM is encouraged, tensions between governments and the media will relatively reduce.

Factors Affecting Content

Structural factors attain their significance because of their influence on content. Apart from the structural factors usually addressed in PBM studies, the paper addresses in the third chapter the two structural factors of ownership and advertising. Both determine much of the content of Arab private media channels through an interrelation of political agendas that marginalizes commercial interests. Ownership, on one hand, determines the political trend and line of argumentation. Advertising, on the other hand, works to the benefit of government restrictions; governments ban advertising in a media outlet if it doesn't comply with desired frames. The paper devotes much of this chapter to discuss these factors in relation

to Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya. These factors are addressed generally and are then linked to their effect on the potential growth of PBM.

In order to clarify power networks and complexities of ownership, the paper reviews the history of how Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya were established. The unique case of Al Jazeera is examined with reference to the political situation and the reform agenda in Qatar. Several examples are brought in to clarify how and why Qatar distances itself from Al Jazeera content despite its generous funding. Then the paper reviews the ownership patterns of the Saudi Media Empire (SME) of which Al Arabiya is the only all-news channel. When it comes to the SME, the paper clarifies extensively how the political or cultural vision of SME owners shapes all content even the entertainment part.

The political and personal motives behind establishing media outlets in the region have undermined the importance media usually gives to advertising revenues. Sakr notes that media outlets are operating in the region despite harsh losses in advertising⁽¹⁰⁾. They are sustained by abundant funding from owners who want to foster their political and cultural roles. This is due to the immature advertising business, generous funding, and government pressures through advertising bans.

In its analysis of how ownership and advertising can affect the rise of PBM in the region and in these two channels in particular, the paper explains how ownership and advertising can encourage the rise of PBM in the region contrary to the case in other regions. While the major challenge facing PBM is the market logic of 'bad news sells,' advertising is still marginal and immature in the Arab region. Thus, it is unable to manipulate content. Advertising, till now at least, would not affect the rise of PBM. The paper also clarifies how owners and their links to power centers might be interested in PBM to preserve the status quo that provides owners with power. Peace will stabilize regimes, but media will stabilize it through advocating both peace and reform. Journalists and editors, however, should be trained excessively on how to balance PBM interest with their role in advocating reform and evaluating government policies.

Content Clues of Conflict

The fourth chapter refers to content clues of conflict as described by Frohardt and Tamin who classify them in two categories. The first are elements that create fear like 'focus on past atrocities and history of ethnic animosity, overemphasis on certain grievances or inequities, and a

(8) Available online at: <http://wwics.si.edu/subsites/ccpdc/pubs/media/medfr.htm>

(9) Schleifer, Abdallah. 'Satellite TV and democracy.' *Bitterlemons international*. Edition 19, Vol 3, May 2005.

(10) Sakr, Naomi. 'Privatization Alone Will Not Loosen Arab Governments' Grip on Broadcasting' *Arab Reform Bulletin*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. p. 4-5.

shift towards consistently negative reporting;” while the second are elements that portray conflict as an eternal process, and that discredit alternatives to conflicts⁽¹¹⁾. These elements can escalate conflict, and they are directly derived from group differences. Francis Rolt explains that conflicts are fed by over emphasis on language, religion, and ethnicity differences. Politicians manipulate the media to stress group differences and inflame conflicts⁽¹²⁾.

However, content clues of conflict should be analyzed with flexibility because they change in significance depending on the context and nature of a particular conflict. There is no perfect list of content news of conflict and interested actors, researchers, or interveners should utilize this flexibility to arrive at realistic assessment of media role in instigating conflict and its potential role in fostering peace. In the same way, the content analyzes chapter detects the use of content clues of conflict that are partially determined by the context of the conflict in Iraq and the overall political setting in the region.

Content Analysis of Programs

The paper refers extensively to the only study in the Arab World that can be categorized under PBM. This study by Jan Jibrán Karam, which does not refer to PBM as a concept, reviews coverage in four daily newspapers in Lebanon during the Civil War and describes how their coverage, words usage, and editorial lines have inflamed the war further⁽¹³⁾. The paper explains findings and methodology of that study with the particular purpose of providing the English speaking community with an overview of the first example of such a study in the region.

Before the actual content analysis, the paper also reviews the political scene in Iraq and the region in order to understand the overall context of the period of analysis and to understand why the analyzed content clues of conflict have been chosen among others. Thus, the paper presents a background on sectarian divisions that erupted in Iraq, the arguments for and against the constitution, federalism, and other dynamics.

In his discussion of transitional media development, Howard describes content analysis as one tool to measure the need for PBM interventions. The experimental part of the paper employs content analyses to analyze live political programs that addressed the political process in Iraq in 2005. The political process is reduced here to include the first Iraqi elections in January 2005 and the formation of the Iraqi constitution in August 2005. Thus, the analysis is restricted to episodes of live political programs in the periods of (January and February 2005) and (mid-July to mid-September 2005). This allows analysis for programs for one month before and one month after key events in the political process in Iraq. Totally, a number of 34 episodes of these programs have been analyzed.

The analysis attempts to answer question like:

1. Are these programs pieces of hate media or peacebuilding media with regards to the internal Iraqi scene and relations between sects?
 - Are these programs creating fear that encourages sectarian divisions in Iraq through focus on history of animosity between sects, and focus on certain grievances?
 - Are these programs creating resignation through discrediting alternatives to conflict and arguing the inevitability of conflict?
2. Are these programs pieces of hate media or peacebuilding media with regards to the regional setting creating tension on the region?

Peace-Building Media Interventions

The last chapter reviews PBM initiatives around the world and media related initiatives in the Middle East to emphasize lessons learned from other regions and to identify gaps in the Arab region. The paper uses the results of the content analysis and the review of PBM initiatives to identify what training needs should Arab journalists and media outlets receive. After describing training needs, the paper advocates involving journalists in assessing their own training needs and designing the training component. Investing in this sense of ownership of PBM concept and development in the Arab region is very important, if such training is to have any impact. It is journalists who should acquire the motivation for and the belief in PBM in order to “sell” the interest in peace.

The paper hopes to address PBM needs early enough in a region torn with conflicts. It achieves this by providing practitioners and interested actors with an understanding of the structural and content environment of Arab private space media, and an example exercise of how to map PBM needs in these channels. ■

(11) Sakr, Naomi. “Why and Wherefores of Satellite Channel Ownership in Sakr, Naomi. From Satellite Realm: Transnational Television, Globalization and the Middle East. Accessed on website of Arab Culture and Civilization at http://arabworld.nitle.org/texts.php?module_id=13&reading_id=1029

(11) Frohardt, Mark and Temin, Jonathan. “Use and Abuse of Media in Vulnerable Societies” USIP Special report 110, October 2003, p 6-8.

(12) Rolt, Francis. “The Media: Reading Hearts and Minds” in *People Building Peace II*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005, p. 176.

(13) Karam, Jan Jibrán. “Lebanese Journalism in Turmoil of War, Controversy for the New Century”. The study was presented in a seminar organized by UNESCO in Beirut. The printed copy appears in Karam, Jan Jibrán. *Arab Media towards the Twenty-First Century*. Beirut, Al Jeel Publishers, 1999. (Arabic)

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. RICHARD J. EISENDORF
EXPERTS ON MIDDLE EAST MEDIA AND PEACEBUILDING
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1. *This issue of ConflictINFOCUS is addressing Arab media from a conflict prevention angle. To start with, how will you describe the current scene of Arab media in its structural and content aspects?*

- There are three faces of Arab media that are apparent today. One is characterized by the popular satellite television stations which combine Western media values with popular Arab sentiments - and range from Al Jazeera's and Al Arabiya's 24 hour news format to the hugely popular entertainment programming such as MBC's Who Wants to Be a Millionaire and LBC's Star Academy - a cross between the pop music hit show, Star Search, and the reality program Big Brother. Another popular format that bridges news and entertainment are the distinctive Arab talk shows that feature guests presenting opposing points of view on topics of the day. The often heated arguments that ensue give viewers an insight into some of the passions that characterize the region. The popularity of these stations can be gauged by the degree of government and societal sanction they receive. Al Jazeera prides itself on being kicked out of several Arab capitals; causing others to recall their Ambassadors from Qatar, their patron state; and most dramatically, causing the Algerian government to black out the capital when they were airing a particularly sensitive program with dissidents critical of the state's human rights record. Even the entertainment programming raises alarms with conservative viewers who are intolerant of the liberal values that these shows profess.

Another face of Arab media is state controlled broadcasting, which dominates in practically every Arab state today. Lebanon, Iraq, and the Palestinian Authority are the only Arab states that allow private terrestrial (non-satellite) broadcasting. The airwaves are dominated by state broadcasters, which largely operate by the same antiquated rules of a generation ago: run by the ministries of information, they are public relations tools of the state. In general, they tend to minimize internal conflicts, publicize government actions and meetings, and air few dissenting voices. While the satellite stations force them to compete with more entertaining programming and have helped break some taboos for the local broadcasters, their bureaucratic and political structure holds them back from really competing.

Print media in many ways occupies a different space in Arab intellectual thought. While distribution is relatively limited compared to television viewership, newspapers are read by the elites and are the space where serious issues can receive serious consideration - and where in many countries there is a greater tolerance for dissenting viewpoints. In Egypt, Algeria, and Kuwait, for example, one can find a variety of newspapers which present the

voice of opposition - these papers have relatively limited distribution and are easily overshadowed by their official nationally distributed counterparts.

2. *There have been several discussions on media role in democracy and reform particularly in the Middle East. At the same time, the Arab world is witnessing a quantitative boom in Arab media, while the qualitative aspect remains poor with few exceptions. How will this boom affect any potential role for media in reform and democracy in the region?*

- Free media is an essential ingredient in any democratic society, providing a check on government and societal excesses. While its emergence is not likely to be well moderated in any emerging democracy which may not have had any tradition of freedom of expression, its development is critical to the democratic process. International support, to be effective, needs to address many levels of media development: from the operating environment, including the laws that protect freedom of expression and responsibly limit media's excesses such as slander and character assassination through spreading disinformation; to training of editors in the technical and managerial skills for operating effective media, and practical training for journalists that leads to more professional media coverage. Accurate, factual reporting should be protected; and punishments for violating media ethics should be appropriate to the transgression, rather than such severe sanctions that serve to prevent media from seriously addressing societal ills.

Lebanon presents an example of a media market that experienced an extraordinary boom in local media during its civil war, where most media outlets were affiliated political party and confessional interests. In that environment, political interests dominated over accuracy and professionalism in news coverage, and in the eyes of the government, threatened to destabilize the fragile peace that the country had achieved. In 1996, regulation reduced the number of licensed television broadcasters to just 6 and radio to 16. True, freedom of expression needs to accompany professional and accurate reporting; the worst examples - such as the hate media that drove Serbs and Bosnians to massacre one another and that provided the justification for atrocities between Hutus and Tutsis in Burundi - must be avoided. The challenge is to create an independent media market that both protects the independence of journalists and monitors potential excesses.

3. *Debates on the role media in conflict zones are currently addressing media role in conflict prevention and/or resolution in areas of overt or previous conflicts. How will you comment on such arguments that media can*

actually prevent or resolve conflicts? And how?

- Ross Howard describes a variety of roles that media can play in conflict resolution - from accurate observer of events, serving to educate an un- or mis-informed public on the one hand; to creative proactive programming such as soap operas that consciously seek to teach lessons on the other. In conflicts that are characterized by deep divisions and suspicions between communities and which are often accompanied by highly partisan media, we must recognize that media has already become a party to the conflict. In that environment, I believe there is a place for the full spectrum of media support that maintains professional journalistic ethics of accuracy and truth

In the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinian Parliament held closed-door deliberations, as is customary in newly formed government institutions throughout the Arab world. One relatively short term initiative sought to introduce a degree of transparency to the deliberations, and accountability to the elected leaders. The Ramallah-based Institute of Modern Media undertook to broadcast the Palestinian Authority parliamentary sessions, and 'sneaker' them to a network of local broadcasters in the Palestinian authority - literally distribute tapes by hand to dozens of stations each of which had a broadcast range of just a few miles. This simple exercise - which is so routine in the US with C-Span and full open media coverage available for almost any local or national governmental deliberation - was revolutionary in the Arab world. Such exercises, while a challenge for those in power in revealing the power struggles that take place and diminishing the air of authority of the leader, are to be applauded.

4. *How will the boom in private Arab media influence any trend to strengthen Arab media role in conflict prevention, or do you think that current patterns of private media ownership will not have any tangible effect on media role in this direction?*

- The real development of private media is in satellite television. Though still not willing to break taboos with their own patrons (Al-Jazeera for instance is funded by approximately \$100 Million per year by the Government of Qatar and does not include much coverage of Qatari politics), they do take a rather equitable view of other Arab states. Providing accurate coverage in Arabic of local developments, opening the airwaves to points of view different from the governments, or giving a platform for those in the opposition has great value for the long-term development of a peaceful society.

When speaking of media and peace, a distinction needs to be made between the suppression of freedom of expression, done in the name of short-term prevention of conflict and the long-term value of shedding light on a conflict and its components so that solutions can be found to addressing them - which sometimes entails a period of disruption in the status quo stability.

States which limit press freedoms often do so initially in the name of national security or in the face of foreign or internal enemies. However, this then becomes the norm. Egypt for example has maintained restrictive laws limiting press expression based on 25 years of a state of emergency. Such suppression of expression may help maintain peace and order on the surface, but contributes to festering discontent and instability that will eventually find its way to the surface.

5. *What kind of structural environment is still needed in the Arab world to enhance media role towards conflict prevention?*

- I would address the question towards what structural environment is needed to enhance freedom of expression. The regulatory environment in most Arab states greatly limits free expression. While all Arab states are signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which stipulates 'the right to freedom of opinion and expression,' and many Arab constitutions reinforce that principal, there are also laws which simultaneously restrict that right.

At the highest levels of government, the principle of free expression needs to be reinforced and each of the draconian laws reassessed. Jail terms for journalistic pursuits should be eliminated; financial sanctions on journalists and their media removed; pressure, scare tactics and intimidation of journalists made illegal.

International support for media initiatives that enhance professional freedom of expression should be welcomed; in some states, it is forbidden because of suspicion that international aid is backed by political ideologies that aim to subvert the authority of the state. Professional media development should be looked at in its own light and on its own merits.

6. *Peace journalism and peace-building media refer to peace-oriented media; both argue that journalists should take the side of peace and the interest of the average people. This view contradicts with the traditional view that media should be neutral and objective? How will you comment on objectivity in media in this regard?*

- Media support should respect the values and ethics of professional journalism. However, this does not deny that there can be a place for media that supports the peaceful resolution of conflicts or development within society. This fact is not lost on Middle Eastern journalists, who live with the reality of regional and internal conflicts. There is a strong tendency of media to identify with a national or ethnic or party cause, especially in times of regional and domestic conflict. We see evidence of this in the United States as we do in the Arab world.

To take a stark example, if Israeli media portrays only images of Palestinians as terrorist and Palestinian

media portrays Israelis solely in terms of occupation and suppression of Palestinian rights; then a bias already exists in the media, reflecting and reinforcing popular sentiment. Yet, the truth remains that not all Palestinians are terrorists, and not all Israelis are out to crush Palestinian aspirations.

In recent years, even at the height of conflict some media distinctions are being made both between the political ideologies on each side and the practices of different political actors - the result is an acknowledgement that one can find common cause for peaceful settlements in both camps. By giving them some credence in the media, people on both sides are able to see greater potential for peaceful solution.

When each side is so demonized in the media, the resulting image leaves little room for the possibility of a solution. When media adds more texture to the picture, by showing the other in greater detail and acknowledges (not creates) the diversity, then I would argue that they are operating by more professional standards and, at the same time, contributing to a greater potential for a peaceful outcome.

7. *What do you think is required for peace-oriented objectivity to prosper in Arab media? Is Arab media ready for such a role? Should peace-oriented objectivity be implicit in media outlets or should they advocate this role?*

- Production partnerships should be encouraged. Between the US and the Arab world, a great deal of misunderstanding exists, and is mutually reinforced by media on each side. However this does not have to be the case, and professional media can play an invaluable role without compromising their objectivity.

8. *There have been a number of media-related initiatives in the Arab World. These include Search for Common Ground training projects, EMP journalism training and awards of Euro-Mediterranean Partnership various programs, and several other NGOs working on local and national levels. While these have helped improve the relatively strict legal media environment in Arab countries, many believe they have had little effect in enhancing the overall media situation in the Arab world. How will you comment on this?*

- Trainings in and of themselves have little impact because journalists, however professional, return to their own media that still operates by the old rules and have to answer to the same bosses.

As mentioned above, a successful media development program will seek to work at every level: from the media laws, the licensing, the bodies overseeing licensing, the unions which self-regulate the field, the management of media (who are often appointed and employed by the government), to the exposure of journalists to diverse

issues and people, and the professional training they receive. No initiative should be seen as applying an ideal model onto any country - but can effectively support local efforts to reform and improve the system.

There is strong interest in the media community in the Middle East to see a more professional effective and accountable press. Thus there is plenty of opportunity to support that interest by providing technical assistance to develop the sector, illuminating comparisons to media laws in other states and regions, and training individual journalists and managers. Professional media support can have small and significant affects in opening the space for freedom.

If one journalist is trained to justify their assertions with multiple sources; if one journalist more accurately quotes interviewees, letting the comments tell the story rather than sharing the journalists' own point of view; each of these steps contributes to the flow of more accurate information.

Successful initiatives can take the form of professional journalism training, co-productions of television series, rewards which encourage and acknowledge professional coverage, and grants which enable a media institution to develop feature stories on topics that are not in the headlines but which are important to the democratic development of society.

9. *Finally, what kind of recommendations you will give to policy makers, journalists, and civil society in the Arab world with regards to improving the role of media in conflict prevention and peace-building?*

- Public-private partnerships - particularly in new media such as satellite television and internet. Media is most effective when it is simultaneously guided by its professional ethics and driven by the commercial interests that demand that a successful program capture a large audience and therefore bring in advertising dollars.

Many publicly funded media initiatives motivated to help local media meet the challenges of a democratic society have limited impact and productions sit on the shelf, rarely seeing the light of day. Yet, any successful commercial production, by its nature, will be seen by a significant audience share. Those two principles can be combined to produce professional media that also strengthens peace, freedom and rights in the Arab world. Those who provide international aid should seek opportunities to partner with leading media outlets rather than shy away from it; and local governments and media in the Arab world should critically assess these opportunities to see what kind of programming can be produced that enhances understanding between peoples, educates publics, and simultaneously entertains, thus ensuring a sizable audiences. The decade old 'Dialogue with the West' program a co-production of Middle East Broadcasting Center and Voice of America is such an example. ■

MEDIA BRIDGES FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION: BREAKING INFORMATION WALLS

Ibrahim Mehmeti*

It is difficult to say when it started, but it is easy to notice that in different parts of the world, ordinary people are familiar with the term ‘Balkan powder keg’. Even if this term has never been clearly defined or explained, when Balkan is mentioned people always imagine conflict, war, hatred, instability, etc. It is difficult to say whether these perceptions stem from the fact that this region has been a main area of many wars throughout history, or the fact that there have been so many disputes and conflicts around this same region starting from the time of Roman Empire, Crusades, Ottoman Empire, both World Wars, two Balkan Wars and the decay of Yugoslavia. Although there are currently few disputes between the newly formed countries of former Yugoslavia, and with other countries in the region, the negative history including the small disputes is considered as a potential trigger for future conflicts.

Success Story of Preventive Diplomacy

Starting from this historical context and just when the war in former Yugoslavia started, the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE)⁽¹⁾ decided to start a preventive mission in former Yugoslavia in order to prevent escalation of the conflict. In June 1992, CSCE/OSCE established its mission in Belgrade and several small offices in Kosovo (but few months later this mission was expelled by the Milosevic's regime). As soon as Macedonia proclaimed its independence from Yugoslavia, CSCE/OSCE established its spillover mission in this country in September 1992. This was followed by the United Nations Preventive Deployment mission (UNPREDEP), which was established in Macedonia in January 1993. The main role of this mission was to prevent spillover of the expected conflict in Kosovo to Macedonia. The UN forces were deployed along the border that divided Macedonia from Kosovo and Serbia. As result of all these efforts, Macedonia is the only country that left the former federation without war.

This success story of conflict prevention started a whole new debate about preventive diplomacy which, in the case of Macedonia, proved to be more efficient and at the same time much cheaper compared to missions deployed after conflicts had already started. ‘Prevention’ as a term became very ‘fashionable’ and frequent in the vocabulary of the EU and UN institutions.

Analyzing the beginnings of the conflict in former Yugoslavia, almost all analysts agree that the media was the main trigger of the inter-ethnic hatred that led to armed conflicts. Media in former Yugoslavia,

particularly those close to the former Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic, launched their campaign of mistrust and prejudice against ‘others’, i.e. other ethnic groups in former Yugoslavia. It was only a question of time when this negative energy burst into open conflict. By taking the side of their ethnic political elite, media could not play its original role to build communication between traditionally confronted ethnicities. As a result, they couldn't avoid miscommunication, which soon led to open conflicts.

After the war, which took hundreds of thousands of lives and left more people homeless or displaced, it was necessary to start the process of reconciliation. This couldn't be done without a transformed media. In some parts of former Yugoslavia, such as in Slovenia and Croatia, the transformation of media went really fast because there has been a democratic nucleus during the communist regime. But in the rest of former Yugoslavia as well as in the rest of the Western Balkans, this process took much longer. In order to foster this process, the international community put big efforts through NGO projects to change the situation in favor of more professional media. To achieve this goal it was important to find an acceptable approach, which will bring together different ethnicities including those who have been openly fighting each other in the recent past. Many organizations have been working in the Balkans in the last 10-15 years. Certain results deserve respect. One of the biggest projects in this period is the Bridges for the New Balkans (often named as Balkan Bridges) project conducted by the International NGO Search for Common Ground (SFCG). This project and its approach can serve as an example of conflict prevention with long lasting effects.

Cross-Border and Cross-Ethnic Information

Bridges for the New Balkans was initiated in 2000 soon after the Kosovo war. It was the largest regional cross-border and cross-ethnic media project under auspices of Stability Pact. The project's main goal was to (1) help in ‘healing’ wounds from previous wars in former Yugoslavia and at the same time to (2) re-open the process of communication to prevent future conflicts. SFCG believes that media can play crucial role in preventing future conflicts and that the best way to achieve this is to promote cross-ethnic or cross-border journalism.

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(1) Later in the Budapest Summit in December 1994, CSCE changed its name into Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

Implemented in cooperation with well-known media partners from participating countries and carried out by a multiethnic team, SFCG developed a unique project, which helped in reshaping the media environment in Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia.

Bridges for the New Balkans established a network of the largest or most influential newspapers and television stations with national coverage throughout the region. Through a series of specific conflict resolution training for journalists, editors and other media professionals, this project aims to transform their attitudes towards conflict and create a network of media which can play important role in future transformation of their societies and of the region in general. Over 500 journalists, opinion makers and other media professionals from the participating countries have addressed various issues that affect life of people in the Balkan region these range from borders, transition from communist into plural society, fight against corruption, position of the children, position of the women, to Euro-integration process and other important issues. Through addressing these topics from a civic and professional point of view without indulging in politicized debates, this project managed to create a positive atmosphere of cooperation and mutual trust among all participants in the project. Close cooperation among all editors, who mutually prepared these articles or documentary films, was the crucial aspect of creating a team spirit among professionals, who before this project didn't have any experience in cross-border or cross-ethnic journalism.

In the frames of Bridges for the New Balkans, SFCG published the regional magazine 'Karavan', the regional TV series 'Balkan Kaleidoscope', the local magazine published in Macedonia 'Multiethnic Forum' and the radio and TV local exchange in Macedonia 'Search for Common Macedonia'. Karavan is a periodical magazine published and distributed in Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, Bulgaria and Serbia in the languages spoken in these countries, plus and English version dedicated to the international readership. Since 2000 'Karavan' has been published and distributed as a supplement to daily newspapers in these countries in over than 2 million copies. This makes this magazine the largest media bridge among nations and ethnicities in the Balkan region.

The latest public survey conducted in Macedonia by Strategic Marketing and Media Research Institute from Skopje shows that 74% of those who have read or browsed through the latest issue of Karavan, published in October 2005 and which addressed the democratization process and Euro-integration in the Balkans, liked the topic. A percentage of 82% of those who read the magazine favored its concept. Two third of the readers of the magazine (65%) stated that 'Karavan' helped clarifying the issue

which was addressed, while 60% believe the magazine helped people from the region to better understand each other. 72% consider that cooperation in the region can be ameliorated through media.

Another public survey conducted in February 2006 about the local magazine Multiethnic Forum, published and distributed in Macedonia, shows that 93% of those who have ever read or browsed through Multiethnic Forum think the concept of the magazine is likable. 55% of those who have ever read or browsed through Multiethnic Forum estimate the quality of the articles to be better than those in other mainstream magazines. 68% of those who have ever read or browsed through this magazine believe that they could find out information that could not be found in any other magazine. 83% of those who have ever read or browsed through Multiethnic Forum believe that it contributes to objective and high quality informing of the citizens, and another 85% believe that it can have a positive impact on improvement of inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia.

Importance of the Approach

Similar results have been achieved with other components of Bridges for the New Balkans. If these results are compared with those of the local mainstream media, one can detect huge difference in the perception of the citizens. For example, according to a research done by UNDP in the frames of Early Warning Report from March 2005, 44,2% of the citizens of Macedonia consider that media very often contributes to ethnic tensions. An additional 44,2% considers that this negative role of the media in inter-ethnic relations is practiced occasionally if not regularly.

If we try to know what makes Karavan particularly interesting for the public compared to the mainstream media, we will come to a simple conclusion. Bearing in mind that the same people, who produce the mainstream media in the participating countries, produce Karavan and other media products of Bridges for the New Balkans, the logical conclusion is that it is the difference in both concept and approach. Another important factor regarding the good acceptance and success of this project in the region is the fact that the editorial board of Karavan as well as editorial boards of all other components of this project enjoys complete editorial freedom. The sense of ownership of the results of this project that editors feel and absence of hidden agendas behind the project are no doubt what makes them feel more responsible and, thus, more constructive.

People in the Balkans have been living in the atmosphere of animosity for many decades and communication among them has been limited to news agencies and official tracks among states. This limited news exchange has been burdened with negative selection in a way that

increased information barriers that divide people. The general public in these countries was used to have more information from the external world rather than from neighboring Balkan countries.

Bridges for the New Balkans organized an information circle where all participants were in equal position bringing authentic information from the ground. Instead of sending a reporter to a foreign country to report on issues which s/he hardly understands beyond the surface, editors would engage local journalists or experts of the respective field addressed. In order to ensure that the public in other countries participating in the project will understand the information that comes from a certain country in the project, each article has to be approved by editors from all other countries. For example, an article from Kosovo was in the same time edited by an editor from that country, but also from an editor from Serbia, Macedonia, Albania, etc. In this way, it is ensured that the final product reaching readers or viewers is not a propaganda tool full of prejudices nor it is a superficial article or a documentary whose author/maker lack in depth knowledge of the issue s/he is addressing.

Reactions from the general public as well as statements from editors and authors who participated in this project prove that people in the Balkan are very keen to get authentic information from the neighborhood. This made this project very popular among the general public as well as among the media professional who were very happy to communicate with readers outside their country.

Another very important outcome of this project is the fact that participating media professional are using the informal network, which was created as result of this project, in their daily work. Editors from different countries, who were sitting in the same editorial board, would call each other to check certain information that would come out from other sources, or to ask for an article or opinion regarding events in different countries. By this, it was proved that cross-border or cross-ethnic projects like Bridges for the New Balkans can serve as a really effective bridge of communication among people in regions swept by hostilities such as Balkan particularly if participants feel there is no hidden agenda behind the project and that they have ownership over the results. Needless to say, that such a model of cooperation among media outlets can prove effective in other regions with similar history. ■

MEDIA AND POLITICAL CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST: AN OUT OF THE BOX PERSPECTIVE*

Ahmad Al Maslamani**

Media and politics witnessed a turning point in 1991 with the rapid political changes at several levels. First was Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the Second Gulf War in the spring of 1991. Simultaneously, the US-backed Madrid Peace negotiations were taking place and the succeeding Oslo Accords. These were followed by the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty. In addition, the concept of the New World Order emerged in the address of former US president George Bush in the summer of 1991. Added to all these were also the permanent presence of foreign forces in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. Then came the sanctions imposed on Iraq. All these factors have actually led to the creation of Al Qaeda by the end of the 1990s.

That era also witnessed rapid and remarkable changes in media. The Second Gulf War led to the rise of Cable News Network (CNN), which transmitted to viewers across the world war scenes in an unprecedented manner. Egypt's satellite channel was also launched followed by the Saudi-owned Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), both making way to a wave of Arabic satellite channels now exceeding 200.

First: A New Map of Conflicts

The current map of the Middle East conflicts combine old and new factors. Conflicts fall in three categories:

1. Conflict with Imperialism
2. Conflict with Zionism
3. Conflict with reactionary forces

Conflict with imperialism was manifested in revolutions in Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, and Yemen, in addition to the Suez War in 1956. As for the conflict with Zionism, it went through five wars of 1948, 1956, and 1967 followed by the Egyptian-Israeli guerilla war. The last war of these was the war of 1973. As for the conflict between the so-called 'revolutionary trends' and 'the reactionary forces', this one has led to media scuffles between the regime of Jamal Abdul Nasser in Egypt and monarchial regimes in the Arab world.

In the 1980s advocacies to the conflict with imperialism and reactionary forces came to an end, while those related to the Arab-Israeli conflict persisted. The conflict with Iran, which also came to surface at this stage, preoccupied Middle East politics until the outbreak of the First Palestinian Intifada in 1987 and the end of the Iraqi-Iranian war at the end of 1980s.

The 1990s kept the Arab-Israeli conflict under spot light,

but added to it new dimensions:

1. Upsurge in religious and sectarian conflicts; there has been an increasing sentiment between Muslims and Christians on one side, and between Sunni and Shiite Muslims on the other. The later reached its peak after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003.
2. Increased ethnic and tribal tensions; this is mainly embodied in the Kurdish question in Iraq and its unfolding in Syria, in addition to the general problem in Sudan particularly the Darfour problem.
3. Increased religious-secular disputes; this was embodied by the rise of Islamic fundamentalism like establishing Al Qaeda in 1998. Al Qaeda has occupied most of global media political content in the last few years. This intensified with Al Qaeda transformation from an isolated fanatic political and religious organization into an icon of potential conflict between two major civilizations.
4. Increased internal conflicts; this has been marked with the rise of conflicts between internal political groups in each country. Some examples of these include the power struggle in Iraq, the semi-coup staged by Syrian then Vice-President Abdul Halim Khadam against President Bashar Al Assad, the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, the conflict between Fatah and Hamas in Palestine after the latter has attained control, and the increased confusion in Egypt with regards to the future president.

Second: A New Map of Media

Media in the Arab world went through five generations of satellite channels and three waves of printed press. The satellite generations can be described as follows:

The First Generation: Conservative satellite channels

The first private Arab satellite channel was launched in Morocco under the name of M2 in 1988, followed by Egypt's satellite channel and MBC in the early 1990s. This generation was politically and socially conservative. Despite its professional effect, these channels had no clear political impact.

The Second Generation: Al Jazeera Channel in Qatar

Al Jazeera was established in Qatar in 1996. Most of its staff came from the unsuccessful experience of launching a BBC Arabic channel. The new satellite news channel caused a widespread political impact and dominated Arab media and political discourse.

* This is the English translation of the Arabic original.

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The channel has rapidly developed. Starting with an annual budget of around \$50 million -the channel does not declare its exact budget, it is now running on a budget of more than half a billion dollars. Al Jazeera developed to include six channels, two websites, and a major research center. The six channels include Al Jazeera general channel, Sports channel, the live channel, and the children channel. Currently, Al Jazeera is also preparing to launch its international English Channel and a documentary channel.

Al Jazeera audience is estimated to be 30 million people during prime time. The editorial policy of this channel presents a combination of revolutionary and conservative thoughts and a mixture of national, religious, and liberal trends.

The Third Generation: Abu Dhabi and Al Arabiya

In year 2000, Abu Dhabi Channel owned by the government of Abu Dhabi attained a remarkable place among other channels. The semi-news channel achieved significant success competing with Al Jazeera, which started four years earlier. Abu Dhabi provided major news coverage of the war in Afghanistan and reached the peak of its success during the Third Gulf War. It attained the first place on a global level in transmitting exclusive live images of the war.

Al Arabiya embarked on the news race during the Third Gulf War, with Abu Dhabi retreating steps back, leaving the contest between Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya.

Meanwhile, Lebanon Broadcast Corporation (LBC) mustered its efforts with the London-based Al Hayat newspaper to upgrade its news center and catch up with the context. However, LBC did not last long and went back to compete on entertainment content.

The Fourth Generation: Video Clip Channels

Arab satellite media is crowded now with video clip channels. These are low budget type of channels mainly broadcasting video clips of Arab and Western pop stars. The most famous of the almost 50 channels of this type are the Egyptian Melody channels.

The Fifth Generation: Religious Channels

This wave of channels started simultaneously with video clip channels. The first among these is Iqra channel, which is part of the Arab Radio and Television network (ART). It was followed by Al Majd, Al Fajr, and Al Risala, all of which Islamic Sunni channels. Some Shiite channels started after that in addition to the Al Haya Christian channel.

This is generally the map of Arab satellite channels map that total more than 200 channels.

The printed press has experienced three waves of journalistic work. Those waves are parallel in terms of time. The first is the religious press, which is an old wave that became more decisive on issues of secularism and modernism. The second is tabloid press mainly concerned with explicit or implicit pornographic material whether textual or photographic. The third is the wave of political and ideological press where political interests prevail at the expense of professionalism. These are marked with criticism of their own regimes, the United States and Israel all at the same time.

Third: The Political Role of Journalists and the Journalistic Role of Politicians

A global phenomenon came to surface of mixing the roles of journalists and politicians. In some cases, politicians turned into writers and talk show hosts, while journalists into politicians. Some journalists have occupied top government positions: prime ministers, ministers, ambassadors, special advisors to kings and presidents. Others entered general elections and formed their own parties.

Mixing roles of politicians and journalists stems from the nature of both the media and politics, especially with the media becoming a major dimension of strategic and political decision making on issues of global effect. Some would argue that media has replaced politics. In other words, many foreign policy decisions are only made for their media impact, not the actual or political effect.

Therefore, a particular school in foreign policy has emerged as a result of the common practice now of running international affairs through television networks instead of making real changes. This seems to be a natural development, especially with the rise of television as a central part of our daily life. The role played by television in taking major political and strategic decisions, is merely an invention of a well-designed political and intellectual opportunity that came to a global dominance⁽¹⁾.

As for the Middle East, events like the Third Gulf War, the ousting and arrest and trial of Saddam Hussein, the assassination of Hariri, the protests in Beirut, the interview with Syrian vice-president in Al Arabiya, terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia and Jordan, Muslim Brotherhood and Kifaya movement problems in Egypt, and the Sudan problem are all best-selling television products regardless of politics.

The political role of media in the Arab world has expanded to the extent that there is a conviction that media has replaced politics and media is responsible. It is no longer an observer or monitor.

(1) Said, Mohammad Al Sayyed. "World transformations between Politics and Media". Al Ahram Daily. October 9, 2005. (Arabic)

Fourth: The Role of Media in Aggravating Conflicts in the Middle East

There are a number of understandings of media role when analyzing it in contexts of conflicts. First, there is the understanding that media should only report the truth as it is without any emission. Professionalism should be the only criteria for reporting. Advocates of this school believe professionalism does not face problems in setting plans of actions or designing editorial policies. Terms and idioms are subject to lingual rules, rather than political. This proposition suits news media most rather than the opinion content of media.

The second proposition suggests that media should surpass neutrality and impartial reporting of events. Instead, the media should carry a national and moral message, and delivering the message should transcend professionalism and neutrality. The role of media is perceived to be of more importance. Advocates of this school can exaggerate or incite in order to communicate the 'moral' or 'political' message.

In the case of the Arab media the ideological school dominates over the professional one. When an Arab news media is professional in transmitting news, credibility is given to its ideology.

A number of factors feed the existing bias in Arab media. Some of these factors will be highlighted here:

1. The Biased Western Media; the obvious bias in the European and American media has fostered the ideological Arab media. Most of the content translated into the Arabic media from the Western one, whether televised, print material, research, or political discourse indicate misunderstanding of various issues in the region. These include the Arab-Israeli conflict, the situation in Iraq, the crisis in Darfour, and other issues of religion or cultural value. Although the Western media present thoughts, visions and media material that support the Arab view, the translated content usually reflect the mainstream media which lacks adequate understanding of the Arab World. Generally, this Western understanding of the Arab world has bolstered the ideological school at the expense of the professional one in the Arab media scene.
2. Internal Crises in the Arab Regimes; most Arab countries suffer critical internal crises. These include political, economic, and social aspects like national gross product, income per capita, growth rate, inflation rate, general budget, unemployment, drugs, healthcare problems, housing, and education. As a result, many Arab countries divert public attention from these problems by adopting a rigid stand on some foreign policy issues. On the Palestinian issue, for example, a number of countries will give it high significance in media but would fail to give any genuine support for the Palestinian party.

Conflict zones in the Middle East have indeed preserved the status quo of internally challenged regimes. Based on this approach media in Arab countries has deviated from objectivity and has in many occasions ignited these conflicts further to preserve the status quo.

3. Poor Professionalism; there is a shortage in the region in media training programs. Many journalists lack proper education and training. Usually, lack of professionalism will feed in the ideological stands. Ideology relies on slogans rather than sophisticated professional skills. It is the case that some journalists resort to politicizing the news and avoid neutrality when they find that a particular news item is not newsworthy or not appealing to the audience.
4. Prevalence of the Conspiracy Theory; recognizing the fact that prevalence of conspiracy theory is difficult to be measured scientifically, one can detect how dominant is conspiracy theory in Arab media particularly after Sep. 11th and April 9, 2003. In this regard, the study 'Conspiracy Theory: Rules of Nonscientific Thinking in the Arab Region,' conducted by Al-Ahram Center for Strategic and Political Studies concludes that conspiracy theory became a phenomenon that controls the mindset of the Arab people in an epidemic way that spread through all levels, even when it come to explaining current political developments. As a phenomenon, this marks an aggressive set back from basics of both modernity and analysis⁽²⁾.

Fifth: The Role of Media in Defusing Conflict in the Middle East

Media has become a tool to implement foreign policy. Media diplomacy competes in its effect on international relations with political diplomacy. This has led to confrontation between journalistic professionalism and interests of media owners.

Several Chinese sources, for example, reveal that 77 American television networks have used for their coverage of the War in Iraq in 2003 materials produced by the American administration and major American companies connected to it⁽³⁾.

In the Arab world, newspapers and satellite channels follow policies of their owners. The numerous Iraqi satellite channels, for instance, propagate views of political factions and sectarian and social interests which these channels represent. In Lebanon, private channels serve particular sects or factions that own it such as Future and Al Manar channels.

We are in dire need to separate ownership from

(2) 'Conspiracy Theory: Rules of Nonscientific Thinking in the Arab Region,' Seminar. Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Al Ahram, Cairo June 25, 1006.

(3) The Public Chinese Daily, the Arabic website, June 20, 2006.

management, and sectarianism from media content, and to separate political interests from professional necessities. Furthermore, these media outlets should upgrade their finances to attain independence from funding sources that try to control media content.

If this is achieved, professionalism would prevail over ideology. This in turn would lead to better understanding of the nature of current conflicts and the roles of involved actors. Understanding conflicts as they are would defuse them. A better understanding is what Arab media should seek and work for if conflicts in the region are to be contained.

However, this does not mean that the Arab media replaces politics. They work hand in hand, but media is helpless if current political situations in the region continue. Media role will be more complicated if injustice in international relations prevails along with absence of international law and UN resolutions. If media chooses to contain conflicts, this mission will be questioned on basis of their loyalties because of the absence of these international principles in the region.

The situation becomes even worse when the absence of justice and law coincides with untalented politicians who are unable to think innovatively for the future, and with political powers subject to extortion at the expense of pragmatic political interests.

An election in the region are merely a mechanism to re-produce what actually exists. Similarly, media merely reports what actually exists. Media is military in war situations; media is of fundamental religious trends when extremism prevails in society; media is liberal and professional with political flexibility when operating in a diverse society. In fact, news editors will not put a fashion show when hearing ambulance all over the place, and they would not broadcast a documentary about olive trees when generals and militiamen swarm the streets.

Professionalism in media -not ideology- can become a major supporter to defuse conflicts in the region. This can be achieved by providing precise knowledge and sound perception. But all this follows politics. Media cannot replace politics.

About ConflictINFOCUS:

Conflict In Focus is a bi-monthly online bulletin designed to provide busy readers in the EMP policy community and interested general public with a concise and regular update on the current state-of-affairs of the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict in the Middle East. Conflict in Focus is compiled by RCCP/IAI, drawing on multiple sources including the resources of our software (CCP).

Conflict in Focus alerts readers to situations where, in the near future, there is a particular risk of new or significantly escalated conflict. In specific, the newsletter is divided into three sections. The first section includes accounts of

and comments on EU developments and policies during the previous two months in the field of conflict prevention.

In its second section, Conflict in Focus summarizes recent developments in a conflict analysis perspective, using our CCP model of analysis, where the overall situation in each case has significantly deteriorated.

The third and final section aims at providing experts and researchers from the Partnership with a forum for common work and collaboration. Toward this end, the newsletter will host, in each issue, two short articles, one by a European scholar and the other by a Middle Eastern one on conflict prevention in the Middle East, with the final aim of provoking a debate on such sensitive subject.



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