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# SPECIAL REPORT

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# Use and Abuse of Media in Vulnerable Societies

## Summary

- Conventional media—radio, television, and newspapers—usually play a positive and informative role in society. However, there are many documented cases of media being manipulated by actors intent on instigating violent conflict.

- Analyzing the "clues to conflict" in vulnerable societies can enable policymakers to identify societies that are particularly vulnerable to media abuse and decide on the most appropriate type and timing of media interventions.

- These clues are divided into two categories. *Structural indicators* concern media outlets, media professionals, or government institutions concerned with media; these indicators can include media variety and plurality, degree of journalist isolation, and the legal environment for media. *Content indicators* concern content designed to create fear (such as a focus on past atrocities and history of ethnic hatred) or content designed to create a sense of inevitability and resignation (such as discrediting alternatives to conflict).

- In response to the clues to conflict, a number of opportunities for intervention are suggested. These media interventions fall into three categories: *structural interventions,* such as strengthening domestic and international journalist networks; *content-specific interventions,* such as issue-oriented training; and *aggressive interventions,* such as radio and television jamming.

- Early interventions are less expensive and more effective than later interventions, because by the time media abuse is widespread there may be little or no recourse.

- The international community should undertake four actions: media in vulnerable societies should be monitored; there should be greater collaboration between media organizations and conflict resolution organizations; media organizations need to build a better case for monitoring and early intervention and need to encourage appropriate donor support; and a systematic review of media behavior in vulnerable societies should be conducted to enhance the international community's understanding of this important dynamic.

# Introduction

In the wake of the deadly and destructive civil conflicts so prominent in the 1990s, academics and practitioners have increasingly focused on predicting and preventing civil conflict, rather than responding to and recovering from it. Accordingly, there have been various methodologies developed to identify societies in which violent conflict is likely to occur, and significant research has been conducted into the root causes of civil conflict. That analysis has focused on identifying and understanding such causal factors as economic decline, longstanding grievances between groups, and the ethnic and religious make-up of society. But the use of the media to promote violent conflict has too often been devoted insufficient attention.

This analysis focuses on the role of media in vulnerable societies, which are defined as societies highly susceptible to movement towards civil conflict and/or repressive rule. This often describes societies in developing countries and countries in transition, almost always those struggling to make the transition from authoritarian to democratic government. It frequently describes multi-ethnic societies as well, which, over the past decade, have proven more likely to fall victim to conflict than societies with greater ethnic homogeneity. Media can be manipulated in an effort to move a society toward conflict or toward non-democratic rule. This analysis focuses specifically on the former, but recognizes that an equally thorough analysis could focus on the latter.

In contrast to active use of media outlets to promote conflict, media can also contribute to conflict *involuntarily*. Such passive incitement to violence most frequently occurs when journalists have poor professional skills, when media culture is underdeveloped, or when there is little or no history of independent media. Under such circumstances journalists can inflame grievances and promote stereotypes by virtue of the manner in which they report, even though their intentions are not necessarily malicious and they are not being manipulated by an outside entity. Such a scenario is less common than that in which media are actively manipulated, but it is no less dangerous.

Perhaps media have generally been overlooked in analyses of conflict because, on their own, they are rarely a direct cause of conflict. Nonetheless, as part of a larger matrix of factors, media can be extremely powerful tools used to promote violence, as witnessed in Rwanda, the former Republic of Yugoslavia, the former Soviet republic of Georgia, and elsewhere. As Jamie Metzl observes, "mass media reach not only people's homes, but also their minds, shaping their thoughts and sometimes their behavior" ("Information Intervention," *Foreign Affairs,* November–December 1997, p. 15).

Media behavior can also provide indicators of impending conflict, as there are certain characteristics of media structure and media behavior that tend to precede conflict, some evident early enough that a media intervention may be feasible. If preventing conflict is the goal, then influential tools such as media must be closely examined, their pernicious effects mitigated and positive output magnified. The various approaches to precluding or stopping the use of media as a tool to promote division and conflict range from training journalists to advising legislators on drafting media legislation. But for such training or advising to be effective the role of media in moving societies toward or away from conflict needs to be clearly understood.

The remainder of this analysis is divided into two sections. The first section identifies indicators within media structure and content that may be used to inform policymakers and media organizations as to which societies are especially vulnerable to abuse. The second section analyzes types and methods of media intervention. Finally, the authors offer recommendations for future action.

## Clues to Conflict

Using a series of indicators developed below, it is possible to identify societies in which media outlets are especially susceptible to abuse or may be in the early stages of manipulation. These indicators are divided between those dealing with *media structure* (the way the media sector is set up) and those dealing with *media content* (the articles and programming that media outlets produce). It should be understood that none of these indicators constitute either sufficient or necessary conditions for media manipulation to occur, but when a significant portion of them are evident media outlets are especially vulnerable to abuse.

## Structural Indicators

Structural indicators can be divided into three categories: indicators concerning media outlets themselves; indicators concerning the professionals—journalists, editors, managers, and owners—associated with media outlets; and indicators concerning the structure of government institutions dealing with media.

### Media Outlets

These indicators concern the configuration of the media landscape in a particular country and the influence that media outlets exert over society. They include reach, accessibility, and plurality.

The *reach* enjoyed by media outlets is critical for obvious reasons: if the reach of a particular outlet is minimal, then its capacity to influence a society will also be limited. Factors affecting media reach include the strength of radio and television signals and the breadth of newspaper distribution.

Media *accessibility* is equally important. Even if media are widely available, people still need to have access in order for outlets to be influential (recognizing this fact, the Rwandan government handed out free radios prior to the 1994 genocide). For newspapers this means that people must be literate in the language of the newspaper and have the means to acquire a newspaper, whether that means purchasing one, borrowing one from a friend, or other means. For radio and television this means owning or having access to a radio or television and understanding the language of the programming. In developed countries media access is taken for granted, but in many developing countries such access is not easily achieved.

The degree of media *plurality* is critical because with greater competiton in the media it is increasingly unlikely that one or a small number of media outlets will have the capacity to dominate. The degree of plurality applies not only to the number of outlets but to the number of divergent voices emanating from those outlets. In other words, a multitude of private stations all playing music, or all espousing similar messages, does not constitute plurality. The society in which media can exert the most influence, both positive and negative, is one in which media outlets enjoy wide exposure but have relatively few competitors.

An important variable here concerns whether the media scene is dominated by either state-owned or private outlets, or if there is a balanced mixture of the two. Particularly if the media scene is dominated by the state, there is often little or no check on media behavior. Another important variable is the receptivity of the population to diversified independent media. This is often taken for granted in developed countries, but it is important to recognize that in many societies there is little or no history of media diversity and independence. Under these circumstances, when media diversification occurs one of the consequences can be the type of situation that developed in the former Soviet republic of

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Georgia, where suddenly vacant media space was filled by outlets operating from distinctly nationalist and ethnic perspectives.

## Media Professionals

The second set of indicators concerns media professionals. This includes not only journalists, but also the individuals behind the scenes, such as editors, station managers, and owners. The indicators are journalist capacity; journalist isolation; the political, ethnic, religious, and regional composition of the media corps; and the degree of diversity in the ownership of media outlets.

*Journalist capacity* refers to journalists' ability to carry out their charge with a reasonable degree of professional integrity and skill. The level of journalist capacity is critical because more capable journalists tend to make media outlets less susceptible to abuse. One important variable is journalism training. Questions that should be asked in any society that may be vulnerable to conflict include: Is there a school of journalism or communications in which journalists are trained? Do journalists enter the profession with the skills needed to report responsibly? Another important variable concerns the degree of fact-checking in place: Do journalists write unsubstantiated stories filled with rumors? Or are the origins of most stories clear and are they attributed to credible sources? The answers to these questions go a long way towards determining the susceptibility of journalists to abuse.

The second indicator is the *degree to which journalists are isolated,* physically and metaphorically, from their domestic and international colleagues. An awareness of international standards of professional journalism provides a basis from which journalists may feel justified, beyond their own personal conviction, to resist manipulation, because they enjoy a network of support and feel part of a larger community of journalists who adhere to a common standard. Not only are they emboldened by the support of a larger community of colleagues, but they may also be able to use the network to communicate with the outside world if media freedoms come under attack. Consequently, actors with the intent of manipulating media may be more hesitant to do so if every time they apply pressure behind the scenes their actions are made public by the local or international media.

The *political, ethnic, religious, and regional composition of the journalist corps* is influential because if media outlets are dominated by people affiliated with a particular political party, of a certain ethnicity or religion, or from a particular region, these people may be able to collaborate to exert disproportionate control over media content. In extreme cases they may be able to co-opt the media in an effort to promote the narrow interests of their group. The best safeguard against this is to ensure diversity in the journalist corps. Particularly in traditional societies where ethnic bonds are given great deference, simple peer pressure and an emphasis on the importance of responsibility to clan or group can facilitate media manipulation. In such societies, it may be relatively easy for individuals holding revered positions in their groups to manipulate members of the same group who work as journalists. They can sometimes do so using threats or bribes, without having to revert to overt coercion.

Along the same lines, *diversity in the ownership of media outlets* is critical because, ultimately, it is the owners who exert the most control over content. A society is especially vulnerable to media abuse when all or a significant portion of media outlets are owned by one or a small number of people, particularly if those people are of the same ethnicity or religion, support the same political party, or are from the same region. Even a balanced mix of state-owned and independent media outlets may not be sufficient to guard against abuse, because the "independent" outlets may have strong ties to the government (for

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example, in Kazakhstan some independent outlets are owned by the president's daughter). It is also important to determine whether there exist more subtle links between influential members of particular groups and media outlets, such as discrete financial relationships.

## Government Institutions Concerned with Media

Perhaps as important as the structure of media outlets and the people involved with them are the independence and effectiveness of government institutions concerned with the media, particularly the legislature and judiciary. The degree of media independence and freedom established in a country's laws, and the degree to which those laws are enforced, defines the space in which media are allowed to operate. The relevant indicators here are media's legal environment and changes in media controls.

Two very different types of legislation are critical to maintaining a healthy legal environment for media: legislation protecting journalists and media outlets from abuse and guaranteeing their freedom to operate without government interference; and legislation, such as libel and slander laws, protecting private individuals from being the subject of unjustified insult or falsehoods appearing in the media. The former allows journalists to operate without fear of government coercion, unwarranted prosecution, or personal harm. If such legislation is in place and consistently enforced, then journalists and media outlets are not likely to be very susceptible to abuse. But if such legislation is absent, journalists and media outlets are essentially "fair game" for the government, meaning that the state is free to attempt to manipulate them however it chooses. Journalists, in turn, have few options for recourse.

Regarding the latter, if private individuals have no effective avenue for registering complaints against the media, there are few options available to people or groups that may be unfairly criticized or demonized in the media. The absence of the possibility of punishment emboldens individuals associated with hate media outlets and may encourage the formation of such outlets, because the risks involved are reduced. To counteract this effect, mechanisms for punishment, such as libel or hate speech legislation that protects both individuals and groups, can be beneficial.

The history of past media legislation strongly affects the receptiveness of a population to contemporary media legislation. If there has not been media legislation in the past, and if a population is unfamiliar with the purpose of media legislation, the legislation is unlikely to be very popular, and therefore will probably not be very effective. Also important is the manner in which past governments dealt with media. If there is a history of government using media to its advantage with little concern for media rights and freedoms, it is more likely that media abuse will be attempted again in the future. It is also less likely that, without intervention, effective media legislation will be adopted.

Recent research into the causes of civil conflict suggests that societies in transition (those that are in the process of liberalizing and moving towards a more open, democratic dispensation) are more vulnerable to conflict than societies that have already gone through a transition or those awaiting one. In other words, it is societies "on the way up" that tend to experience civil conflict. A common characteristic of liberalization is relaxation of controls on the media, and while this is generally a positive development there are dangers that accompany it. Newly opened media space can quickly be filled by media outlets that mirror political or ethnic centrifugal forces promoting conflict. Thus, a relaxation of media controls can sometimes actually lay the groundwork for future conflict.

On the other hand, a tightening of media controls can also be a precursor to conflict, as it can be indicative of a government's intentions. For example, the Zimbabwean government imposed tight restrictions on media towards the beginning of its violent land seizure initiative and its effort to ensure Robert Mugabe's victory in the 2002 presidential elections. By forcing these measures through parliament, Zimbabwean authorities telegraphed their intentions.

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## Content Indicators

The previous section described the circumstances under which media outlets may be vulnerable to abuse and manipulation; this section analyzes indicators in media content that suggest that manipulation is taking place. Content is critical to the overall analysis because media content helps shape an individual's view of the world and helps form the lens through which all issues are viewed. The content indicators presented here can be evident early in the manipulation process, at a point where intervention may still be feasible. However, once media manipulation is widely apparent it may be too late, and interventions may yield little or no benefit.

Media content indicators are divided into two categories: those intended to instill fear in a population, and those intended to create a sense among the population that conflict is inevitable. Each category is analyzed individually below, though there is significant overlap.

### Content Creating Fear

The construction of fear is likely to be a component of any effort to use media to promote conflict. In Rwanda prior to the genocide a private radio station tried to instill fear of an imminent attack on Hutus by a Tutsi militia. In the months before the most recent conflict in Serbia, state television attempted to create the impression that a World War II–style ethnic cleansing initiative against Serbs was in the works. Throughout the 1990s Georgian media outlets sought to portray ethnic minorities as threats to Georgia's hard-fought independence. In all three cases these efforts were at least partially successful, as many people subscribed to these "imminent" threats, though there was only flimsy evidence provided to support them. When such reporting creates widespread fear, people are more amenable to the notion of taking preemptive action, which is how the actions later taken were characterized. Media were used to make people believe that "we must strike first in order to save ourselves." By creating fear the foundation for taking violent action through "self-defense" is laid.

When assessing the construction of fear one must be circumspect, though, because there is an important distinction between content that criticizes a person or group in a manner that is simply degrading (as seen in many Western tabloids) and printing or broadcasting information that is clearly intended to create a fearful reaction. While the former can lay the groundwork for the latter, it is most often the latter that increases the likelihood of conflict. Four strategies commonly used to create fear are: focus on past atrocities and a history of ethnic animosity; manipulation of myths, stereotypes, and identities to "dehumanize"; overemphasis on certain grievances or inequities; and a shift towards consistently negative reporting.

A *focus on past conflicts and on a history of ethnic animosity* is an important tactic for spreading fear. By highlighting the fact that violent conflict has occurred in the past, and that the same groups behind violent acts then are suspected of planning them now, the potential for future conflict can appear much greater to media consumers than it actually is, and the means and capacity for carrying out such atrocities more attainable. Media can be used to make the point that "they did it before, they can do it again." Such a message creates the impression that preemptive action is necessary, almost a responsibility, and that such action is really just self-defense. This message provides an immediate rationale for violent action against someone who may have done nothing to cause such an attack. For example, for Georgian media outlets in the early 1990s "the perceived or imagined historical roots and origins of the two ethnic groups [attempting to secede] appeared to be far more important than any attempt to report upon or analyze what was actually unfolding on the ground at the time" (Giorgi Topouria, "Media and Civil Conflicts in Georgia," in Alan Davis, ed., *Regional Media in Conflict,* Institute for War and Peace Reporting, London, p. 19). While it might be difficult to attack a neighbor with whom one has shared good relations for some time, once that neighbor is "depersonalized" and the positive individ-

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ual history is replaced by the negative group history, the attack is no longer against an individual but against what he or she represents. In some minds this justifies such an attack.

The *manipulation of myths, stereotypes, and identities* in the media can provide further legitimization of conflict. This often occurs through the dehumanization of members of the "other" group. Frequent references to Tutsis as "cockroaches" in the Rwandan media are an example of this phenomenon. As soon as people in the other group are perceived as "less than human," engaging in conflict with them, and killing them, becomes easier to justify. A related strategy is to portray members of a particular group as "irrational" or "unpredictable." This provides additional justification for preemptive action by creating the impression that one's own group must act first before the others have the opportunity to do something "irrational." Yet another strategy is to portray members of the other group as ruthless killers who have it in their nature to murder. Once this impression is created and propagated, preemptive action to avoid such killing can be seen as the only option.

An *overemphasis on certain grievances, inequities, or atrocities* in the media can create the impression that circumstances are worse than they really are and that a particular group is more victimized than it actually is. Especially if the overemphasized grievance or inequity is particularly sensitive, such as a religious issue or an issue concerning the use of natural resources (for example, oil in Nigeria's Delta region), excessively negative reporting can be particularly inflammatory. The overemphasis adds fuel to the fire by creating the impression that a group is being intentionally discriminated against and that the situation is particularly dire, even though neither of these impressions may be accurate. Discrimination may be present, but the point is that the size and scope of the discrimination may be exaggerated in the media. Thus the "victimized" group is given added incentive and justification for reprisal, regardless of whether their grievances are actually legitimate. For example, in Sierra Leone, Amadu Wurie Khan observes that "those newspapers and radio stations supporting the government provided graphic details and exaggerated portrayals of the burning and looting of towns and villages, and the maiming and killing of civilians perpetrated by the RUF [Revolutionary United Front rebel group]. Very few and in most cases no reports were made of appalling atrocities committed by government troops" ("Journalism and Armed Conflict in Africa: The Civil War in Sierra Leone," *Review of African Political Economy,* 1998, p. 589).

In similar fashion, *a shift towards consistently negative reporting* can give the impression that the situation in a country is so dire that only radical action will halt and reverse the country's decline. The critical element here is change; if the situation has been bad from the start and consistently negative reporting is the norm, then it is not likely to be inflammatory. But a significant shift in reporting toward a decidedly negative and pessimistic tone creates the impression that the country's situation is worsening considerably and provides justification for people or groups to stop and reverse that slide by taking decisive action, including violence.

## Content Creating Inevitability and Resignation

Just as media outlets have been used to create a pervasive sense of fear, they have also been used to convince people that conflict is inevitable. This leaves media consumers resigned to the notion that conflict will happen, and when such resignation is prevalent, efforts to prevent conflict tend to be seen as futile, which makes them increasingly unlikely to succeed. By convincing people that conflict is inevitable, those manipulating the media create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Consequently, people convinced of the inevitability of conflict are much easier to move to violence. Two strategies have been used to create this sense of inevitability: portraying conflict as part of an "eternal" process, and discrediting alternatives to conflict.

*Portraying conflict as part of an "eternal" process* is a frequently used strategy for creating the impression that conflict is inevitable. This often occurs when media promote

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"primordial identities" that suggest that people of different ethnicities have, since the beginning of time, been in conflict with one another, have never co-existed peacefully, and are somehow pre-ordained to be in perpetual conflict. Rarely, if ever, is this actually the case, as virtually every ethnic conflict involves groups that have lived together peacefully at one stage or another. Conflict in the Balkans, according to Christopher Bennett, "is a tale not of 'ancient hatreds,' centuries of ethnic strife and inevitable conflict, but of very modern nationalist hysteria which was deliberately generated in the media" (*Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse: Causes, Course, and Consequences,* Hurst, London, p. viii). But journalists intent on inciting conflict, or journalists who are simply poorly trained, sometimes ignore this fact, choosing instead to focus on periods during which groups have been antagonistic or in conflict with each other. This sort of selective media memory creates the impression that groups have constantly been in conflict, when in reality they have not. Once this impression is created, though, the logical extension is that these groups will continue to be in conflict and cannot co-exist peacefully. This notion further justifies conflict, giving the impression that conflict is inevitable and that there are no peaceful alternatives. Thus little thought or effort is devoted to pursuing such alternatives.

A similar strategy for promoting the inevitability of conflict is to *use media to discredit alternatives to conflict*. For example, Alison des Forges observes that Rwandan radio "seized the opportunity to impress upon Hutu that Tutsi could never be trusted and that any form of power-sharing, such as that specified in the Arusha Accords, could never work" ("Silencing the Voices of Hate Radio in Rwanda," in *Forging Peace: Intervention, Human Rights, and the Management of Media Space,* Edinburgh University Press, p. 241). In the former Soviet republic of Georgia, according to Topouria, "incessant rumors [in the media] emphasized divisions and suspicions between opposing sides. These wild, unconfirmed reports thus helped to kill off any attempt at reconciliation until it was too late" ("Media and Civil Conflicts in Georgia," p. 21). If alternatives to conflict are discredited in the media, people are left feeling that conflict is the only feasible option.

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## Opportunities for Intervention

The previous sections established guidelines for identifying situations in which the structure of the media makes outlets vulnerable to abuse and societies in which media abuse is in its early stages. This section describes strategies for media interventions designed to prevent and counter media abuse.

The term "intervention," as it is used here, does not denote any sort of military or armed initiative (with one exception in the segment on "aggressive interventions"). Rather, the term refers to support for the development of diverse, pluralistic independent media outlets giving voice to a variety of views and opinions. Such interventions are not carried out by soldiers or peacekeepers, but by journalists, professional media trainers, and non-governmental organization (NGO) workers.

Media interventions are divided into three categories: structural interventions (affecting the structural indicators identified above), content-specific interventions (directly addressing the content produced by media outlets), and aggressive interventions (using force or prohibiting media outlets from operating).

## Structural Interventions

> *The most effective strategy for strengthening a professional media sector and protecting its content from biased influence is through reforms in media structure.*

The most effective strategy for strengthening a professional media sector and protecting its content from biased influence is through reforms in media structure. Structural reforms have many advantages over interventions that target only content. If carried out early enough they can prevent media abuse from taking place. Structural reforms can also go a

long way towards obviating future attempts to manipulate the media during periods of social stress. Once in place, these reforms are no longer dependent on foreign assistance, so they tend to maintain legitimacy and build popular support. Eight types of structural intervention are detailed below.

### Strengthening Independent Media

Enhancing the ability of independent media outlets to resist unwanted influence from the government or elsewhere is critical to developing their ability to avoid abuse and manipulation. This strengthening is often a product of media plurality and longevity, both of which make using media to incite violence increasingly difficult. Plurality creates strength in numbers; with a variety of diverse independent media outlets in place, if one or even several are co-opted the effect is mitigated. Through media expansion and diversification hate media can be marginalized, as it is, for example, in the United States, where hate media exists but is virtually irrelevant. Longevity contributes to the strength of independent media because the longer independent outlets are in place the more ingrained in society they become. Consequently, if such ingrained outlets are abused, or shut down, the public outcry is likely to be substantial.

One of the most prominent examples of independent media thwarting government attempts to manipulate information comes from Serbia under Slobodan Milosevic, where the independent radio station B92 is credited with playing an instrumental role in informing and mobilizing the population. Though it was periodically shut down and had its signal jammed by the authorities, during the war in Serbia B92 was able to air reports from the field and advise young people on how they could avoid the draft. It also succeeded, with the help of the BBC, in connecting Serbs and Montenegrins by allowing them to speak to each other on uncensored radio programs.

### Developing Journalist Competence

Developing journalist competence involves two basic objectives: enhancing the physical resources available to journalists (such as computers and vehicles), and enhancing human resources (such as writing ability, editing skills, and contextual knowledge). Regarding the former, such physical resources are important for obvious reasons, and without them journalists' ability to perform their duties is compromised. Furthermore, if journalists lack these resources they are likely to be more susceptible to co-optation and corruption. For example, if they are poorly paid (or not paid at all) it is easy to imagine how journalists could be bought off by actors with malicious intentions. Similarly, if journalists have no form of transportation, one could envision how they could be bribed with rides and vehicles.

Human resource needs are more difficult to define and to provide because they are not tangible goods. The principal method of enhancing human resources is through journalist training, often through peer-to-peer training conducted by journalists. While the results of such training are often difficult to quantify, the benefits accrued by journalists can be substantial. Even with the latest technology, ultimately it is the quality of the journalist that determines the quality of the journalism. Improving the technical or material components of the medium does not, in itself, improve the message, which is of greatest importance. Consequently, addressing human resource needs must be a top priority.

An added benefit of developing journalist competence is that more competent journalists are more likely to investigate and report on actors attempting to abuse the media and to expose their intentions, which can deter or thwart their efforts. Investigative journalism can be critical to blocking efforts to incite conflict and can debunk some of the inflammatory myths and stereotypes propagated in the media.

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### Working with the Legislature and Judiciary

Another type of structural intervention involves working with the legislature and judiciary, the government institutions responsible for protecting citizen's rights, including the rights to free speech and independent media, both of which are enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Particular attention should be paid to the legislature because of its capacity to make and modify legislation. In many societies susceptible to media abuse the legislation necessary to prosecute media abuse—including legislation that protects the independence of private media outlets and legislation that addresses hateful and antagonistic media content, such as slander and libel laws—is absent, ineffective, or poorly designed. Thus it is important for experts in comparative media to work with legislatures to aid them in crafting such legislation. Individual legislators deemed sympathetic to the notion of legislation addressing media abuse can be identified and encouraged to introduce new legislation or modify current laws deemed ineffective.

Once the necessary media legislation is in place, it is equally important that the judiciary has the capacity to enforce the laws. If it is effective and impervious to corruption, the judiciary can provide an important check on media abuse because it can punish actors attempting to use the media maliciously. But in so many of the societies recently succumbing to conflict and in those vulnerable to doing so, rule of law is weak and the legal system is riddled with bribery and corruption. Among the recommendations by the NGO Article 19 following the Rwandan genocide was that government "should seek to strengthen the judiciary to ensure that the necessary steps can be taken within the domestic legal system to prevent the broadcasting of incitement to violence" *(Broadcasting Genocide,* Article 19, London, p. 171). But often the government is poorly equipped to do this, and assistance from the NGO community can make a significant difference. NGOs should focus on strengthening the mechanics of the judiciary and on reducing the susceptibility of judges to corruption. The victims of media abuse need to have the means to combat such abuse and to protect themselves, and their most obvious and potentially effective recourse is through the judicial system.

### Promoting Diversity in the Journalist Corps and Media Ownership

As discussed above, if there is little diversity among journalists and owners of media outlets, the journalists and outlets are more vulnerable to abuse by members of the dominant group or groups in society. The way to combat this effect is clear—promote diversity—but strategies for doing so are not as obvious. One strategy for promoting diversity among journalists is to impress upon the management and ownership of media outlets the importance of diversity and how they can benefit from it, both commercially and through content improvements that result from employing more diverse personnel. Another strategy is to work with members of certain political, ethnic, religious, or regional groups to help them become involved with media (though this runs the risk of appearing to favor one group over another). A third strategy is to create incentives for outlets to promote diversity in their hiring, for example by having donor organizations provide more support, financial or otherwise, to outlets that are more diverse.

Promoting diversity in media ownership is even more complex, because in a market economy it would be difficult and ill-advised to set quotas concerning the demographics of media ownership. Worse yet, in a non-market society, the government controls the media outlets and is unlikely to be convinced of the merits of diversity in ownership. Nonetheless, there are ways to both aid individuals in creating new private media outlets and encourage governments to allow for such outlets. One route is through bilateral aid, particularly aid channeled from development banks through national financial institutions via leasing and other financial support, intended for developing small and medium-sized businesses. The role of NGOs could be to lobby donor governments to designate part of such

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loans for the development of media enterprises, while simultaneously exerting pressure on the regulatory environment. Such a two-pronged approach could convince governments that it is in their interests to allow, and even promote, diversity in media ownership.

### Licensing and Regulation of Media Outlets

Another strategy concerns the media regulatory environment. A balance needs to be struck so that starting a media outlet is not an overly complex, time-consuming, bureaucratic task, but nor is regulation lax enough so that almost anybody can have their own radio station or newspaper. Complete state control over media is not the solution, but neither is the total absence of regulation. Some type of government oversight over the licensing process is often in order, but one that is shielded, to the extent possible, from heavily political or corrupt influences. Again, it may be difficult for governments, particularly in developing countries still building and consolidating their democracies, to effectively design and implement such regulations. Assistance and encouragement from the domestic and international NGO communities can provide a strong impetus for establishing regulations, and international assistance can provide a blueprint for how to implement such regulation. Bilateral relationships between donor and developing countries are also important, as they often involve assistance to government institutions and advice on the overhaul of bureaucratic processes, which can strongly affect the domestic regulatory environment.

### Strengthening Domestic and International Networks

Because journalists in vulnerable societies are often isolated from both domestic and international colleagues, establishing and strengthening journalist networks can be an effective strategy for combating media abuse. Domestically, this can be accomplished through journalist organizations or unions. Such organizations exist, at least in name, in almost every country, but are sometimes ineffective or dormant. When effective, they serve various purposes, among them providing journalists with information and ideas on how to report in a particular context (especially when there are personal safety issues involved), defending journalists' rights and freedoms, and providing journalists with legal counsel. All of these services are critical, particularly in a society where the state is wary of independent media and eager to crack down on independent journalists.

International journalist networks can be just as important. Such networks can help journalists operating in difficult circumstances feel part of a larger community of journalists around the world, which can strengthen their resolve. These networks can also inform journalists on what may be considered international standards of journalism—though there does not exist a single, comprehensive how-to guide to journalism, there are best practices to which most journalists try to adhere, and an awareness of these best practices can be beneficial for journalists operating in vulnerable societies.

A more programmatic form of international networking involves making international media, such as CNN or the BBC, accessible to journalists in vulnerable societies. This already occurs in many countries; for example, the BBC is available throughout Africa, and Voice of America and Radio France International are widely available as well. But there remain societies in which international media are scarce or non-existent. The benefits of making international media accessible to journalists are two-fold: sometimes journalists use the content verbatim, but even if they do not, they are better informed and are exposed to a different perspective, which helps them in their own reporting.

### "Demand Side" Intervention

Too often the "supply side" of the media equation (meaning the news and information that is supplied by media outlets) is closely scrutinized at the expense of attention paid to the "demand side" (the demand by individuals for that news and information). Address-

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ing one but not the other produces only a partial solution, though. A problem often found in societies in which media abuse occurs, and in societies with underdeveloped media in general, is that media consumers—everyday citizens—rarely consider and question the source and credibility of their news. Instead, they take for granted that what they hear on the radio and read in the newspapers is accurate and unbiased. This can be a dangerous tendency, especially when media outlets are weak and have been co-opted by special interests. For example, des Forges observes that in Rwanda prior to and during the genocide, "most ordinary people saw no reason to call into question their practice of taking the radio as the voice of authority" ("Silencing the Voices," p. 246). Part of the reason that critical analysis of the media was absent was that prior to the genocide most Rwandans had never been exposed to alternatives to state-owned media, so they were conditioned to believe everything they heard from the few state-controlled media outlets to which they had access. It was also due to the fact that most Rwandans had little understanding of the bias inherent to all media outlets.

The prescription is increased public education and enhanced awareness of how media outlets operate. People need to understand that media outlets report from a particular perspective, one that may represent interests contrary to their own. B92 in Serbia tried to create such an understanding. "The idea was to provoke the public to start thinking about the information that they were receiving," according to one of the station's managers. "So don't be just a passive recipient of this information, think about it and decide, do you believe it or not?" ("Bringing Down a Dictator: Rock and Resistance," www.pbs.org). People should also understand that there is no need for them to be limited to one or a handful of media outlets all operating from similar perspectives, as is the case when the media scene is dominated by the state; they have a right to demand variety and plurality in the media. Generating a "national dialogue" on the role and responsibilities of media helps to engender such an understanding. This dialogue can involve call-in radio and television shows devoted to discussing the media as well as newspaper editorials on the subject. If media outlets are unwilling to engage in such dialogue for fear of advocating their own demise, this dialogue can occur outside of the media itself, through public forums and panel discussions on the role of the media.

Ultimately, if there is little "demand side" public pressure on the media to improve their content and behavior, there is little incentive for media outlets to change. But if citizens hold media outlets to a higher standard, if they raise the bar on their expectations of media professionalism and accountability, and, most critically, if they back that up by refusing to consume products of media outlets of which they do not approve, then pressure on media outlets to alter their behavior will mount and they may be compelled to change.

### Media Monitoring

*Once fervent hate media is present it may be too late. Media monitoring makes early intervention possible, and enhances the likelihood of its success.*

The final structural intervention is quite broad: monitoring media behavior in an effort to identify the indicators described above so that the interventions detailed here can occur. It is imperative that somebody keep watch over the media and, just as critically, over forces influencing the media. Such oversight is most effectively accomplished through media monitoring initiatives, organized efforts to monitor for specific characteristics. Some monitoring of broadcasts in various countries already occurs—the U.S. government runs the Foreign Broadcast Information Service and the BBC has a monitoring service, and at the local level there is an ongoing media monitoring initiative in East Timor—but it is not broad enough and does not cover media outlets in some of the most vulnerable societies. Monitoring for the indicators presented above can inform policymakers on societies at risk of media manipulation. In doing such monitoring, it is important to work with local NGOs to develop a local monitoring capacity. Monitoring by a multinational organization such as the United Nations is beneficial but not sufficient, and in most instances probably is not sustainable in the long run. Once the societies at risk are identified, the media interventions described here can be initiated. But the key is early identification of these

societies. Once fervent hate media is present it may be too late. Media monitoring makes early intervention possible, and enhances the likelihood of its success.

## Content-Specific Interventions

Content-specific interventions are often based on observations of the content indicators detailed above, which tend to appear at a relatively late stage. But content-specific interventions can also be pre-emptive. The interventions described here can occur prior to the appearance of the indicators, in an effort to ensure that they do not appear.

It is important to note that content-specific interventions are most effective when media abuse is involuntary, due to a lack of training and competence, rather than calculated. If the latter is true, content-specific interventions are unlikely to succeed because journalists are fully aware of the consequences of their actions. But when media abuse is involuntary, content-specific interventions offer alternatives to structural interventions; in circumstances where structural interventions are ineffective, content-specific interventions may be more successful. They may also serve as short-term remedies for some forms of media abuse, allowing more time for structural interventions, which tend to take longer to implement and yield results.

### "Repersonalization"

As described above, one of the strategies for using media to instigate conflict involves the "dehumanization" and "depersonalization" of individuals. Through this process, people are portrayed in the media as members of a stigmatized group rather than as individuals. Training on how journalists can move beyond the political, ethnic, religious, or regional factors to identify the true source of a grievance (be it an economic grievance or another concern), and how they can portray people first and foremost as individuals, can ease tensions and move a society away from conflict. These strategies concern not only mitigating the negative effects of media abuse but using media as a positive tool for reconciliation and conflict prevention. Excellent examples of such interventions come from the video *Spacebridges,* pioneered by Internews, in which individuals from communities on opposite sides of a conflict engage in dialogue with each other over a live video feed, giving them the opportunity to see one another, attach faces and voices to members of the "opposition," and recognize the common concerns they share. Spacebridges have been conducted between, among others, members of the United States Congress and the Supreme Soviet during the Cold War; among Muslim, Serb, and Croat refugees from Bosnia, all living in exile in Paris; between Armenians and Azeris; and between American and Iranian women.

### Issue-Oriented Training

Another strategy for content-specific interventions involves training journalists on reporting on issues that tend to be particularly sensitive and possibly explosive. Two such issues concern economic and environmental resources. More so than most other issues, they have the potential to be distorted and twisted into tales of ethnic hatred and animosity because they are issues that affect people's livelihood, as they can have a dramatic effect on both personal economic viability and general stability. Thus it is particularly important that they are reported on in a professional manner, and issue-oriented training focusing on how journalists can frame these issues helps ensure that they are. Such training increases the capacity for journalists to provide their listeners and readers with the information they need to address the underlying causes of economic or environmental problems, rather than stories that provide scapegoats and thus are misleading.

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## Entertainment-Oriented Programming

Entertainment-oriented programming offers another way to use media as positive tools for preventing and resolving conflict. The work of the NGO Search for Common Ground provides several impressive examples of such programming. Among other projects, they have co-produced a dramatic television series for Macedonian children intended to facilitate cross-ethnic understanding and established radio studios in Burundi, Liberia, and Sierra Leone that produce, in addition to other programming, soap operas designed to encourage dialogue and discourage violence. It is easy to discount the effects of such programming due to its "soft" nature, but these programs can be quite effective, as many people use media not for news gathering but for entertainment. Entertainment-oriented programming can have a direct effect on them, and may be significantly more influential than news programming. Even for people who use media primarily for news, entertainment-oriented programming can supplement and complement what they read, watch, and hear.

## Aggressive Interventions

Finally, the third group of strategies for combating media abuse and manipulation involves what may be considered "aggressive interventions." Such interventions tend to be a last resort, and usually occur after media abuse and manipulation is widely apparent, often after violent conflict has begun. They are more reactive than proactive. They are also externally imposed, and some forms are unlikely to be effective if not accompanied by other forms of intervention, such as military intervention. Such aggressive interventions do not usually change media structure or content, though some forms do disable physical infrastructure. Clearly, earlier intervention that stands a chance of preventing media abuse and manipulation before it proliferates is preferable.

### Alternative Information

A prominent strategy for aggressive intervention is for foreign entities, including governments, NGOs, and political parties, to offer sources of information other than those available domestically. There are several instances of alternative information playing an important role in mobilizing a population and injecting new ideas into society. Among them are Democratic Voices of Burma, a station broadcasting into Burma out of Norway; and Radio Freedom and Capital Radio in South Africa—the former was broadcast by the African National Congress into South Africa from several southern Africa states in the 1970s, and the latter broadcast from the "homeland" of Transkei to the rest of South Africa in the 1980s. Both served as valuable sources of news about the realities of apartheid, winning many converts among the white population along the way. More generally, in many countries major international radio networks, such as the BBC and Voice of America (VOA), are regularly heard on the airwaves, and offer citizens reliable information that sometimes contradicts information broadcast by local media outlets. Because of this, though, international broadcasts are sometimes blocked so that the local media monopoly remains intact.

Alternative information can be specifically designed to counter information broadcast by a single or small number of sources, such as government media or hate media outlets. A good example of the use of alternative information is the "Ring Around Serbia," a multilateral project spearheaded by the United States in 1999. It involved assembling a ring of radio transmitters in countries neighboring Serbia and broadcasting into Serbia programming from the BBC, VOA, Deutsche Welle, Radio France International, and Radio Free Europe. Many of the broadcasts consisted of local language versions of Western programming. Such an intervention is reactive and occurs late in the manipulation process. It is

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also expensive, difficult to organize, and of questionable legality. Broadcasts prepared especially for transmission into "hostile territory" are often perceived as propaganda and thus discounted by the intended audience. But if all other opportunities for media intervention have been missed, broadcasting alternative information may merit consideration.

### Radio and Television Jamming

Perhaps the most frequently discussed strategy for countering hate media is jamming radio and television signals. In looking back at Rwanda, several scholars and practitioners, foremost among them Romeo Dallaire, the UN commander in Rwanda during the genocide, have suggested that jamming Rwandan radio would have made carrying out the genocide significantly more difficult and would have been worth the effort and cost (to his credit, Dallaire proposed radio jamming *prior* to the genocide as well). But jamming is a blunt instrument that comes with substantial legal concerns and would only be seriously considered once violence is already widespread. This analysis looks for more subtle modes of intervention that could occur much earlier in the media abuse process, at a time when it is still possible to avert widespread violence. The more effective and less costly alternative to radio jamming is removing media from the "toolkit" belonging to actors intent on inciting conflict, which is what the structural and content-specific interventions detailed above are designed to do.

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## Recommendations

As this analysis demonstrates, media can be extremely powerful tools used by actors intent on instigating conflict. Media are multipliers: they amplify and disseminate messages and opinions. Media spread information and misinformation, shape individuals' views of others, and can heighten tensions or promote understanding. This makes controlling media and their messages an important goal for anybody intent on promoting conflict. This analysis concludes with four recommendations to the international community for addressing the use and abuse of media in vulnerable societies:

### 1. Media in vulnerable societies should be monitored.

Media in vulnerable societies should be monitored for the "clues to conflict" detailed above. Special attention should be devoted to the structural indicators—including, in particular, journalist competence, media variety and plurality, and media's legal environment—as they can reveal how vulnerable or resistant media are to manipulation and point to specific interventions that might prevent media co-optation and abuse before it occurs. Attention should also be given to content indicators, such as a focus on past atrocities and a history of ethnic hatred; manipulation of myths, stereotypes, and identities to "dehumanize"; and efforts to discredit alternatives to conflict. The monitoring should be comprehensive, put in context with political, economic, and social indicators, and conducted by experienced or trained monitors. If this occurs, interventions can be pursued at an early stage, enhancing the likelihood of their success.

### 2. There should be greater collaboration between media organizations and conflict resolution organizations.

The role of media in fermenting conflict is seldom addressed comprehensively by either media or conflict resolution NGOs. Media organizations tend to devote limited attention to the dynamics and causes of violent conflict, while conflict resolution organizations often overlook the role of media in fermenting or tempering the

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conflicts they scrutinize. Working together, though, these organizations can pool their knowledge and address the role of media in conflict from both sides of the issue. Particularly in efforts to develop early-warning instruments, media organizations should be consulted and media "indicators" incorporated into the analysis, so that media are considered, along with other factors, when trying to identify societies highly susceptible to conflict. Such collaboration can enhance understanding of the relevant issues and the design and implementation of early-warning instruments and preventive interventions.

### 3. Media organizations need to build a better case for monitoring and early intervention and encourage appropriate donor support.

This analysis emphasizes that early, preventive media intervention, such as the structural interventions described above, can be significantly more effective and beneficial than later, reactive interventions, such as radio jamming. Early interventions are more cost-effective and can lay the foundation for the long-term institutional development necessary to combat political or ethnic instability.

Media organizations need to provide donors with reliable research and reports on significant field experience to justify supporting early interventions, even before traditional conflict indicators are visible. Further collaboration and information sharing between conflict resolution and media organizations, particularly through common methodologies for identifying critical points for intervention, will contribute greatly to assuring donors that funding early intervention is worthwhile and cost-effective.

### 4. A systematic review of media behavior in vulnerable society should be conducted.

There remains much to be learned about the use and abuse of media in vulnerable societies. An effective approach to gaining a better understanding of this dynamic would be to conduct a comprehensive study by monitoring the characteristics of media behavior in several countries deemed close to conflict. Such a review could provide the quantitative and qualitative data needed to focus the attention of donors and media organizations on the role of media in societies vulnerable to conflict, and on the importance of early, preventive intervention.

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