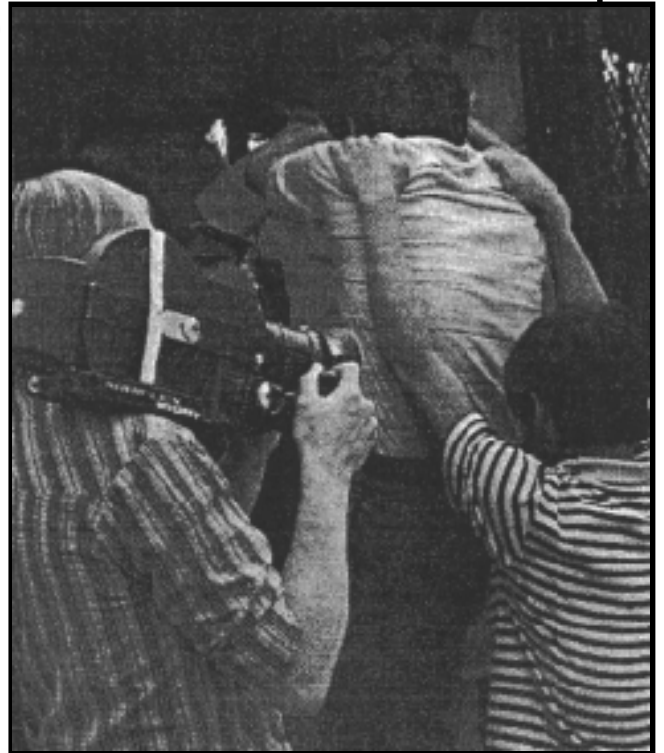


1st Edition

The News Media and Humanitarian Action



■ Disaster Management Training Programme

The News Media and Humanitarian Action

1st Edition

Authors of the original text, *The News Media, Civil War, and Humanitarian Action*, Larry Minear, Colin Scott, and Thomas Weiss

Part three of the module and the training materials prepared by Charles Dufresne, *InterWorks*



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■ INTRODUCTION

Purpose and scope

This training module is designed to introduce the relationship between the news media and humanitarian action as an aspect of disaster management to an audience of UN organization professionals who form disaster management teams, as well as to government counterpart agencies, NGO's and donors. This module will help the learner understand the news media's multiple agendas and functions and recognize that the influence of the news media on policymaking and humanitarian response is inconsistent and debatable. This module encourages the learner to develop and nurture more professional relationships with the media, and provides insights and guidelines for doing so. Whereas aid agencies are the principal intended audience of this study, newcomers to the humanitarian arena from the media and from government also may find it useful.

Three sets of institutions – the media, humanitarian organizations, and government policymakers – make up what may be called a *crisis triangle*. Headline-grabbing crises such as those in Somalia, Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, and Haiti have revealed complex relationships among these institutions. Their interaction is increasingly salient to the outcomes of effective humanitarian action. Gone are the days when success was determined principally by humanitarian organizations themselves. The news media, it seems, has become a major humanitarian actor in its own right, helping to frame the context in which governments formulate policy and humanitarian action is mounted. While the growing role of the Western news media is widely acknowledged, the dynamics of interaction with government policymakers and humanitarian practitioners have received little analytical scrutiny to date.

This module explores these dynamics and their implications for effective humanitarian action. It seeks to improve the quality of humanitarian action by strengthening the contributions of these institutions. The questions that follow are intended to enhance debate and improve understanding of the complex interactions that occur among the institutions of the crisis triangle.

- How does the media influence the dynamics of emergency crises and the jockeying for position which results?
- How significant is the pressure of the press, what are its positive and negative consequences, and what strategies are needed by humanitarian organizations for coping with it?
- Does the media stimulate better policy and humanitarian action or just encourage short-term mobilization of resources?
- Have crises been media led? When? Where?
- How might each institution function more effectively and accountably in the humanitarian sphere?
- What are the interests of each institution, as well as their range of responses to humanitarian crises, and their limitations?
- What has been the three-sided interaction among external actors in several recent complex emergencies?

Overview of this module

Part 1 introduces the complex humanitarian arena in which the news media, humanitarian institutions and government policymakers interact. We analyze each of these institutions with reference to its agendas and interests, its range of responses to humanitarian crises, and its limitations. (Since this part is designed as a primer, readers familiar with these institutions may wish to proceed to the following units, or limit their reading to the institutional actors with which they are least familiar.)

Part 2 presents various frameworks for analyzing the timing, level and degree of news media impact on government policymaking and humanitarian action. It examines the relationship among the news media, government policymakers and humanitarian organizations in seven post-Cold War crises: Liberia, Sudan, Northern Iraq, Somalia, former Yugoslavia, Haiti, and Rwanda. This examination illustrates some of the ways that the media do – and do not – influence policy processes and humanitarian responses. Finally it presents recommendations on how each institution can function more effectively and cooperatively in the humanitarian sphere.

Part 3 provides an introduction to dealing with the news media and preparing for media interviews. This part also serves as a springboard for agencies interested in formulating or updating their media relations policies and guidelines.

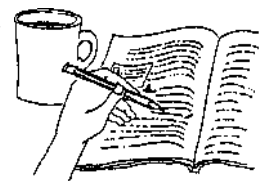
Training methods

This module is intended for two audiences: the self-study learner and the participant in a training workshop. The following training methods are planned for use in workshops and are simulated in the accompanying “trainer’s guide”. For the self-study learner the text is as close to a tutor as can be managed in print. Workshop training methods include:



- group discussion
- simulation and role plays
- supplementary handouts
- videos
- review sessions
- self-assessment exercises

The self-study learner is invited to use this text as a workbook. In addition to note-taking in the margins, you will be given the opportunity to stop and examine your learning and anticipate upcoming topics through questions included in the text. Write down your answers to these questions before proceeding to ensure that you have captured key points in the text.



ACRONYMS

ACUNS	Academic Council on the United Nations System
AID	Agency for International Development [USA]
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CNN	Cable News Network
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DAC	Development Assistance Committee [OECD]
DHA	Department of Humanitarian Affairs [UN]
DPA	Department of Political Affairs [UN]
DPKO	Department of Peace-keeping Operations [UN]
EC	European Community
ECHO	European Union [formerly Community] Humanitarian Office
ECOMOG	Economic Community Monitoring Group [ECOWAS]
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council [UN]
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
ESCAP	Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization [UN]
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee [UN]
ICHR	International Centre for Humanitarian Reporting
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IFOR	Implementation Force [former Yugoslavia]
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IGO	Intergovernmental organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ITN	Independent Television News [UK]
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
OAU	Organization of African Unity
ODA	Official development assistance
ODA [UK]	Overseas Development Administration [UK]
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFDA	Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance [USA]
ONUSAL	United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador
PDD	Presidential Decision Directive
PVO	Private voluntary organization
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SRSG	Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General
UNAMIR	United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda

**The News Media and
Humanitarian Action**

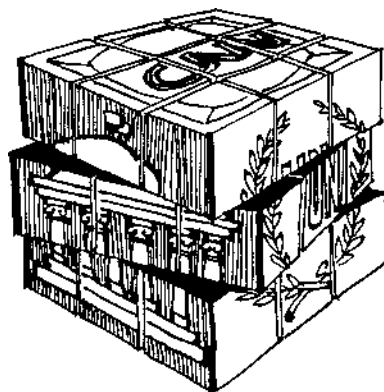
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDRO	United Nations Disaster Relief Office
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNITAF	United Task Force [Somalia]
UNOMIL	United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia
UNOSOM	United Nations Operation in Somalia
UNPA	United Nations Protected Area [former Yugoslavia]
UNPROFOR	United Nations Protection Force [former Yugoslavia]
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VOLAG	Voluntary Agency
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Complex emergencies, humanitarian action and the crisis triangle

Any attempt to capture the vigor, complexity, and idiosyncrasies of interaction among government policymaking institutions, humanitarian organizations, and the media will suffer from oversimplification. Interactions among the three are complex. Governments not only make policy but also have their own implementing humanitarian agencies. Many governmental and private humanitarian organizations seek to influence the processes and results of public policy formation. All implementing agencies are subject to decisions reached by policymakers and may be subject to media scrutiny. All those with an interest in humanitarian crises, whether governmental, intergovernmental, or private, share analytical and operational problems.

In carrying out their functions, individuals from all three groups seek contact and cooperation with the others, regardless of their own institutional affiliations. Governments are concerned with decision making that serves national interests. Humanitarian organizations are concerned with implementation and serve the victims of conflict. The news media are concerned with reporting crises and responses and serve customers. None – including humanitarian organizations – has objectives that are exclusively humanitarian. While their distinct functions may be clear, their distinct interests, structures and limitations relative to humanitarian action are not.

In this part, we analyze these institutions in order to understand the distinct perspectives of each institution. Chapter 1 begins by acquainting the reader with the complex humanitarian arena in which these three players interact, examining the nature of humanitarian action and introducing the widely-held, yet contested, belief in what has been called the “CNN factor”, a term used to describe the influence the news media has on policy formation and action. Chapter 2 through 4 examine the respective interests, structures and limitations of each set of institution. (Since these chapters are designed as something of a primer, readers familiar with these institutions may wish to proceed, or limit their reading to the actors with which they are least familiar.)



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PART 1 Chapter 1

The humanitarian arena

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter you should be able to:

- *Define complex emergency*
- *Identify three types of humanitarian action: emergency delivery, rehabilitation assistance and human rights protection*
- *Describe the concept of the “aid continuum”*
- *Articulate the concept of the “crisis triangle” and its institutions*
- *Describe and critique the concept of the “CNN factor”*

Each successive chapter in this part, as well as each successive part, builds on the terms, concepts and analyses introduced in this chapter. For those readers with experience in humanitarian emergencies, much of this chapter will be a review. By examining the headings, readers can focus on those terms, concepts and analyses which are least familiar to them.

Humanitarian action in complex emergencies

This module examines the role of external actors in a selected number of *complex emergencies*: that is, political crises within states characterized by armed conflict and widespread social upheaval. International responses to complex emergencies frequently build upon - but sometimes also preempt—remedial action by institutions internal to the crisis areas themselves. In a complex emergency, humanitarian action broadly conceived includes three basic forms of response: 1) emergency delivery, 2) rehabilitation assistance, and 3) human rights protection.

Emergency delivery

Emergency delivery is short-term humanitarian assistance, usually in the form of life-saving measures such as food, shelter, and medical care. Although organizations may differ in how they define the term, emergency aid is distinguished from medium-term rehabilitation and longer-term developmental aid and usually is funded from separate budget sources. Functional and institutional links exist between emergency and non-emergency aid, making their separation for conceptual, programmatic, and budgetary purposes somewhat arbitrary and questionable.

Rehabilitation assistance

Looking beyond meeting immediate needs, humanitarian agencies view rehabilitation as a way out of a crisis. (Rehabilitation may also be termed recovery or reconstruction.) A long-term goal is rebuilding governmental

and private infrastructure, a task that has become urgent in many countries because the systematic looting of physical assets and the elimination of trained human resources have been specific war aims. The longer term process of development is generally viewed as the task of converting medium-term changes to a sustainable basis. Often different international institutions, and sometimes, different divisions within the same institutions, have responsibility for rehabilitation activities than are charged with emergency delivery.

Human rights protection

A related concern, often institutionally separated from the provision of emergency, rehabilitation, and development assistance, is the prevention of human rights abuses. As well as working to ensure physical protection of vulnerable populations, humanitarian and human rights agencies monitor and publicize abuses, lobby governments, and nurture a broader constituency in support of their efforts. Publicity, especially in the form of media coverage, is often crucial to accomplishing their objectives. Human rights violations also may provide an early warning of social or political upheaval and thus of the eventual need for emergency assistance.

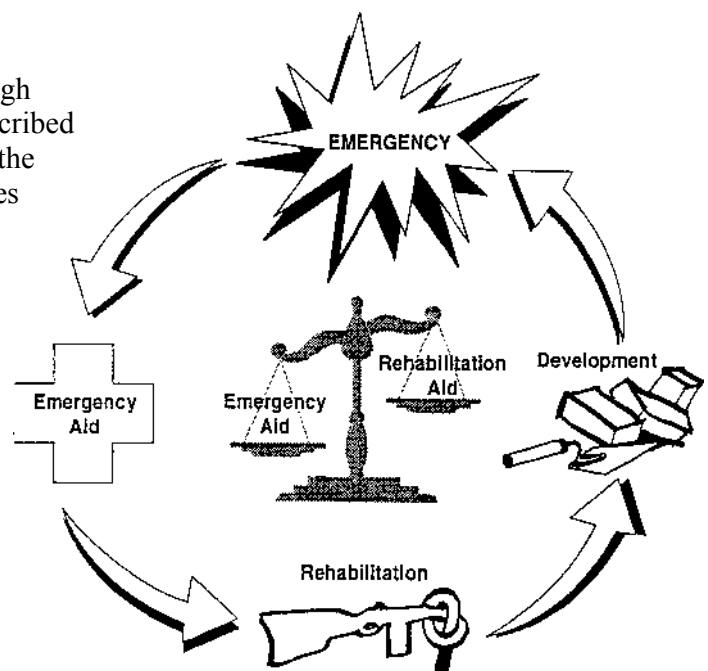
Human rights protection and various forms of assistance are integral parts of humanitarian action. Exercising the protection function, however, may present a dilemma for agencies whose primary purpose is assistance. Such groups face difficult choices when witnessing human rights abuses because reporting them places aid operations and personnel in jeopardy. Human rights agencies traditionally have been separate and distinct from relief organizations, with relatively little interaction between their respective staffs, programs, and constituencies. Recent complex emergencies, in which human rights abuses have been used as weapons of war, however, have increased their degree of contact. Targeting the safety and security of minority groups, like interdicting their food supplies, are related threats to humanity that challenge all humanitarian actors.¹

Aid continuum

The progression in assistance from emergency through rehabilitation to long-term development is often described as the *aid continuum*. Though experience questions the idea of a linear or sequential approach, donor policies and statutory and budgetary definitions perpetuate a division of aid categories, often with little tolerance for the “gray areas” confronted by aid agencies.

In the Commission of the European Union, for example, responsibility for emergencies and for reconstruction and development activities are in two different directorates.

The growing discontinuity between emergency aid and other related efforts has become a major policy concern. In recent years, attention has been directed to providing emergency aid in ways



that lay the groundwork and establish momentum for medium- and longer-term efforts. Conversely, the provision of emergency aid may affect negatively the prospects for rehabilitation and longer-term self-reliance of recipients whose coping capacities have been undercut by relief activities.

In its broadest sense, humanitarian action includes longer-term development assistance as well as emergency and rehabilitation aid. The fact that rehabilitation and development are invariably less well-funded and less energetically pursued than relief is cause for concern. Critics of the imbalance often fault the media for failing to give adequate attention to the post-emergency challenge.²

The crisis triangle

Headline-grabbing crises such as those in Somalia, Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, and Haiti have revealed complex relationships among the *crisis triangle* of policymakers, humanitarian agencies, and the international news media. Their interaction is of increasing salience to the outcomes of effective humanitarian action. Gone are the days in which success was determined principally by humanitarian organizations themselves. The news media have become a major humanitarian actor in their own right, helping to frame the context within which government policy is formulated and humanitarian action is mounted. While the growing role of the international news media is widely acknowledged, the dynamics of interaction with government policymakers and humanitarian practitioners have received little analytical scrutiny to date. The exploration of these dynamics in this module represents one step in a long and complex analytical journey.



Analyzing media influence

The CNN factor

The *CNN factor* is a term used to suggest a causal link between news media coverage and subsequent changes in policy and humanitarian action by government and humanitarian agencies.

Q. *Think of a recent complex emergency with which you are most familiar. Was the CNN factor evident in the crisis? How? Compare your response with the discussion that follows.*

A. _____



Evidence of what has come to be called the *CNN factor* remains highly anecdotal. Although neither humanitarian crises nor their reporting is new, the proliferation of both in an era of high-speed communications has led to widespread speculation about the influence the media may exercise. The news media are widely supposed to have increased pressures on government policymakers, both directly and through the information provided to the public. Some suspect that the need for officials to be seen doing “something” now outweighs the need to do “the right thing.” Others counter that the media are not a serious factor in the formulation of policy; rather, they only influence its presentation. The underlying assumption that the media have the power to pervert or distort rational policy processes, while arguably true in some recent situations, has not been examined as a more general proposition.

Similarly, the media are widely thought to influence the work of humanitarian organizations. Media success in putting crises into the living rooms of potential donors and in augmenting the resources that aid groups have at their disposal is widely acknowledged. But, do the media also influence the dynamics of the crises to which humanitarian organizations flock, the jockeying for position that results, the kinds of activities mounted? How significant is the pressure of the press, what are its positive and negative consequences, and what strategies do humanitarian organizations need to cope with? A clear understanding of the impact of the media will enable decision-makers to determine how many resources to invest in media relations and how high a priority to place on training staff in media relations.

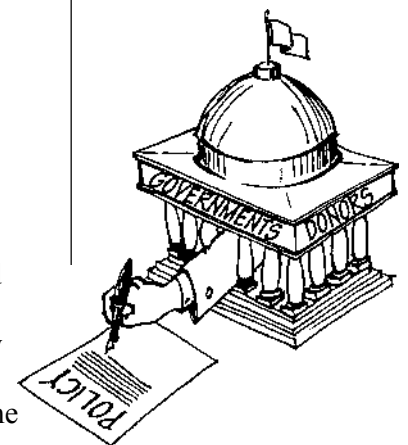
Empirical research and scholarly analyses which review the relationships between the news media and policymakers and humanitarian organizations have been surprisingly scant.³ The dynamics of these interactions are little understood. Indeed, whether the impact of the news media on humanitarian action is revolutionary, evolutionary, or largely imagined remains, for the most part, a matter of conjecture.

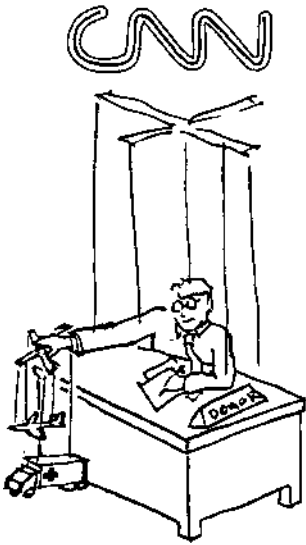
Assessing causation

When it comes to understanding the interactions between the media and humanitarian organizations, assessing causation is difficult. The crises reviewed in Part 2 demonstrate an undeniable mutuality of *influence*. The news media influence the pace, scale, locus, and duration of action mounted by humanitarian actors. Conversely, those actors alert the media to breaking stories, provide them with first-hand accounts of what is taking place, and even arrange for journalists to access otherwise unreachable destinations and provide overnight food and accommodations in war zones. Yet calibrating the relative influence of the two institutions upon each other is almost impossible.

Foreign policymaking models

When it comes to foreign policymaking, two divergent models are discernible. In the traditional view, policymaking is the prerogative of an informed elite. In this construct, the media’s agenda reflects the priorities of policymakers, with creative roles for the media normally restricted to the “quality press,” which has traditionally provided a forum for informed debate. A century-old example of this model of influence is Lord Salisbury’s use of the *London Times* to float the outlines of a new British policy toward Africa.⁴





*CNN is the 16th
member of the
Security Council.*

—UN Secretary- General
Boutros Boutros- Ghali
1995⁷

A revised and so-called popular model recognizes the importance of domestic politics, public opinion, and consequently the influence of pollsters in the policy process. Because of the vigorous interaction between the media and public opinion, the popular model also assumes greater influence on the part of television, radio, and tabloid journalism. This latter model, epitomized by the term *CNN factor*, suggests a reversal of policy-media effect, with a consequent loss of control by government policymakers to the media.⁵

These two models of media-policy interaction can also be applied to the other sides of the crisis triangle. Regarding media-humanitarian interaction, in the traditional model the media simply report. In the popular model, however, media coverage influences the course of humanitarian activities. Regarding humanitarian-policy interaction, aid activities follow the flag of donor nations in the traditional view whereas humanitarian activities influence foreign policies and the perceived national interests of donor governments in the revised view. As with the media-policy-making interaction, the post-Cold War era has enlivened the triangular interaction considerably.

Generally speaking, research literature and case examples do not conclusively support either the traditional or the popular model. Passions run high and views are ardently defended, but there is no real dichotomy between media-dictated policy and policy-dictated media. Nor can humanitarian action be seen as dictated by either the media or government policymakers. The interplay is fluid and dynamic; the experience is rich and diverse.

Post-Cold War experience

The media's role in publicizing crises, influencing public opinion, and reporting international response is not new. Are the humanitarian emergencies in Biafra in the 1960s and in Bangladesh and Ethiopia in the 1970s and 1980s precedents for the current debate? In these crises, media coverage had an irresistible effect on mass audiences, producing surges of fund-raising and humanitarian responses. What is the current reality of reporting and response? Do the media stimulate better policy and humanitarian action or just encourage short-term mobilization of resources? And how will these processes be changed by the proliferation of media channels and the speed with which any number of crises can now be spotlighted?

In the recent spate of post-Cold War crises - Somalia provides a good example - was the international response television-led? Did the media retard more-effective response by not reporting the crisis early enough and then stimulate a panic response⁶ late in the day? Why was the intervention in Somalia not preceded or followed by similar action in nearby southern Sudan, where humanitarian conditions had been worse for years? Was that neglect due to lack of TV coverage, or were other factors at work?

Relentless coverage of inhumanity in both Bosnia and Rwanda, matching the intensity of that directed toward Somalia in late 1992 and early 1993, failed to produce Somali-style interventions. Although massive coverage of the situations in Sarajevo and Goma has been linked to a variety of international response, none of them appears to have constituted decisive or durable policy changes. British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd asserted in September 1993 that policy was not and should not be dictated by the media.⁸ Yet, hurry-up measures by governments to help the Kurds in Iraq or evacuate certain Bosnian war victims with high media profiles seemed to reflect causation rather than coincidence. The nature and extent of the media's influence on policy generate more questions than answers.

Those questions, however, do require answers. Building on the growing awareness among many international actors of the media's potential for powerful humanitarian consequences, a more detailed assessment from the humanitarian community of the media is required. Are the media a unitary actor that manipulates events or a complex process or set of processes that are themselves subject to manipulation? Are there not differing effects on policy and humanitarian action of news, documentary, and other types of coverage, and differing impacts from television, radio, and print media?

Given economic pressures facing media outlets to tell a good story more quickly and compellingly than their competitors, is the role of the media to inform or entertain?

Identifying the potential and constraints of the media requires more than talk of the CNN factor and other glib generalizations. Challenging conventional wisdom and presenting conflicting evidence is the first stage in a more realistic assessment, and the overall objective of the following pages.

SELF-STUDY EXERCISES

1. Short-term humanitarian assistance, usually in the form of life-saving measures such as food, shelter, and medical care, is referred to as:

- Complex aid
- CNN aid
- Emergency aid
- Rehabilitation aid

2. Define "complex emergency"

3. Define "crisis triangle"

4. Describe the "CNN factor"

5. Describe the debate which challenges conventional wisdom regarding the CNN factor.

- ANSWER KEY:
1. Emergency aid
 2. Complex emergencies are political crises within states that have involved armed conflict and widespread social upheaval.
 3. The crisis triangle refers to the complex relationships among policymakers, humanitarian agencies, and the Western news media.
 4. The CNN factor refers to a concept used to describe the influence the news media has on the course of humanitarian policy and action.
 5. The dynamics and veracity of the CNN factor are little understood—indeed, whether the impact of the news media on humanitarian action is revolutionary, evolutionary, or largely imagined remains for the most part a matter of conjecture.



PART **1** Chapter 2

Governmental policymaking institutions

LEARNING OBJECTIVES




After studying this chapter you should be able to:

- Describe the reasons why governments respond to humanitarian crises
- Describe a framework for understanding the policymaking process
- Identify limitations on governmental response

The interests of States

Q. Why do governments respond, or fail to respond, to humanitarian crises? List as many reasons as you can. Compare your answers to the discussion that follows.

A. _____

_____ 

Governments respond to humanitarian crises for any one, or a combination of the following reasons and pressures (which are elaborated on below):

- Growing interdependence among nations
- Humanitarian imperative and global leadership
- Domestic political agendas
- International peace and security
- Palliative

Growing interdependence among nations

The tendency of states to avoid involvement in the internal conflicts of other states has been tested in recent decades by growing interdependence. With the passing of the Cold War era, conflicts within states and their accompanying humanitarian consequences have become a preoccupation of governments and the United Nations system. “All of us feel our humanity threatened,” U.S. President Bill Clinton has observed, “as much by fights going on within the borders of nations as by the dangers of fighting across national borders.”⁹

Humanitarian imperative and global leadership

The humanitarian imperative reflects an obligation perceived by governments to respond in instances of widespread suffering. However, it should be noted that humanitarian reflexes rarely operate in isolation from other forces and factors. The exercise of international responsibilities related to this humanitarian imperative, whether in the form of providing emergency assistance or peacekeeping troops, has come to be regarded as an element in global leadership.

Domestic political agendas

Domestic political agendas, which involve a multitude of players and power-brokering, also come into play. Within a country various constituencies may have special interests and links to foreign populations, ethnic groups and countries. When these constituencies are powerful and organized they are often able to persuade politicians to address the humanitarian issues of most concern to their constituent group.

Threats to international peace and security

Beyond altruism, there recently has been a greater readiness to define humanitarian crises as a threat to international peace and security thereby requiring a collective response in the spirit of the UN Charter. The expansion of the traditional definition of such threats follows a recognition of their potential to spread chaos and conflict to neighboring states. In practice, the international community has responded with a range of measures, including various forms of outside military force, although experience in Liberia, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Somalia has demonstrated the limitations of ill-conceived military action, even when mounted to support humanitarian operations.

Palliative

Whether or not they provide peacekeeping or other troops, States often are ready to support emergency and rehabilitation aid. Such assistance may be offered as a palliative. High-profile humanitarian action often becomes a substitute for, rather than a complement to, political-military strategies. The need for peace and security measures along with humanitarian action is apparent, but their joint application often is not well-defined or well-executed. Frequently, even if the provision of humanitarian aid depends upon favorable political and security conditions, the cost of military action—especially when accompanied by casualties—may be judged too high. Moreover, the use of force to secure aid may jeopardize the neutrality of humanitarian operations in the eyes of belligerent forces.

Stages of the policymaking process

While there are many reasons why governments get involved in humanitarian crises, governmental policymaking is a complex endeavor. Any attempt to measure the effect of the news media on government policy must begin with an understanding of the stages of policymaking. The making of public policy involves a range of institutional processes in numerous stages, all subject to political bloodletting and other factors extraneous to the specific humanitarian challenge. Although the processes rarely involve a precise



progression, the following stages provide a useful framework for identifying and analyzing the impact of the media and government responses to humanitarian crises. Alternative and nonlinear models may be equally helpful in reaching useful conclusions about how certain crises find a place on the government's agenda.¹⁰

Agenda setting: problem identification

The model suggests that there is a priority list of issues to which government officials and their outside interlocutors are paying attention at any given time. Of course, agendas vary among levels of government. Even apparently minor humanitarian crises will have the attention of some specialized official at one level or another. However, being "on the agenda" is taken to mean the serious attention of senior policymakers reflecting the concerns of ministers of state, heads of aid agencies, legislators, or senior military staff.

Delineation of alternatives: solution formation

Once a crisis has been placed on the agenda, a set of alternatives for government action is formulated for consideration by senior officials and their close associates. In major crises, governments can consider a range of alternatives (military, diplomatic, and/or humanitarian measures) through unilateral, regional, and multilateral means and using private and/or governmental channels. Most governments have both routine and expedited structures for devising options and responding to crises.

Selection of alternatives: policy adoption

This stage involves "an authoritative choice among ... specified alternatives, as in a legislative vote or a presidential decision."¹¹ In the United States, the commitment of troops, at least initially, is an executive branch function, although the fact that the Congress holds the purse strings makes consultation advisable. In Europe, the wide dispersion of powers at the national and international levels makes it difficult to generalize about action in humanitarian crises. Individual European governments, although free to act unilaterally through their own structures, have options (and feel increasing pressures) to give preference to Europe-wide institutions for policy, emergency aid, and military response.

Implementation of decisions

Once problems have been identified, alternatives framed, and courses of action chosen, the focus of attention turns to the agents of action. These include ministries of defense and/or NATO for military intervention, foreign ministries and their aid departments for political and aid responses. Here, too, distortion of policy implementation may result from media attention or even extended public relations by governments. This stage might involve "mission creep", as policy goals that were originally narrowly framed expand as a result of the actual situation.

The complexity of the international system makes it difficult to trace policy processes through these different stages. In both bilateral and multilateral settings, states may respond at the political-security and humanitarian levels. In practice, there are myriad institutions and processes, all with policymakers pursuing their own ideas and agendas and responding to varying kinds of pressures. Coordination of policies across and within states often is hard to detect, if in fact it exists at all.



Constraints and limitations on governmental response

The media and humanitarian organizations may criticize governments for not responding effectively to complex emergencies, but there are, in fact, major constraints and limitations on government action. Three of the major constraints are:

- Political constraints
- Organizational limitations
- Resource limitations

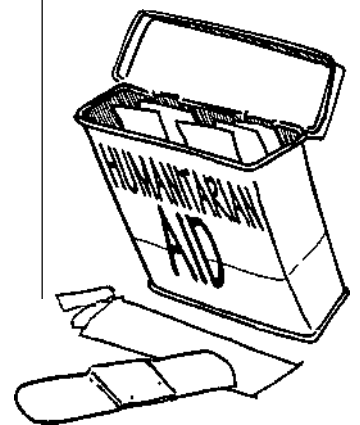
Political constraints

Although perceived national interests and electoral concerns usually explain the actions of states, they may also represent a major limitation on humanitarian action. Governments may manage tensions between humanitarian action and political considerations by subordinating humanitarian action to politics, by using humanitarian aid as a palliative, and by balancing political and humanitarian operations.¹² The choice of approaches will vary according to the donor government and the emergency.

Humanitarian action subordinated to politics. The first approach subordinates humanitarian action to politics. This approach was most apparent during the Col War era when U.S. aid was weighted toward countries under communist threat while Soviet aid went to those pursuing communist agendas. In the post-Cold War era, aid carries economic and political messages, such as the promotion of free-market economies or multiparty democracies. Aid is also linked to the purchase of donor country services or products. Although emergency humanitarian aid is ostensibly more free of such conditions, its political value is being increasingly recognized, representing yet another limitation on the independence of humanitarian action.

Humanitarian aid as a palliative. Governments may also use humanitarian aid as a palliative, in effect as a substitute for dealing with the root causes of crises or for taking more robust action. A single government or a group of governments that cannot agree on a more decisive action may find in humanitarian assistance a lowest common denominator. The results are often unconvincing or counterproductive.¹³ In some cases aid may even prolong the conflict by inadvertently supplying warring factions and easing the pressure for more decisive diplomatic or military action. Recent expenditure trends, which favor emergencies at the expense of development, have fueled a concern that donor governments are not really serious about dealing with the root causes of humanitarian crises.¹⁴

Balancing political and humanitarian operations. The third approach balances political and humanitarian operations, retaining a certain independence for aid activities. Striking a proper balance means neither conditioning emergency aid on the existence of a prior political settlement nor tying a political settlement to the provision of such aid. In El Salvador, the peacekeeping efforts of ONUSAL and the humanitarian activities of the UN and other aid organizations manifested a productive synergism. After U.S. changed its approach to Haiti from an unproductive sanctions-only policy to one in which the military supported humanitarian goals, there were benefits to both the political and the humanitarian side.



Organizational limitations

Finding the proper political context within which to situate humanitarian action is only one of the constraints under which donor governments labor. A second category of difficulties concerns organizational or bureaucratic limitations. Humanitarian action by governments, mediated through a complex multi-layered set of institutions, is often affected by bureaucratic interests. The institutional apparatus through which governments respond to complex emergencies involves a bewildering array of sometimes conflicting executive, administrative, military, and legislative elements. In the United States, responses are coordinated by the executive branch, but a variety of pressures emerge from the policy processes in the White House (including the National Security Council), the State Department, the Pentagon, and the Congress. Operational responses come from the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration and from the Agency for International Development's Bureau for Humanitarian Response, which includes the Office for Foreign Disaster Assistance. The increased political attention paid to complex emergencies also means that, nontraditional elements, such as the Defense Department's Office of Human Rights and Refugee Affairs, have increased their involvement in policy and operations.

European governments exhibit a similar array of institutional actors, with decision-making processes equally complex and perhaps a bit less transparent. In Western Europe, the institutional architecture is complicated further by an extra layer of response through the European Union (EU). An EU member government may respond to a crisis bilaterally through its aid ministry, and, since 1992, with a multilateral option through ECHO. Governments may insist on their own visibility, whether channelling resources through national or European vehicles. Even in working multilaterally, they may insist on preferences for the utilization of NGOs or suppliers from their nation.

Decision making and coordination become even more problematic when the arena is broadened to include the United Nations system, where organizational rivalries, political-aid tensions, and budgetary and turf concerns are legendary. The bureaucratic confusion that results at every level creates problems for humanitarian organizations that receive funds from governments and provides the media with an easy target.

Resource limitations

Governments face a seemingly unlimited number of crises with decidedly limited resources. They cannot avoid picking and choosing among the emergencies to which they will respond. To guide decision-making, they attempt to establish priorities among crises. Criteria used include such indicators as the nature, scale, and severity of the suffering; the proximity or accessibility of its location; the nature of the assistance needed; the comparative advantage that a given government may have in providing such assistance; and the donor government's historical relations with the affected country, government, and people.

Defining a nation's interests, and then applying such determinations to the crises that exist at a given time is a difficult process. Some argue that social and environmental chaos springing from internal conflicts is the new enemy, the containment of which should be the centerpiece of Western foreign policy. If so, the classic test of national interest will need radical revision to guide responses in most civil wars of the post-Cold War era.¹⁵

From a humanitarian standpoint, the dangers of ranking crises are legion. If all life is precious, how would an intervention in a crisis be justified at 100,000 deaths but not at 10,000? At the same time, without some specific criteria, how do policymakers avoid conveying the impression that Bosnian lives are more important than Sudanese, Rwandese, or East Timorese lives? The Geneva Conventions specify that authentic humanitarian assistance is to be based exclusively on need, devoid of extraneous agendas. However, various criteria used by governments to apportion scarce resources have political elements, as does the bureaucratic process through which allocations decisions are vetted.

In summary, government policymaking is inhibited by political constraints, organizational inflexibilities, and resource limitations. Each prevents the evolution of consistent policy and impedes the abilities of governments to respond effectively to humanitarian crises. Humanitarian action reflects the multiple and sometimes internally inconsistent agendas of governments. In the tensions between domestic and international priorities, humanitarian agendas generally come last and are rarely, if ever, overriding. Operative definitions of national interest and prioritization of emergencies currently provide little space for independent humanitarian action. Budgetary constraints and inflexibilities among various kinds of assistance discourage longer-term preventive and reconstruction measures. Complex emergencies thus expose a gap in governmental competence that the media may highlight and help remedy.

SELF-STUDY EXERCISE

Indicate whether each of the following statements is true or false.

- _____ 1. Both unilateral and multilateral governmental bodies have largely failed in developing comprehensive response packages that integrate peace and security measures along with humanitarian action.
 - _____ 2. In an effort to model responsible global leadership, governments will often act on humanitarian imperative and impulses in isolation from other political forces and factors.
 - _____ 3. The making of public policy progresses more or less in a linear fashion along the four stages described in this chapter.
 - _____ 4. Due to political constraints and competing interests, governments often subordinate humanitarian action to political concerns and priorities.
 - _____ 5. Recent studies reveal a trend of increasing willingness of donor governments to address the root causes of crises and engage in robust action.
6. Briefly describe the three categories of constraints on government action.

Vital national interests pertain when “the survival of the U.S. or key allies, critical U.S. economic interests or the danger of a nuclear threat” all require a readiness to risk military action, as with Iraq and North Korea.

Important, but not vital, national interests pertain in cases, such as Bosnia and Haiti, where “some level of force” should be considered, but used “selectively” and “commensurate with U.S. interests.”

Humanitarian concerns pertain where U.S. military forces should only be used if their “unique resources” can counter humanitarian “catastrophes”, such as Rwanda, which “dwarfs the ability of normal relief agencies to respond. “The risks to U.S. personnel should be “minimal”.

— Secretary of Defense
William J. Perry,
on U.S. interests and
the use of force.¹⁶

6. The three major constraints examined in this chapter where: 1) political constraints that complicate the effort to frame the proper context for humanitarian action; 2) organizational inflexibilities that make it difficult for government bureaucracies to respond; and finally 3) resource limitations that dramatize the need to rank humanitarian crises in order of relative priority. These various constraints will be examined in greater detail in the six case studies in Part 2.

1. T 2. F 3. F 4. T 5. F

ANSWER KEY

PART 1 Chapter 3

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

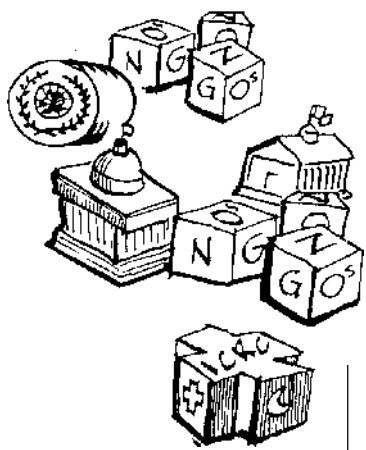
After studying this chapter you should be able to:

- Identify five broad categories of humanitarian assistance organizations
- Describe the particular interests and responses of these organizations
- Identify the limitations of humanitarian response

Humanitarian organizations are characterized by their diversity. Although humanitarian institutions include a wide range of governmental and nongovernmental organizations, embrace diverse philosophies, and rely on a variety of constituencies for support, they all espouse the humanitarian imperative: the alleviation of life-threatening suffering.

Q. List as many categories of humanitarian assistance organizations as you can. Compare your list with the discussion of categories that follows.

A. _____



International humanitarian actors

Like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), founded in 1864, many humanitarian groups, such as UNICEF, Save the Children, and Oxfam, have their origins in nonpartisan relief programs for victims of war. While firmly committed to the preventive value of long-term development, emergency aid has remained a highly publicized part of their work. However, the proliferation of complex emergencies since 1990 and the heightened expectations for international responses have put a special burden of responsibility on established agencies as well as crating a host of newcomers. In this chapter we analyze the interests and responses to the following five broad categories of humanitarian institutions: UN organizations, donor government agencies, NGOs, the ICRC, and the military. In addition, we consider the limitations these institutions face when responding to humanitarian emergencies.

The United Nations system

Within the United Nations system, the task of responding to humanitarian need resides principally with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Health Organization (WHO). United Nations Volunteers (UNV) provide personnel to assist in complex emergencies. Although the primary objective of most of these agencies is the promotion of long-term development, they all also have mandates and special units to respond to emergencies.

Each of the organizations has its own mandate and its own governing body made up of representatives of governments. UNICEF focuses on the needs of women and children; UNHCR on refugees; and WFP on food assistance. Such mandates obviously overlap. The resulting problems of coordination have led to periodic calls for a single consolidated UN organization to handle emergencies. While conceptually attractive and potentially cost-effective, such an entity could widen existing disconnects between emergency assistance and rehabilitation and development aid. A single UN relief agency also could worsen the existing imbalance in funding to the further detriment of non-emergency programs.

A second circle of UN organizations has significant but more peripheral involvement in emergency response activities. These agencies include the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and several activities administered by UNDP, including the UN Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), the UN Development Fund for Women, and the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF). In addition, regional organizations such as the Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) are involved in program operation.

A third circle is made up of the Bretton Woods institutions: the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Formally a part of the United Nations system, these organizations have independent charters and governance and stress their separateness from the UN. Although the World Bank's resources are not normally committed to emergencies, they are increasingly available for rehabilitation as well as development purposes. IMF policies and loans have a direct bearing on the economic and political prospects for governments beset by and recovering from civil wars. Similarly involved are the regional lending institutions in the World Bank family, such as the African and Asian Development Banks.

Since 1992m, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) in the UN secretariat has been responsible for coordinating the UN response to complex emergencies. Created in the wake of disjointed UN programs in the Gulf crisis, DHA has enjoyed neither the financial nor the administrative leverage necessary for its demanding task. DHA provides support for the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), a forum that draws together representatives of the major UN organizations, NGOs, and the ICRC for information-sharing and coordination purposes.¹⁷ DHA spearheads efforts to do joint assessments of individual humanitarian crises, to make joint appeals on behalf of the entire system, and to track the contributions that result.



DHA

DHA is also the focal point for coordination with the other two major UN departments engaged in complex emergencies: the UN Departments of Peace-keeping Operations (DPKO) and Political Affairs (DPA). The interface among these three departments is where humanitarian and political-military activities are addressed. The Under-Secretary-General of each department reports to the Secretary-General, who takes direction from the Security Council.

At the country level, the UN official charged with coordination of the humanitarian response is the UNDP resident representative in his or her capacity as resident coordinator of the UN system. In major emergencies, a separate humanitarian coordinator may be appointed by DHA. In some crises, particularly before DHA's creation, one of the operational UN organizations was appointed "lead agency", with certain coordinating responsibilities for the UN family of agencies. In circumstances in which the Secretary-General appoints a special representative (SRSG) to head an operation, the humanitarian coordinator may report to that person as well as to DHA in New York.

The UN Centre for Human Rights, an arm of the UN Human Rights Commission, is separate from the UN family of assistance organizations and outside the coordination scope of DHA and the IASC. Until the recent spate of emergencies, the commission had few international staff resident in countries in crisis, instead it dispatched special rapporteurs to report on human rights abuses.

Donor governments

Donor governments are the source of most of the resources available for humanitarian action, whether channelled to UN organizations and NGOs or used by governments to operate their own substantial assistance programs.

At the opening of the Second Development Decade in 1970, governments in the UN General Assembly adopted a target of 0.7 percent of their gross national product (GNP) as the level of their commitment to official development assistance. Only the countries of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands reached that target in 1993. The preeminent donors - the U.S. and Japan - fell far short of the target at 0.15 and 0.26 percent, respectively.

U.S. resources frequently amount to between one-third and one-half of total bilateral government commitments to humanitarian crises. Washington remains the preeminent donor to emergencies, often setting the pace and the trend of responses. However, its leadership position has eroded in recent years, in part reflecting a falling off of resource commitments and in part a broader U.S. retrenchment in multilateral cooperation. The member states of the European Union, individually and jointly through ECHO and the European Union's Development Directorate, represent, along with Japan, the other major blocs of resources.

Well aware that the decision-making and prioritization processes vary from one country to the next, governments seek to coordinate and harmonize aid policies through the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Paris-based Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). DAC figures are instructive in highlighting

*Boxes of European
Community tinned beef at a
warehouse in Tuzla, Bosnia-
Herzegovina.*

Refugees, 1995, No. 2 p. 19.
Photo: UNHCR/B. Stevenson



the growing share of official development assistance (ODA) directed toward emergencies. "Emergency assistance and distress relief, which had constituted less than 3 percent of bilateral aid until 1990, had come to exceed 8 percent of the total by 1993", the DAC chairman reported in 1994. "Expressed in current dollars, what had been a 300 million item in the early 1980s had become a 3.2 billion claim on bilateral aid budgets in 1993."¹⁸ In 1994, humanitarian assistance to Rwanda alone totaled an estimated 2 percent of all ODA.¹⁹

In recent years, DAC chairmen have expressed concern about a levelling-off and falling of aid levels. The 1994 report showed a drop in aid levels from 60.8 billion in 1992 to 56.0 billion in 1993. Taking a hopeful view, the DAC report interpreted this troubling development as "a bout of weakness, rather than an incipient collapse" in the fabric of aid cooperation.²⁰ A recent NGO review was more negative. "In spite of growing prosperity in DAC donor countries, and the consistent support of the OECD public for efforts to help the poor," the analysis concluded, "the era of gradually growing assistance for the poor seems to have come to an end."²¹

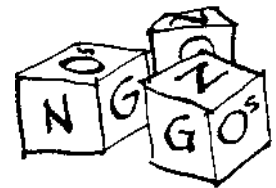
The extent to which "donor fatigue" is a new fact of international life is a matter of debate. The loss of interest among the publics in donor countries is frequently cited by governments as a major factor contributing to a falling off of aid levels. The alleged loss of interest is contested by NGOs, who, pointing to public opinion polls that show continued strong support for programs of development cooperation, charge that governments are using "donor fatigue" as a rationalization for their own lackluster performance. The media often use the term, unaware of the debate surrounding it.

Nongovernmental organizations

Nongovernmental organizations are the third category of humanitarian agencies. The multitude of international NGOs ranges from large-scale international federations that respond to most major crises to individual agencies with programs in selected countries or emergencies. More than 1,000 NGOs have been granted consultative status by the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and for every organization accredited there are scores that are not. Many developing countries and nations in crisis have their own NGOs, some of which are linked to international networks.

NGOs are a loosely defined group of institutions whose purposes are often public but whose resources are privately generated and managed. Many have charitable or nonprofit status in their countries of origin, entitling them to receive individual donations on a tax-deductible basis, but imposing certain constraints regarding such matters as advocacy and accountability. Many are linked to religious networks; many are rooted in secular constituencies.²² Some, such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), concern themselves with emergencies only; others, such as Oxfam, address both emergencies and development.

Although many NGOs are modest in the scale of their activities, a few, such as CARE and World Vision, have access to more resources for work in a given country than UN organizations, donor governments, or even government ministries themselves. NGOs were so numerous and so active in Haiti in 1994-1995 that Haitian government officials referred disparagingly to their country as a "Republic of NGOs". Mozambican officials called their country "the Donor's Republic of Mozambique".



Donor governments often regard NGOs as advantageous partners in emergencies because their energetic and low-cost operations help victims at the grassroots, a population that governmental and intergovernmental programs often fail to reach. Quick responses, direct action in danger zones, and a willingness to operate where other actors face political constraints make them an attractive conduit for both public and private funds.

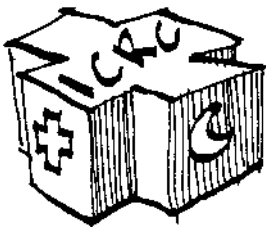
NGOs include agencies concerned with human rights protection as well as those providing emergency relief. Groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have greater freedom and willingness to speak out against abuses than governments or the UN human rights machinery. Often exposure of individual abuses or an evolving pattern of abuse signals a broader erosion of internal security and a threat of wider humanitarian problems.

In recent years, NGOs have paid greater attention to effectiveness and accountability. This trend has been spurred by factors such as the greater prominence NGO work has attained in headline crises, the higher degree of complexity involved in functioning effectively in civil war settings, and the increased scrutiny that their activities have received from governments and the media. Professional associations of NGOs, such as the Geneva-based International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and the Washington-based coalition of U.S. agencies, InterAction, have been an arena for reviewing current standards of professionalism. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has taken the lead in developing and promoting a voluntary Code of Conduct among NGOs.

International Committee of the Red Cross

In a category of its own, the ICRC is a neutral body established in international law to assist and protect individuals in both international and non-international armed conflicts. Custodian of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols of 1977, the ICRC enjoys a special status in international law and an observer role in the UN General Assembly. Donor governments traditionally fund about 90 percent of its 500 million annual budget. The base of the organization in Geneva, Switzerland, underscored its commitment to neutrality. Traditionally, most ICRC international staff have been Swiss nationals, but the ICRC in recent years has utilized professionals from other countries in responding to emergencies. Specialized personnel, such as doctors or logisticians, may be non-Swiss, although the heads of the ICRC's delegations remain Swiss.

ICRC staff are generally in the vanguard of international personnel working in areas of potential conflict. In conflict after conflict, it emerges as the single most sought-after and trusted source of information by the media. Although ICRC is a member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and shares information on emergencies with the United Nations, it is nonetheless careful to maintain its distance from UN peacekeeping and political activities. ICRC requires agreement of all belligerents in a given conflict before it will provide assistance to civilians in any one area. Its mandated responsibilities include visits to prisoners of war and political detainees as well as assistance to civilian populations.



The ICRC is only one of three component parts of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement. The other two are the (180) national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies (IFRC). The IFRC is tasked with responding to natural disasters and the needs of civilian populations in non-conflict settings. Individual national societies have their own mandates, which include assisting in emergencies within their own borders, managing blood donation and volunteer programs, and mobilizing financial and personnel resources for international deployment.

The military

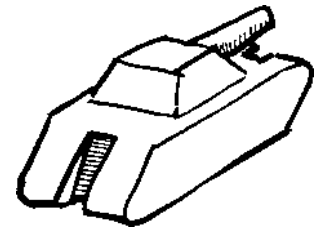
A fifth institution, in some respects an element within the UN and donor government categories, comprises external military forces. This relative newcomer to the humanitarian arena has contributed significantly to recent efforts by traditional humanitarian organizations to respond to emergencies. During the Cold War the military forces of various nations were sometimes mobilized to combat the consequences of natural disasters, but their contribution to the delivery of relief and protection of human rights in war zones was limited to occasional actions of unilateral forces or of national contingents serving in UN peacekeeping operations.

Beginning with the creation of safe havens for Kurds escaping Iraqi aggression in April 1991, however, outside military forces have been increasingly pressed into service in complex emergencies. Sometimes, troops have operated under national authority, as in the case of U.S. troops in Somalia. Sometimes they have served in coalitions of forces, as in northern Iraq or Haiti. More frequently, they have served under multilateral authority in UN peacekeeping operations, as in Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, Cambodia, and Angola.

International military forces have performed three basic roles in the humanitarian sphere. They have fostered a climate of security for civilian populations and humanitarian organizations; they have provided direct support to the work of such organizations; and they have engaged in direct assistance and protection activities themselves. Whereas the contribution of the military in a number of recent crises has been indispensable, the extent to which it will become a permanent feature of the international humanitarian system is unclear. At issue are several unresolved policy questions, such as cost and cost-effectiveness, comparative advantage, cultural differences with humanitarian organizations, and the often negative consequences of utilizing military forces.²³

National actors

In addition to these five sets of international humanitarian actors, there are also institutions within the countries in crisis that often play a major humanitarian role. These include the political authorities—governmental or insurgent; the military forces of the warring parties; and the institutions of civil society. These national actors do not figure prominently in this module because the focus is on international organizations. The roles of national actors, however, should not be minimized or ignored.²⁴



Limitations on humanitarian responses

Every humanitarian organization operates under certain constraints. Five of these constraints are examined here:

- Mandates, funding, and ties to donors
- Emergency vs. longer-term approaches
- Security
- Coordination and competition
- Changing priorities

Mandates, funding and ties to donors

Each organization is limited to one degree or another by such factors as its constitution and mandate, constituency and traditions, geographical area and client group, operational sector and expertise. Available resources are generally provided for specific purposes in stated settings for stated periods. As a result, partnerships are often sought with governmental, intergovernmental, or nongovernmental agencies, which further complicates funding and coordination.

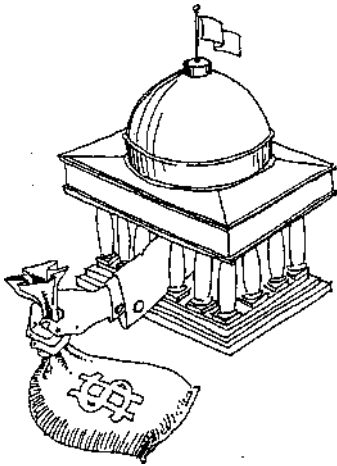
In recent years, the proliferation of emergencies and of agencies seeking to provide assistance has increased the demand and competition for funds. UN organizations and donor governments are making greater use of NGOs as subcontractors. For NGOs that rely on such resources, limitations on the location and type of aid operations inevitably follow. If donors themselves lean in the direction of televised crises, the effect is carried over to NGOs whose funding depends on government allocations.²⁵ Even NGOs that rely for most or all of their resources on private contributions are affected by the priorities of individual contributors who may be influenced by the media.

Emergency vs. longer-term approaches

The relationship between emergency and longer-term assistance remains a conceptual and operational hurdle for many humanitarian agencies. As already described, many organizations respond to emergencies but see themselves primarily as agents of long-term development. This means, on the positive side, that they approach emergencies with an eye to addressing the underlying causes of humanitarian crises. On the negative side, it contributes to an institutional schizophrenia among groups that would rather not be involved in emergencies at all. Agencies that see themselves as providing essentially a short-term, life-saving service often become involved necessarily in prolonged emergencies and issues of rehabilitation and reconstruction. Despite the fact that some donors are more flexible in their approach, funding criteria reflecting a continuum from emergency relief through rehabilitation to development greatly complicate program planning and operations.

Security

There is widespread agreement that a basic level of security is essential for all humanitarian operations. Working in highly volatile conflicts, humanitarian agencies are faced with the difficult choice of negotiating their own safety and access from a position of humanitarian independence or integrating their operations within a political-security framework. The military can offer unparalleled security and logistical advantages that may be valuable for a time, but humanitarian workers tend to be more willing to take



risks than are the military assigned to protect them. Moreover, their association with armed forces may compromise their neutrality in the eyes of warring factions or of civilian populations. Military forces deployed to protect assistance for one group of victims may be perceived as the enemy by others.

Several alternative approaches have been taken by aid organizations to the challenges posed by multifactional violence in settings such as Liberia, the Sudan, and Somalia. The ICRC has sought to negotiate the passage of assistance through the battle lines. Negotiating agreements in consistent with the principle of impartiality and in keeping with the voluntary nature of assistance but is often rejected by warring factions. Others, primarily UN organizations, have relied on the use of superior military force to shield relief operations. The use of military force, while often more effective in the short term, risks compromise by association with a political-military strategy and is difficult to sustain. A third option involves temporary suspension or permanent cessation of aid operations, an apparent admission of defeat for those with humanitarian mandates. NGOs, which have more freedom to choose the path of independence or to associate themselves with a given security framework, have yet to agree in various conflicts or, as a general matter of principle, on one approach or the other.

Coordination and competition

Better coordination at the international level and within individual crises is always in demand. Indeed, there is a chronic lack of coordination at both levels. However, there is little agreement about what coordination involves and considerable reluctance by individual organizations to submit to it.²⁶

Competition among humanitarian agencies is a distinguishing feature of virtually every emergency. Fund-raising and publicity are the lifeblood of aid agencies, whether they are seeking governmental or individual support. As a result, jockeying for the attention of the media and donors is routine. The agency competition that characterized aspects of the Rwanda emergency in May 1994, especially the infighting for the attention of the media, appeared to overwhelm established coordination systems.²⁷ As the numbers and types of agencies multiply, the lack of regulation is likely to stimulate further competition.

Several interagency mechanisms already have been mentioned that play a role in different aspects of coordination at different levels. These include the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD, and professional organizations of NGOs, such as Geneva-based International Council of Voluntary Agencies and Washington-based InterAction. Additional coordinating vehicles are a European Union-NGO forum and a Disasters Emergency Committee in the United Kingdom. In individual crises, ad hoc coordinating mechanisms – either among NGOs or encompassing NGOs and other humanitarian actors – are also established.

While the United Nations appears to provide a logical vehicle for coordinating in-country operations, some organizations have reasons of principle and policy for refusing to allow themselves to be coordinated. As a result, coordination arrangements in a given crisis are generally ad hoc, hammered out on the ground at meetings of practitioners. The chemistry among the organizations and individuals involved as well as the nature of the crises mean that results are difficult to predict.²⁸

With an increasing number of players, more complex political terrain, and heightened expectations by the international public, the guiding humanitarian principle is often obscured in the crowded landscape of internal armed conflicts. As the number of agencies has increased, values beyond altruism have emerged as powerful forces. Disaster relief is now big business, with agencies competing for their own market share. The need for funding pressures agencies into demonstrating results to both the public and governments – the latter an increasingly critical source of finance.

While NGOs are generally acknowledged to be more cost-effective and represent the major operational partner for much assistance from the UN and donor governments, subcontracting aid to private groups does not necessarily guarantee greater efficiency or cost-effectiveness. The ten largest U.S. and European NGOs now control about 75 percent of emergency delivery. These agencies with multi-million-dollar budgets are every bit as powerful – and, some would argue, as bureaucratic – as similar-sized UN organizations.

Changing priorities

Humanitarian agencies also face tortuous choices about where to deploy resources and personnel. In addition to the overall trend of shrinking resources, since 1990 major donors have shifted their aid budgets to perceived priorities in areas such as the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. “The policy ‘commitment’ which many donors have given [that] aid to the [Central and Eastern European countries and newly independent states] will not be at the expense of developing countries is difficult to monitor”, concludes one recent independent review. “But it is nevertheless the case that funds have been found for aid to the East at a time when aid to the South is being cut.”

Even within Africa, certain “loud emergencies” such as Somalia and Rwanda have attracted more international attention and funds than the relatively silent emergencies such as Sudan and Liberia, to say nothing of the really silent emergencies in Sierra Leone and Burundi. Some agencies have followed available money while others have attempted to sustain interest in the forgotten crises and unpopular sectors. NGOs are likely to have more difficulty in resisting donor government trends.

SELF-STUDY EXERCISES

Please indicate whether each of the following statements is true or false.

- _____ 1. UN organizations and donor governments are increasingly relying on NGOs as subcontractors.
- _____ 2. In matters of guaranteeing security for their humanitarian operations, ICRC often tries to negotiate agreements which are consistent with principles of impartiality.
- _____ 3. NGOs, as a general matter of principle, agree on the need to use superior military force to shield relief operations only in the most complex of emergencies, and only when belligerents threaten humanitarian operations.
- _____ 4. NGOs which receive donor funding are able to maintain their independence from donor priorities as long as these NGOs clearly espouse principles of impartiality and neutrality
- _____ 5. Military involvement as humanitarian actors in complex emergencies has increased as the number of international private humanitarian assistance NGOs has decreased.

For questions 6-12, match the organizational acronym with the agency description which follows.

UNICEF	WFP	UNHCR	DHA	UNDP
WHO	IMF	OAU	IOM	DPKO
ECHO	UNV	NGOs	ICRC	ECOSOC

- _____ 6. UN entity whose primary purpose is to provide food assistance.
- _____ 7. This term covers a broad range of private organizations who officially remain independent of governments yet often serve as their implementing partners.
- _____ 8. The UN entity officially responsible for coordinating UN response in complex emergencies since 1992.
- _____ 9. UN entity which focuses on the needs of women and children.
- _____ 10. The UN entity responsible for peacekeeping operations.
- _____ 11. This body was established by international law to protect individuals in both international and non-international armed conflicts.
- _____ 12. UN entity which focuses on the needs of refugees.

13. From the reading, recall and list at least five constraints or limitations on humanitarian agency response.

ANSWER KEY

1. T 2. T 3. F 4. F 5. F
6. WFP 7. NGOs
8. DHA 9. UNICEF
10. DPKO 11. ICRC
12. UNHCR
13. Mandates, funding, ties with donors; emergency vs. Long-term approaches; security issues; coordination and competition; resource constraints and changing priorities

PART **1** Chapter 4

The news media

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Good news is too often considered not newsworthy. Bad news is not “news” until it offers good visual images. Murder in a small town and its big-time equivalent, war within or between nations, makes better news than a nutrition program that improves a million lives.

—Carole Zimmermann³⁰

After studying this chapter you should be able to:

- Identify various news media types and structures
- Define and understand the importance of “journalistic ethics”
- Identify criteria for determining the news value of humanitarian crises
- Identify limitations of media coverage in relation to humanitarian crises
- Understand the difficulties of measuring media influence on public policy
- Describe two divergent models of foreign policymaking

An improved understanding of the news media, their interests, structures and limitations will assist both policymakers and humanitarian agencies in better managing and preparing their media relations strategy. Policymakers and humanitarian agencies frequently complain about what they consider disproportionate media influence over elected officials and public opinion. The same critics are often equally dismayed, however, if the media stay away from crises altogether. The media are criticized often for the superficial knowledge of international affairs that prevails among major segments of the U.S. population. In reality, the prevailing illiteracy implicates public institutions, policymakers, and even humanitarian organizations.³¹ It is clear that the media have become a favorite scapegoat, the more so as new technology has appeared to augment their influence.

What is the news media?

Rather than approaching the media as an actor with a purpose, it is more instructive to view the media as an institution with a process. In fact, using *media* in the plural may help to disaggregate their multiple agendas and interests in humanitarian crises. A more disaggregated approach offers a closer analysis of the differential effects of various forms of journalism on various audiences, including policymakers and the general public.

The news media as a process

Viewing the news media as an institution with a process, provides a helpful framework for reviewing more closely the news information which originates in many forms and is subject to many influences. Before reaching the media, information is handled by a host of stakeholders, many of whom are influenced not by the objective news value of a given event but by political, professional, or commercial motives. Within media institutions such information is moved forward, changed, or discarded via an editorial funnel managed by a series of “gatekeepers”. In addition to gatekeepers who



measure the comparative value of news information, other professional and idiosyncratic forces – only some of them journalistic – are at work determining what will be produced and conveyed.

News uniformity

Despite multiple interests and influences, the product that emerges from the system bears much uniformity across competing sections of the media. As a foreign news radio editor said, “No one in the media wants to take the chance of being wrong, so they stick to consumers’ view of the news.” At the same time, while commercial competition may contribute to a certain uniformity in news coverage, different media inject different commercial criteria and, in some cases, political considerations that affect the content and style of coverage. Since the product is available to policy elites and public alike, the media is regarded by some observers as a lowest common denominator within which multiple actors in a crisis find themselves reduced to a common field of arbitration.

Types of news media

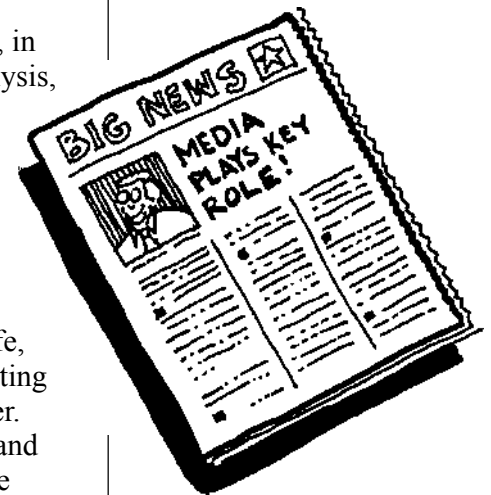
In practice, news information comes to the consumer at different speeds, in various packages, with different shelf lives. For the purposes of this analysis, three broad types of news coverage are identified.

Headline news. Television and radio news bulletins as well as news summary sections of print media constitute what might be called headline news. The emphasis is on reporting the latest developments in fast-moving or breaking stories and scooping the opposition rather than on presenting an in-depth analysis of events.

Documentary news. Documentary news, which enjoys a longer shelf life, may offer more detailed background and analysis of an issue, demonstrating the investigative or analytical skills of a particular news outlet or reporter. This kind of coverage is typically found in specialist broadcast features and on inside pages of newspapers and journals. Some newspapers have little space for documentary news and, give preference to local or national rather than international topics.

News commentary. A third category, news commentary, is represented by editorials or opinion pieces that carry a particular point of view on the issues of the moment. Such commentaries are an extension of policy processes, often used by governments and policy elites to make their own views known. Use by nongovernmental commentators also demonstrates the autonomy of news organizations and represents an obvious source of media impact on policy. News commentary provides perhaps the most obvious vehicle through which publishers and editors can communicate their institutional or personal viewpoints.

These three broad types of news information are not mutually exclusive, but overlap and interact. All three affect the formation of public policy and the shape of humanitarian action. Policymakers and aid groups often overlook how much modern news information is tailored to different audiences, with different style and content.



Structure and trends

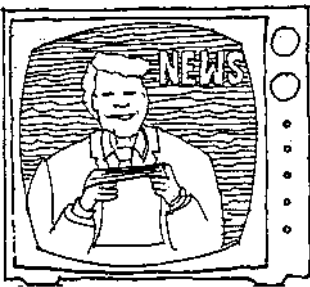
Electronic and print media. Within the news industry, a broad division exists between electronic and print media. Each has maintained a separate niche in the commercial and news markets while using the other as a source. Television and radio journalists regularly scan newspapers and journals for story ideas; the print media often utilize their greater capacity to follow up headline news items in more depth. Many journalists – and some policymakers as well – admit to using CNN as a kind of wire service for monitoring fast-breaking stories. Changing technology, in particular the development of electronic newspapers and interactive television, may blur the remaining distinctions between electronic and print media and rearrange the gatekeepers in the system.

Television news. Much of the post-Cold War debate about media influence on foreign policy has focused on television as the most potent actor.³³

Drawing upon satellite technology, television news bulletins depict the violence and suffering of conflicts with an immediacy and realism that, some argue, forces a rapid policy response. If the so-called CNN factor exists—and the review of recent humanitarian emergencies in Part 2 contains traces of it—that effect necessarily would be limited by television’s selectivity in covering crises. Moreover, the production expense of television, especially with respect to foreign news, is such that sustained coverage often depends on radio or print media to uncover a story in the first place and to maintain its public profile once the cameras have left. The value of television news dramatizing events needs to be balanced against the selectivity and episodic nature of its coverage.

Market audience. The media also need to be differentiated according to their basic market audience of readership. Although they have access to a global pool of pictures and to far-flung (albeit largely English-speaking) reporting, the majority of media are still national in focus. So, too, is the content of most news programs and publications. Even services such as CNN or ITN World News, that are marketed as global, invariably reflect U.S. and British domestic perspectives and values. Commercial demands also have blurred the traditional division of news media into those serving “quality” as distinct from “tabloid” markets. Electronic and print media are now finely tuned to link audiences or readership with advertisers. Increasingly, the media have to resort to packaging news in a new form of tabloidism that mixes information with entertainment. Judging from the reception, the resulting blend dubbed “infotainment” is both profitable from a commercial standpoint and questionable from a journalistic one.

Several international media organizations stand out as noteworthy exceptions to these trends. These include the BBC World Service radio and the International Herald-Tribune newspaper, which maintain high standards of comprehensive reporting and are regarded as sources of authenticity in international affairs. This is not to say that such media are necessarily influential in the highest levels of policy processes. As a British government policymaker noted, only a limited number of broadcast institutions such as BBC Radio News and ITN bulletins exercise serious influence on senior officials and politicians.



Humanitarian interests within the media

Journalistic ethics

The news media in general and journalists in particular are wary of suggestions that they have, or should adopt, a humanitarian agenda. The majority of professional journalists pride themselves on the “journalistic ethic” which dictates that they report the news in an objective and “morally neutral” fashion. Since their primary mission is not humanitarian, international and humanitarian matters must compete for attention with business, sports, entertainment, domestic politics, and other news. The proposition that the media give special attention to humanitarian issues is similar to requests by other special interests for expanded coverage of activities in which they are involved and is viewed as a flagrant violation of journalistic ethics.

Humanitarian interests and instincts

While different independent news sources and journalists may agree on the need to preserve the journalistic ethic, they vary in their interests and the relative emphasis which they place on covering international and humanitarian issues. The humanitarian instincts and personal objectives of working journalists can also affect the way a given news institution functions. Some journalists carry a strong personal humanitarian agenda, take great personal risks in reporting conflicts and suffering, and are committed to seeing that their work contributes to a more-effective global response.

The involvement of reporters in war zones has produced numerous examples of actions outside the call of journalistic duty. At a workshop convened to discuss the news media and humanitarian action, one reporter recounted personally shepherding a youngster across a closed bridge from Rwanda into Zaire, negotiating with the authorities in order to reunite him with his parents. In conflict after conflict, journalists strike up not only working relationships but also friendships with humanitarian personnel. While they must work to preserve their objectivity as reporters, the fact that they take more than a professional interest in the issues is undeniable. Their reporting helps establish, and builds on, a palpable human interest among news consumers.

Net news value of a particular crisis

Another major factor in determining media coverage is the net news value of a particular crisis. A glance at daily headlines and bulletins in competing markets demonstrates a striking consistency. Attempts to determine whether that consistency reflects an intrinsic objectivity in news coverage or, more negatively, the uniform currency created by the demands of competition have confronted analysts with a maze of contradictory data. Research and conventional wisdom, however, suggest that the value of a particular crisis is deliberately or intuitively subject to a number of filters or criteria which determines its “news value” relative to competing stories.

In our treatment of the subject, we provide a distillation of these criteria without attempting to weigh their influence or claim that they are completely distinct from one another. Nor do we suggest that various news media



What matters is the truth.
Refugees, October, 1989
Photo: UNHCR/N. van Praag

sources use these criteria in the same way or in a disciplined fashion. Rather, the following nine criteria (the first four adapted from the those identified in the classic study, *Deciding What's News*, by Herbert J. Gans) provide a useful checklist for the non-media professional interested in anticipating or assessing the net news value of a particular crisis or story angle. Building on Mr. Gan's assertion, we can venture to say that stories meeting one of the following nine criteria grow in importance if and when they satisfy any of the others. The reader must also recognize that the outcome is more often a matter of journalistic judgment than of absolute values.

1. Rank in government priorities

The higher the priority of the crisis on a government's agenda the more likely the crisis will be covered. Crises in Liberia and Sudan, of low priority on the U.S. government agenda, were repeatedly overshadowed by intense coverage of the "high priority" crises in the Gulf (1991) and Somalia (1992-93).

2. Impact on national interests

The greater the real or potential impact of a crisis on domestic national interests the more likely the crisis will be covered. Haiti began receiving increased coverage long before the U.S. military intervened in September 1994, in part spurred by the Haitian boat people destined for U.S. shores.

3. Number of people affected

The greater the number of people affected by a crisis, the more likely a story will be covered. Everything else being equal, an Indian newspaper is more likely to give relatively more front page coverage to a cyclone resulting in the deaths of 200 people than it is to an earthquake resulting in the deaths of 15 people.

4. Significance for past or future developments³⁴

The greater and more significant the links between a current crisis and past or future developments the more likely a story will be covered. For example, the news media were fast to report the plight of the Kurds in northern Iraq, which was directly linked to the Gulf War which preceded it.

5. Domestic links of an overseas story

The more numerous and concrete the links between a crisis occurring overseas and the domestic audience the more likely the crisis will be covered. For example, all other factors being equal, French news media sources will give more extensive coverage to a crisis involving French humanitarian agencies than to a crisis where they are absent.

6. Novelty of the story

What is novel in one setting, may be considered mundane in the next. The further the event or "story" from the domestic news consumer, the more novel and sensational the story will have to be. As Herbert Gans observed, "Foreign conflicts must be more dramatic and usually more violent in order to break into the news."³⁵ All other factors being equal, a California news station will cover an earthquake in San Francisco which kills 10 people before it will cover an earthquake of similar magnitude and suffering occurring in Cairo, Egypt.

7. Suitability for the particular media format

Different media formats have different logistical and technical requirements for covering a story. For example, television crews dependent on satellite communications technology are generally more restricted in their geographic mobility than are journalists with the print media.

8. Commercial and political priorities: publishers/proprietors

Editors must not only recognize a good story when they see one, they often must consider how this story fits within the commercial and political priorities of their publishers and proprietors—some of which have more humanitarian interests and instincts than others.

9. Competition among news sources

Understanding news as the dynamic commodity within a competitive process qualifies any notion of an intrinsic or net news value. "Note the impact of a few national news organizations" on the decisions that other media make, said one editor who considers the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the networks, and CNN to be "the relatively few trendsetters".

News media limitations/constraints

Analysts of how the media function in complex emergencies note limitations in the sufficiency and adequacy of coverage provided.³⁶ Many factors and trends contribute to these limitations. Some of these are listed below.

Reduced foreign coverage

Fires, the amount of news coverage of complex emergencies is widely held to be insufficient. The number of major crises in which there is widespread and serious human deprivation and abuse of human rights outruns the coverage provided. At precisely the time when major crises have proliferated, many news organizations have reduced the space devoted to these events. That situation seems unlikely to change as commercial pressures continue to force a reduction in foreign news-gathering operations. "Most broadcast networks have severely cut back overseas operations", noted a foreign affairs correspondent, "often relying on footage drawn from other sources [which is then added] to a story written in London or New York."

Focusing on breaking events

The media have been criticized for providing too much attention to breaking events and too little historical and political context. A notable example is the reporting of the Rwanda crisis. During the initial phase, when a preplanned campaign of genocide took place, international coverage was insufficient, with only a handful of reporters on the scene. Later, however, when hundreds of reporters chronicled the distress of Rwandan refugees in neighboring countries, coverage was inadequate. Few journalists noted that the population in refugee camps was composed of Rwandan communities transported largely intact, including political and military elements implicated in the genocide. (See the next part for a more detailed analysis of the Rwandan crisis).

Focusing on the sensational and exceptional

In general, it takes exceptional violence or some other distinguishing feature to lift humanitarian crises onto the screen or page. How early in an emerging crisis does news coverage occur? This is a key issue for humanitarian agencies seeking to stimulate preventive action in a world in which government intelligence and policy systems fail to move incipient crises onto more visible agendas. The crises reviewed in Part 2 suggest a serious limitation in the attention of the media in the early phases of an emergency. The news media as well as the government policymakers and humanitarian institutions, missed clear early warning signs in Somalia of the deteriorating situation and obvious forerunners in Burundi for what was to follow in Rwanda. The limitations of headline news in these various cases might suggest documentary coverage as a more likely early warning agent. The overriding conclusion is more negative: the media should not be regarded as a substitute for other sources of intelligence for government decision-making apparatuses and humanitarian organizations.

Judging news value based on perceived domestic interests

Another major area of criticism is that the international media have focused on subjects of perceived interest to readers and viewers in developed countries. These include the threats posed by a given crisis to Western values, for example, and the activities of expatriate—generally North American and European—aid workers and the involvement of Western troops. When a particular country's aid personnel or soldiers are on the front line of a disaster it is sure to make the news over another concurrent disaster where this is not the case. "It's a world through a Western prism," remarked a CNN reporter of much of the current coverage of international events. Among the results are a denigration of local institutions and an overemphasis on the relative importance of international and Western-led initiatives.

The presence of international military forces invariably ensures coverage and provides the focus for the media of the troop-sending nation. U.S. military involvement in Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, and Bosnia resulted in coverage far in excess of equally grievous humanitarian crises in Liberia and Sudan. Similarly, reporting on the activities of Canadian peacekeepers over the last several decades has provided the Canadian public with a major point of entry into international affairs. Dutch media were preoccupied throughout 1995 with the fate of Dutch peacekeepers in Srebrenica and a subsequent parliamentary inquiry about ethnic cleansing as the Serbs overran this so-called safe area.

In summary, foreign news is often given highly subjective treatment by media committed to serving domestic markets. As a result, foreign conflicts carrying no obvious or immediate threat may be presented in the Western media only when they are advanced well beyond the stage of prevention or containment. Even active conflicts are not assured coverage.

Perpetuating negative images and ethnocentric views

A related criticism concerns the perceived tendency of the media to perpetuate negative images and ethnocentric views. Persons affected by international crises often are portrayed as helpless victims who are dependent on, and take liberties with, international largesse. The fact that those who suffer are often nonwhite and their "rescuers" white has

contributed to charges of racism in news coverage. Critics also speak of the "pornography of suffering," that is, of the dehumanization in the portrayal of those who suffer. On occasion, the beneficiaries of assistance have criticized the media and humanitarian institutions for the images conveyed.³⁷

Reducing complex situations to "infotainment"

Complex situations in war zones are frequently reduced to infotainment rather than treated in news documentary or news commentary format. Often a human interest angle is identified to emphasize the connection to a domestic audience. Sensing the difficulties in reporting the complexity of the conflicts in Bosnia and Rwanda, where "there are no good guys and bad guys, just bad guys and worse guys," Western journalists focused instead on efforts to arrange the medical evacuation of a single child from Sarajevo or to provide potable water for an individual family in Goma.³⁸

Reporting limited to areas of access and security

The difficulty in gaining access in complex emergencies and the high costs of producing usable footage or reports can be prohibitive. With respect to Rwanda, after months of limited coverage of genocide that claimed between 500,000 and one million lives, the resulting refugee emergency, complete with the specter of cholera, became the top international news story of the day. CNN, which was alerted to the likelihood of the outbreak of genocide in early April, opted against reporting on developments until three months later, when the genocide produced a mass migration of Hutus into neighboring countries. Increased coverage resulted in part from greater security and accessibility in Goma than in Kigali, and the involvement in the relief effort of many national military contingents and myriad humanitarian organizations.

Resources and priorities

In 1995, an estimated thirty civil wars claimed at least a thousand deaths each, with all the actual or potential humanitarian costs accompanying such strife. Judging from the resulting media coverage, there appear to be no agreed-upon criteria by which the news media determine the comparative newsworthiness of a given crisis. Available data suggest that each crisis competes for coverage, not only with other foreign news stories but also with one another. With surprising regularity, the crises reviewed in Part 2 demonstrate that the attention given to one emergency comes at the expense of another. As a result, the serious issue arises of whether the media as well as government policymakers and humanitarian institutions are able to keep the relative severity of multiple crises in view and respond accordingly.

In any event, the choices faced by the media in determining which crises to cover are complex, and multiple factors beyond perceived domestic threats often play a role in decisions. As discussed earlier, a major development, a fresh news angle, or an accumulation of event is often needed to attract the media to a conflict or crisis that otherwise would remain largely unnoticed. For example, there was little coverage of the disintegration of the Somali state and the attendant civilian distress throughout most of 1991-1992. It was not until the latter half of 1992, when aid activities were increased—some of them designed to attract coverage—that the media accelerated reporting.

The Advent and Domination of Real-Time Television:

- *Real-time images are those television pictures beamed back live by satellite from a location. Alternatively they may have been taped a few minutes earlier, or perhaps an hour or two beforehand— but little more.*
- *The presence of a satellite dish has created a new grammar and editorial agenda for TV news coverage.*
- *The absence of a satellite dish usually means significantly less TV coverage of a crisis. Often no dish means no coverage.*
- *The presence of a dish creates new coverage because of a TV news manager's corporate obligation to justify its costly deployment.*
- *In a war zone [real-time coverage] reduces the time span of the news cycle to a point where there is virtually no time lag.*

—Nik Growing, diplomatic editor,
Channel Four News, ITN³⁹

SELF-STUDY EXERCISES

Indicate whether each of the following statements is true or false.

- ___ 1. The news media refers to a single monolithic actor with a uniform product.
- ___ 2. A television news bulletin is one example of headline news.
- ___ 3. While the majority of media are national in their focus, media sources marketed as global, such as CNN or ITN World News are relatively free of U.S. and British perspectives and values.
- ___ 4. CNN is among one of the few news sources considered by other news media sources to be a trend setter of what constitutes "news".

For questions 5-7, circle the correct answer.

- 5. News which enjoys a relatively short shelf life, is commonly referred to as:
 - A. Headline news
 - B. Emergency documentaries
 - C. News commentary
 - D. None of the above

- 6. The debate over media influence on foreign policy has focused primarily on:
 - A. Print media news
 - B. Documentary news
 - C. Television news
 - D. Internet news sources
 - E. None of the above

- 7. The "news" is subject to a multiplicity of interests and influences with many different media sources competing for audiences. The product that emerges from the system bears:
 - A. no uniformity across competing sections of the media
 - B. little uniformity across competing sections of the media
 - C. much uniformity across competing sections of the media
 - D. the diversity of media actors makes uniformity very difficult to determine

- 8. Define the concept of "journalistic ethics"

- 9. List at least five of the nine criteria which serve as filters in determining the relative news value of a crisis or story.

- 10. List at least four limitations or constraints on news media response to humanitarian crises

1. F 2. T 3. F 4. T
 5. A 6. C 7. C
 8. "Journalistic ethics" refers to the value among journalists and editors of reporting the news in an objective and "morally neutral" fashion.
 9. Domestic political priorities, number of people affected, significance for past or future developments, domestic links of an overseas story, novelty of the story, suitability for the particular media format, commercial and political considerations, competition among news sources.
 10. Reduction in foreign coverage, focus on breaking events, focus on exceptional and sensational, news value based on perceived domestic interests, perpetuating negative images and ethnocentric views, reducing complexity to "infotainment", need for access and security, priorities and limited resources.

ANSWER KEY



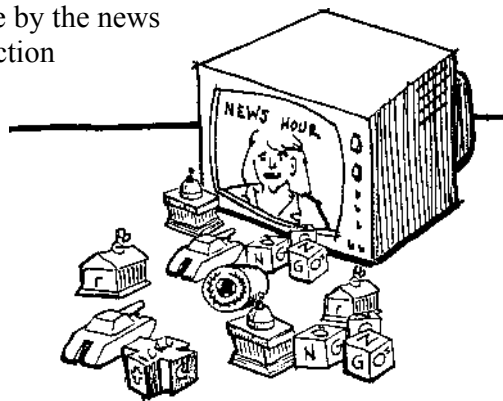
Analysis of media influence and recommendations for crisis triangle institutions

This part provides a framework for analyzing media influence on policymaking and humanitarian action and provides recommendations on how each institution can function more effectively and cooperatively in the humanitarian sphere. Chapter 5 presents an analytical framework which should be applied to the case studies presented in Chapter 6.

The case studies represent a cross-section of post-Cold War crises and exhibit varying degrees of coverage by the media, attention by government policymakers, and action by humanitarian organizations. Since the cases fit no simple classification scheme, they are presented roughly in chronological order. The Liberia and Sudan case studies have received relatively sparse media coverage and exhibited little media-policy interaction. These two "obscure" crises stand in stark contrast to the others.

At the end of each case study you will be asked questions to help you reflect on and analyze the case study information. These questions will require that you recall information provided in Part 1. In addition you should think about the framework for analyzing media influence (presented in Chapter 5) as you read the case studies. You are encouraged to bring your own experience to bear in this analysis. You may also want to analyze cases other than those reviewed here.

The discussion and analysis of the case studies point to changes which can improve coverage by the news media, policy of governments, and action by humanitarian organizations. In Chapter 7, therefore, we propose ways in which each set of institutions can function more effectively and cooperatively in the humanitarian sphere, while not losing sight of its own primary objectives.



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PART **2** Chapter 5

Analyzing media influence

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

- Understand how the news media influence distinct stages of policymaking.
- Describe and anticipate news media involvement across various stages of the response.
- Describe, and provide examples, of the difference between the news media's influence on strategic, as differentiated from, tactical, or presentational policy decisions.
- Describe, and provide examples, of the difference between primary, secondary and negligent media effects on policy.
- Describe how the news media influence the pace and scope of specific humanitarian action.



Framework for analyzing media influence

The following framework can be used as a tool for analyzing media influence on government policymaking. First, it is important to delineate the stage of response and the stage at which policy-making is occurring. Then it is necessary to consider how the media impacts policy at these various stages. Media impact on policy may be identified in two ways: by the level of policy at which impact occurs and by the degree of influence the media exercises. Although the media may influence policy and humanitarian response, other factors, especially domestic political contexts are at least as important in determining governmental responses. Where the media has clear impact, however, television coverage has been critical.

Framework for analyzing media influence

Stages of response	Stages of policymaking	Levels of impact	Degree of impact
Discovery	Set agenda	Strategic	Primary
Inundation	Delineate alternatives	Tactical	Secondary
Business as usual	Adopt policy	Presentational	Negligible
Wind-down	Implement decisions		

Stages of response

It is important to distinguish the stage of response crisis at which the interaction of the institutions of the crisis triangle is being assessed. In workshops which served as the basis for this analysis, participants identified four broad stages, beginning with the "discovery" of a given crisis by the media, sometimes with the help of humanitarian organizations and sometimes government officials. The discovery of a crisis is often followed by "inundation"—the period of snowballing interest as the media, government officials, and humanitarian groups flock to the scene in an effort to be identified with the action. During a subsequent "business-as-usual" phase, all institutions go about their respective tasks in the humanitarian sphere. Finally, comes a "wind-down" of involvement as the media and government officials, and sometimes humanitarian organizations as well, move on to other crises. During the third phase, the media may seek out particular angles of the event to pursue. During the final phase, reporting often becomes more negative and trenchant.⁴⁰

The duration of each of these stages varies according to the dynamics and violence of a particular emergency. As discussed in more detail in the case studies in Chapter 6, the northern Iraq experience tends to be remembered for the role of the media in initially highlighting the distress of Kurds in the mountains along the Turkish border, the Rwanda experience for the inundation of attention received during the Goma period, and so on. Media coverage and influence in a given crisis also may be cyclical, as demonstrated in Somalia. The media's attention is also often limited, as Haiti and northern Iraq suggest. Often, the media wind down their involvement before the problems are resolved.

Stages of policymaking

Any attempts to measure the effect of the news media on government policy needs first to identify the stage of the policy process at which the effect operates. In this regard, the focus necessarily shifts among different governmental institutions as the crisis appears on different agendas. Perhaps the most detailed illustration of the interaction was provided by growing media coverage of Somalia, traced alongside the incremental ascent of the crisis on the agendas of various government officials in Washington. To the extent that comparable detail is known about other crises, media effects might follow a similar progression.

Levels of media impact on policy

Policymakers can respond to media coverage in one of three broad ways: strategic, tactical or presentational. Simplified for analytical purposes, they nevertheless help to differentiate impacts at the various levels of policy formulation. Particular crises also can move across these levels as their perceived relevance to national interests changes.

Strategic. The media, especially television, may have a noticeable influence on broad matters of government strategy. These include decisions on whether or not to intervene in a crisis, whether to change radically the nature of a given intervention, or whether to withdraw altogether.

The effect of the press is in general more substantial in foreign policy than in domestic policy. We are not at all sure why this is so, or what are the consequences for both of the specific differences.

—Martin Lipsky⁴¹

Tactical. At the more operational or tactical level, the news media may have a significant influence, whether or not they have played a role in the shape of the overall strategy. In Bosnia, for example, increased measures to protect Sarajevo—no-fly zones, weapons collection points, and aerial attacks—were tactical innovations that responded in part to media coverage and growing public concern. These measures became the focus of extensive media coverage, but they never challenged the overall Western strategy of avoiding a more confrontational and forcible approach.

Presentational. The media may stimulate cosmetic changes in policy that are designed primarily for media presentation and public consumption. In this category are such actions as medical evacuations by the British government of a small number of victims from Bosnia and the limited humanitarian response by the U.S. military in Rwanda. These kinds of action also may represent tactical responses to a given problem, but they are "presentational" in that, however constructive in their own right, they probably would not have been undertaken apart from the media exposure that accompanied them. Such measures amount to little more than photo opportunities that create difficulties in distinguishing reality from the presented image.

Degrees of media impact on policy

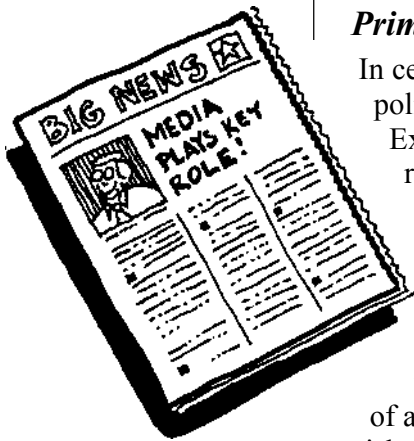
Within each stage, level, and policymaking institution, the news media exert varying degrees of influence or control over the policy process. In some cases they are primary movers; in others, influence may be secondary; in still others, negligible. The degrees of influence described are based on the collective judgments of participants and observers, although there is little unanimity among them.

Primary effect

In certain instances, the media dominate, control or even supplant the usual policy processes, sidelining the normal institutions of policymaking.

Examples from particular institutions at specific points, especially regarding tactical or presentational changes, include moments of policy uncertainty in Somalia, Haiti, and Rwanda that led to control shifting toward the media, especially television. Media control was also evident in the case of the UK medical evacuations from Bosnia.

Short-term actions in the humanitarian sphere appear to be closely correlated to media influence. At work here are several factors. A principal one involves the difficulty in complex emergencies of achieving consensus among or within governments on tougher and more risky political or military actions. The dramatic and photogenic nature of international actions to assist and protect besieged populations serve the interests of governments in being seen to be "doing something". Particularly attractive are the activities of foreign military forces, often to the exclusion of local actors. Recent experience suggests that only well into crisis reportage - Rwanda provides a striking illustration - do the media ask probing questions about the underlying cause of the distress or the longer-term impacts of the government policies and actions undertaken.



Secondary effect

Only on rare occasion are the media the primary impetus to a government's course of action. More typically, the media exercise a secondary, contributory effect, often when there exists a broader policy consensus. The tendency is to stimulate short-term action with aid as a palliative rather than the vigorous and dangerous security intervention required to enforce international decisions and norms. Humanitarian operations in northern Iraq and Bosnia had discernible links with influential media coverage but were also the products of the overall political context - dovetailing with such overriding policy considerations as keeping Saddam Hussein under siege and wishing to be seen "doing something".

Negligible effects

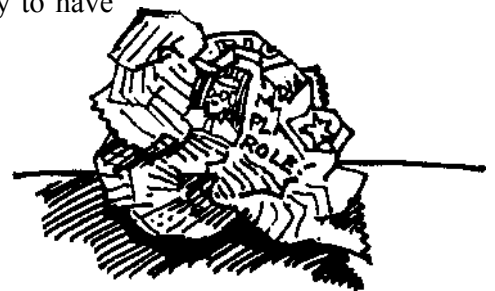
There are crises in which the media appear not to have had much impact at all. These have been situations in which a clear strategy or expression of national interests already had been articulated, resulting in concerted government resistance to changing fundamental policy. Once policymakers decided to intervene in Haiti, fears expressed in the media about the likelihood of limited success did not reverse policy. Repeated British and French determination to persevere in their strict interpretation of the UNPROFOR mandate was sufficient to resist pressure either to broaden term of engagement or to withdraw troops altogether. In the forgotten crises of Liberia and Angola, media coverage never achieved the critical mass necessary to have visible influence on policy processes.

Overall the essential dynamic is that the media effect on policy decreases as the clarity of definition and articulation of strategic interest increases.

"To the degree...that U.S. foreign policy in a given region has been clearly stated and adequate [and] accurate information provided," observed television journalist Ted Koppel, "the influence of television coverage diminishes proportionately". Other television reporters have detected significant media impact "only at moments of policy panic" or "where policymaking is weak or cynical."⁴² Although television assumed a high profile in accounts of policy influence, closer analysis revealed an interdependence with other forms of news media.

Effect of the media on humanitarian responses

Governmental response to humanitarian crises has clearly changed during the early post-Cold War period. Initial willingness by governments to respond more actively, first with the intervention in northern Iraq and then Somalia, as been followed by greater caution in Bosnia and Rwanda. Early experience may well have alerted policymakers to the dangers of overreaction to the media. Media effect on policy has become more limited, often linked to humanitarian as distinct from political or military action. Humanitarian action is likely to proceed on a case-by-case basis, with consistent principles and practice still a matter of discussion.



Effect of the media on operational courses of action

How do the media make a difference in the choice of particular actions? The clearest linkage is between media exposure and aid responses. For governmental policymakers, humanitarian aid plays well in response to headline news. Visibility is paramount; the quantity or quality of the resulting humanitarian action is less important. Greater visibility of aid was a principal objective in the formation in 1992 of ECHO. NGOs delivering aid have a contractual obligation to display the EU logo. Similarly, USAID supplies display the agency's clasped hands emblem and are marked "Gift of the People of the United States of America."

Although "foreign aid" is frequently misunderstood and sometimes unpopular with voting publics, humane impulses are firmly rooted and humanitarian action enjoys a significant constituency at peaks of visible suffering.⁴³ In the United States and Europe, this constituency, represented by an influential coalition of legislators and NGOs, has a powerful voice. "People in their living rooms are watching history in the making," explains Sylvania Foa, then UNHCR spokesperson. "They like it and the fact they can influence it." Aid in such circumstances may satisfy the media and public opinion agendas, but it risks becoming a palliative rather than a policy. Without appropriate political and security frameworks, aid agencies have experienced limited success. Moreover, there are growing concerns that, in crises like Rwanda, Bosnia, and the Sudan, humanitarian aid, despite short-term positive benefits, also directly and indirectly prolongs conflicts.⁴⁴

Strategic policy, once set, is unlikely to be influenced or reversed by the media, but until it is set, the media enjoys considerable space. Furthermore, in the present geopolitical moment, the potential for media influence is heightened as governments have not clarified their policies on international armed conflicts. As former U.S. National Security Adviser Anthony Lake commented, "It was a lot easier to think about the world in which you were trying to deal with aggression primarily across borders than [within] them." Once governments have clarified the importance of dealing with internal armed conflicts, they will have reduced the potential and the need for belated and limited media-linked responses.

Effect of the media within war zones

The effect of the media in complex emergencies and the roles of external and local media are increasingly recognized as key factors in the generation, continuation, and resolution of humanitarian crises. Since each acts in different political contexts, the use of the media as a tool of diplomacy or propaganda is of particular concern.

The policy impacts of external media are normally played out in far-off capitals, but they also can have a significant impact on in-country operations. The case studies in the next chapter demonstrate that the external media can act as humanitarian agents, encouraging the targeting of aid toward areas of publicized need or discouraging human rights violations. In Liberia, they provided objective information at a time when indigenous communications media were thoroughly politicized. Those who intervene have a challenge and responsibility to disseminate accurate and current information about the nature of their activities.

The media native to conflict areas - be they local, national, or regional— are a potential force for reconciliation in civil war settings. They also may be used by humanitarian agencies to ensure greater transparency of operations. Frequently, with a focus on influencing governments and publics in donor countries, expatriates in war zones concentrate media relations efforts on Western news organizations to the exclusion of indigenous channels, but for indigenous outlets to achieve their full potential, international actors need explicit strategies that nurture working relationships with them.

Local media often reflect and deepen the politicization of conflicts as the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda demonstrate. Though external media can become targets of manipulation by warring factions, where local media are thoroughly politicized, external media carry a heavier burden of responsibility to convey accurate information and to encourage reconciliation. The specific problems of propaganda and "hate radio" are the subject of separate studies.

Effect of the media on humanitarian action

The media have an impact on humanitarian action in high-profile crises: that impact appears to be greater than the impact of humanitarian actors on the media. The imbalance reflects a variety of factors, including the lack of coordination among humanitarian groups and the lack of individual and corporate strategies for relating to the media as an institution.

Humanitarian agencies enjoy a privileged position to influence policy processes, both directly and through the media. Their uneven success rate in doing so in part reflects variables in media-policy interaction that are beyond the control such agencies, and in part results from structural limitations.

Coordination among humanitarian organizations is difficult, straddling, as they do, agencies in the intergovernmental, governmental, and nongovernmental arenas, each with divergent points of view. Consensus is lacking on matters such as how to ensure the security of humanitarian operations and how to relate to the increased activism of international military forces in the humanitarian sphere. NGOs publicity objectives frequently are torn between collaboration as advocates and competition as fund-raisers. In addition, NGOs that rely increasingly on government grants may be less willing or less able to criticize their donors.

The news media can sometimes be implicated in undesirable developments on the humanitarian front. Coverage of the deteriorating situation in Goma helped stimulate an enormous outpouring of resources from governments and the public. Yet it also led to increased posturing and competition among a wide array of aid groups and to the imbalance of resource allocations—to the advantage of photogenic sectors and refugees and to the detriment of Rwanda's own reconstruction agenda and internally displaced persons. The opportunism of humanitarian organizations in these circumstances has led to serious and recurring questions about their professionalism and accountability.

The capacity of the media, using the latest technology, to convey information rapidly is also exerting new pressures on humanitarian actors. Amnesty International members who see atrocities on television demand to know what their organization is doing to address them. Some personnel fear that such pressure may introduce changes in their organizational cultures. The traditional emphasis on doing what is needed - which often requires

patience, nuance, and discretion - could give way to a push to do anything quick and visible. The need of agencies to be perceived as in the vanguard rather than playing catch-up with media-identified crises has negative as well as positive aspects.

The new world disorder has imbedded humanitarian crises in complex emergencies that have varying and yet-to-be articulated elements of national interest. In the early post-Cold War era, the international community and its principal governmental and humanitarian actors swung toward greater interventionism, sometimes with a heavy military component. More recently, they have reverted to a more isolationist mode. The news media, and television in particular, have contributed to the movements in both directions.

Humanitarian actions, whether as a concerted policy or as a substitute for more vigorous diplomacy and military intervention, has enjoyed a high profile. As a short-term measure, humanitarian action offers an effective counter to media pressure on policymakers. But for governments and humanitarian agencies, aid-only response falls short in situations in which insecurity is high and political and diplomatic objectives remain unclear. While honest scrutiny of these failings (a process in which the media also are playing a role) may weaken short-term support for humanitarian action, it also may contribute over the longer term to the effectiveness of such action.

SELF-STUDY EXERCISES

Indicate whether each of the following statements is true or false.

- ___ 1 The "wind-down" period for the news media often corresponds to the final phase of a crisis.
- ___ 2 Where the media has clear impact on governmental response, television coverage has been critical.
- ___ 3 The longer the media is engaged in covering a crisis, the less likely it is to ask probing questions about the underlying causes of a crisis.
- ___ 4 The nature and scope of emergency response by humanitarian agencies has remained relatively unfazed by accompanying news media coverage of a crisis.
- ___ 5 The media's influence over strategic policymaking in a given crisis appears to diminish in proportion to the degree of clarity and focus that a government has established in its foreign policy towards the country or region experiencing the crisis.
- ___ 6 Media coverage of a crisis seems to have an overall greater effect on government policymaking than it does on humanitarian agency response.

Circle the correct answer for each of the following questions.

7. According to the typology described in this chapter, the “business-as-usual” phase of a crisis, immediately succeeds the:
- “inundation” phase
 - “wind-down” phase
 - “unusual” phase
 - “discovery” phase
 - “complex” phase
8. At which level of media coverage can one expect to encounter more partisan, politicized and inflammatory reporting:
- By the indigenous or local media
 - By the regional media
 - By the international media
 - They all report the news more or less in a uniform fashion.
9. When analyzing the potential effect of the news media on humanitarian action in a particular local conflict, why is it necessary to distinguish between the international and local news media?

10. Humanitarian agencies enjoy a privileged position to influence policy processes, both directly and through the media. Discuss some of the difficulties and limitations these agencies have in making this happen consistently.

ANSWER KEY

1. F 2. T 3. F 4. F
5. T 6. F 7. A 8. A

9. It is important to distinguish between the international and local news media for a number of reasons. First, in crises occurring in poorer countries, the Western news media often have many more re-sources and pull with Western policymakers. Second, in highly politicized conflicts, the local media may reflect and deepen politicization, making it hard for them to maintain objectivity. Finally, local, national and regional news media, much more than the international media, are potential forces for reconciliation in civil war settings.

10. Coordination among humanitarian organizations is difficult. Humanitarian organizations lack consensus on many issues including how to ensure the security of humanitarian operations and how to relate to the

*THINKING
CRITICALLY
ABOUT THE
CASE STUDIES*

CASE STUDY:

Use this page as a study-guide to help you think critically about and reflect on the following case studies. We encourage you to answer these questions on your own note-paper, or on photocopied versions of this master sheet.

Background information

- What is the historical and political background of the crisis?
- What was the relative scale of suffering or need?
- What aspects of this crisis received the most intense and heightened news media coverage?
- What was the level of U.S. and Western European political strategic interest in this crisis? Does this account for the level of news media interest? Why? or How?

Applying previous learning: news media criteria and limitations

Recalling the filters and criteria for determining “news value”, and the limitations on media response to humanitarian crises (in Chapter 4), how might these help explain the quantity, quality, timing and content of news media coverage in this crisis?

In your opinion

- Was the quantity, quality and content of media coverage of this crisis adequate? Why or why not? Give examples.
- What interaction or mutual influence was evident in Media-Policy and in Media-Humanitarian Organization Interaction?
- Did the news media seem to affect the scale, scope and level of international humanitarian aid or response? Why or why not? When or how?

Case studies

In this chapter you will learn:

- *Why the media covers certain humanitarian crises rather than others*
- *Factors that affect the level of news media coverage of a crisis*
- *How the news media influences and is influenced by government policy*
- *How and why media attention fades over time*
- *Ways in which the media and the military interact*
- *How local news media and the military interact*
- *How local news media can be highly politicized and used as weapons of war*
- *How the print and television media differ in the depth of their coverage*
- *How news media coverage can influence the scale and pattern of humanitarian assistance activities*
- *How the news media and humanitarian agencies depend on each other for achieving logistical and professional objectives*

As you read the following case studies, use the questions on the previous page to help guide your analysis and to think critically about each situation. You may want to make photocopied so that you have a separate page to use with each case study.

LIBERIA AND THE SUDAN

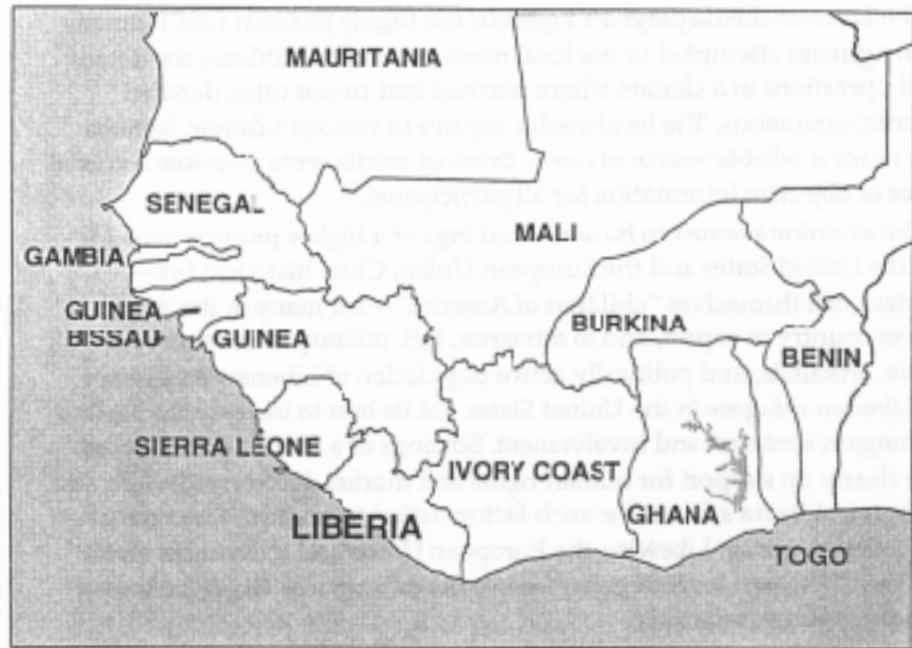
Two “obscure” crises with limited response

Liberia

Despite widespread violence and suffering over more than five years, the Liberian civil war has received sparse international coverage and exhibits little media-policy interaction. The lack of engagement by external media paralleled international disinterest; it is not apparent which was cause and which was effect. International diplomatic response was limited to support for a regional intervention by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and a belated UN political initiative. International humanitarian organizations provided assistance from the inception of civil strife, in December 1989, at levels of per capita largesse disproportionate to the sparse news media attention paid to the crisis.⁴⁸

Liberia’s lack of strategic profile for Western states was scarcely questioned. As the war spread in 1990, carrying with it devastating humanitarian consequences, the international community was preoccupied with radical changes in Eastern Europe and, beginning in August, the crisis in the Gulf

LEARNING OBJECTIVES



sparked by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. During the following year the disintegration of Yugoslavia combined with the Gulf War and the related refugee problems eclipsed events in Liberia. During 1992 and throughout 1993, Somalia joined Bosnia in the international limelight. In mid-1994, Rwanda temporarily took center stage. Across this half-decade, Liberia's bloodletting continued virtually unabated in an obscure war well beyond the purview of the international community.



Ironically, the scale of suffering in Liberia matched or exceeded the distress in conflicts that commanded greater media coverage. Liberia's entire population of 2.5 million was affected, with 1.8 million dependent on humanitarian aid by 1995.⁴⁹ The UN reported 150,000 casualties, 865,000 refugees, and 800,000 internally displaced persons. The population of Monrovia swelled to 1.3 million, nearly three times its prewar level. The international view of Liberia, which rivaled many other complex emergencies not only in terms of human suffering but also in the degree of state collapse, was obscured by external coverage and policy attention paid to Bosnia, Somalia, and even southern Sudan.

Physical access was not an insoluble problem for reporters. From the outset, the BBC World Service radio and a group of agency reporters based in Abidjan maintained a steady stream of news—which was little disseminated or used outside the region. But visits by foreign television crews were infrequent, with headline news reserved for the most extreme violence—among such events were the massacre of civilians who had sought refuge in churches, in July 1990, and the renewed assault on the capital of Monrovia, in October 1992. The Liberian conflict "was reported as a weird, lower-order war", said an NGO press officer, reflecting on his unsuccessful efforts to call greater attention to the mayhem. The international media ventured into Liberia, it appears, to provide bizarre documentary-style coverage from the "Heart of Darkness" rather than news of a serious threat to international peace and security.⁵⁰

The Liberian media played a vigorous but highly partisan role. Humanitarian agencies attempted to use local news services to publicize the details of aid operations in a climate where mistrust and rumor often derailed impartial operations. The local media, captive to various Liberian factions, were never a reliable source of news. External media were therefore a crucial source of objective information for all participants.

The situation seemed to have the makings of a higher priority crisis for both the United States and the European Union. Close historical ties—Liberians call themselves “children of America”—ed many in the West African country to expect, and to advocate, U.S. military intervention. A sizable, articulate, and politically active population of Liberian-Americans and Liberian refugees in the United States did its best to increase the scale of Washington’s interest and involvement. Stirrings of a foreign policy based more clearly on support for human rights and market democracies were also elements in Liberia’s favor. Yet such factors failed to produce a more active U.S. policy response. Likewise, the European Union and its member states restricted their own level of policy attention and response largely to that of providing humanitarian aid.

Generally free of media or public pressure to produce instant solutions, Western policymakers had an opportunity to develop long-term strategies. But their reactions were shaped by a narrow view of Liberia’s geopolitical relevance, and, although Liberia was on the agenda of specialized aid officials, it never attained much political visibility. Washington’s support for ECOMOG, the West African peacekeeping force, was cautious. In both the United States and the European Union, the policy response focused on short-term support of the humanitarian agencies, with humanitarian aid used more as a palliative than an integral part of a comprehensive strategy.

Sudan

Liberia was not alone in the category of ignored crises. In Sudan there was a similar lack of international resolve to address the issues raised by the protracted civil war between the secessionist Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Islamic government in Khartoum. In the 1990s, that war, which had been more or less ongoing since the Sudan received its independence in the mid-1950s, produced a humanitarian crisis that, in numbers of persons affected, exceeded either the Kurdish or Somali emergencies. Despite “casualties and displacement of people by the million,” noted one commentator, the United Nations “has chosen to regard it as a strictly internal matter.” Sporadic media coverage of events in the Sudan did little to change its relative lack of priority.

The Sudan suffers from perennial lack of attention. Coverage of the Sudan was inhibited by access problems due to geography and logistics, poor communications, visa complications, and safety concerns.⁵³ Like the conflicts in Angola, Afghanistan, and Liberia, the protracted war in the Sudan received coverage only at moments of high violence, visibly calamitous suffering, or political crisis. “Sudan is evidence of the starving baby syndrome,” said one commentator, referring to the media’s tendency to cover only highly visible crises, “where only peaks of suffering during a 13-year war have merited coverage.”⁵⁴ Such peaks in 1989 and 1993 produced surges of pressure to do something to reduce starvation, followed by flurries of humanitarian diplomacy to gain access to the affected populations.



Humanitarian agencies have made attempts to publicize these forgotten crises. Coalitions of organizations, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States, have monitored developments closely, employing the considerable information available from humanitarian and journalistic circles.⁵⁵ Humanitarian groups focusing on the problems of aid distribution and human rights abuse have enjoyed some short-term successes, but the diplomatic *démarches* they have supported have failed to end the wars or bring durable solutions to the plight of civilians. Ironically, such countries as Liberia, Angola, and Sudan depend upon dramatic deterioration of humanitarian conditions to increase the likelihood of media coverage and international attention.

These forgotten crises form a baseline for assessing the effect of media coverage on public policy and humanitarian action. Liberia and the Sudan, for example, have received relatively high per capita levels of humanitarian aid from the United States and other major donors, largely irrespective of media coverage. Afghanistan and Angola, which were perceived as front-line states in the global struggle between communism and capitalism, received ample coverage and generous aid in earlier days, but less of each in the post-Cold War era.

SELF-STUDY EXERCISES

Indicate whether each of the following statements is true or false.

- ___ 1. The relative absence of humanitarian assistance efforts in Liberia was a direct result, or at least reflected, the sparse international media coverage of that crisis.
 - ___ 2. The scale of suffering in Liberia matched or exceeded the distress in conflicts receiving greater media coverage.
 - ___ 3. Partisan and politicized reporting by local news media sources in Liberia were surprisingly the exception.
 - ___ 4. Liberia provides a clear case where Western governmental policy response focused on providing humanitarian aid as a palliative, rather than as part of a comprehensive strategy aimed at resolving the conflict.
 - ___ 5. Unlike the crisis in Liberia, in the Sudan the international media balanced its tendency to cover only the moments of high violence and drama with a more thoughtful and more in-depth coverage of the crisis.
 - ___ 6. International news media coverage and serious policy attention was so sparse in Liberia because the scale of suffering in Liberia was significantly less than the distress experienced in other concurrent conflicts receiving more media coverage.
 - ___ 7. The Sudan received relatively high per capita levels of humanitarian aid from the United States and other major donors, largely irrespective of media coverage.
8. Recall the criteria for determining “news value,” and the limitations on media response to humanitarian crises. Which of these may help explain the sparse international news media coverage of the Liberia crisis?
-
-
-
-

9. At what points did the Liberia crisis receive international news coverage? What types of events generated the news media coverage? What type of news media was involved?
-
-
-
-

10. Explain why you agree or disagree with the following: There has been a relative lack of news media coverage of the Liberia and Sudan crises. Free from news media pressure, Western governments have chosen to ignore these two crises completely.
-
-
-
-

1. F 2. T 3. F 4. T
5. F 6. F 7. T

8. Low strategic profile on Western government agendas; complex and protracted war; continual competition from other international news stories with more strategic and immediate importance (1990-1991: radical changes occurring in Eastern Europe, crisis in the Gulf and related refugee problems, disintegration of Yugoslavia and related refugee problems. 1992-1993: Western involvement in the Somalia crisis, mid-1994: Rwanda crisis takes center stage). 9. The Liberia crisis received headline news coverage during periods of the most extreme violence, such as the massacre of the civilians who had sought refuge in churches in July, 1990. 10. Western governments have not completely ignored these crises. While they have failed to develop comprehensive strategies, the United States and other

ANSWER KEY



NORTHERN IRAQ

Providing comfort in an emerging televised order

The deployment of coalition troops in northern Iraq in April 1991 to create “safe havens” for Kurds was viewed at the time as heralding a new era of humanitarian intervention, with television leading the charge. “Television coverage of wretched Kurds dying in freezing mountains day after day aroused huge sympathy from international public opinion,” observed Médecins Sans Frontières, leading Western capitals to put “rising pressure on the White House.”⁵⁶ The impacts were confirmed by those involved in policymaking. “I do think the vividness of television images probably heightened the sense of urgency,” noted U.S. Under-Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz. “The inescapable fact was that you had a half a million [Kurdish] people who, if nothing was done, were liable to all die and start dying rather quickly.”⁵⁷

Pictures of the massive Kurdish exodus, involving two million people—a scale of displacement comparable to Rwanda in 1994—undoubtedly moved public opinion and impelled humanitarian action. In the United Kingdom, the public response to an initial appeal from aid groups for contributions exceeded 3 million. The British government’s decision to participate in the initiative to create “safe havens” for refugees, however, was triggered by domestic political factors rather than by the pressure of public opinion. Sources close to the decision-making process noted that Prime Minister John Major feared criticism for inaction from his predecessor Margaret Thatcher, who had taken it upon herself to meet with the Kurdish refugee leaders in an effort to goad her government to act.



At the international level, the protection of the Kurds was regarded as the “next episode” in the Gulf War, which already had featured dramatic footage of the rout of Iraqi forces by coalition troops. The allies had controlled the media effectively in their victory; the media, using television as the main source, provided the vital link between events and Western publics. “But the military supplied much of the news that came out of the Gulf through briefings and videotapes”, concluded one study. “Therefore what Americans saw on their screens reflected the government’s viewpoint.”⁵⁸ Televised pictures of Kurdish refugees massed along the Turkish border built on a Western consensus that an obligation to them existed, growing out of the stand already taken against Iraq. In fact, their continued distress and repression threatened the political dividends to be reaped from a successful Gulf War.⁵⁹



Following authorization in April 1991 by the Security Council, coalition troops invaded northern Iraq from Turkey, reclaiming land occupied by the Iraqi army north of the thirty-sixth parallel to which the Kurds sought to return. The well-televised establishment of safe havens demonstrated that the coalition forces could maintain their subjugation of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. An additional consideration from Turkey’s point of view was the need to prevent refugees from crossing the border to join an already troublesome and destabilizing Kurdish population inside Turkey. Media-generated pressure thus built upon events to reinforce a rationale for what was widely described as a “humanitarian intervention”. The Kurds were already high on the agenda of policymakers, but the media helped frame a new imperative for action.

The actual intervention, involving 10,000 American, British, French, and Dutch troops, was short-lived. Of the three safe havens, the U.S.-controlled sector received the most media attention because it was the easiest to access and had large refugee camps. Moreover, the U.S. military were skilled in handling the media, which was part of a strategy to provide additional protection for the refugees and to give the humanitarian operation credibility. “The tensions were practically nonexistent” between the military and the media, reported U.S. General John M. Shalikashvili, “and we not only were able to give the press total freedom to roam the operations area, but we gave them maximum support to get around and be better informed. The result was a more factual story filed, a better-informed public, a better-informed Washington, and thus better support for us in the field”.⁶⁰

By July 1991, the presence of coalition troops had been replaced by air cover, which was sufficient to keep Baghdad at bay. The media departed as quickly as the troops, with some passing depiction of the handover of humanitarian activities to the United Nations and cooperating nongovernmental organizations. With no political settlement in place that would guarantee the security of the Kurds, however, the Iraqi government resumed pressure on them, obstructing and harassing humanitarian activities, in direct contravention of agreements between Iraq and the United Nations.

Attempts by humanitarian organizations and by the Kurds themselves, both in the region and in Europe and North America, to maintain media interest ran against the tide of events. Both the sanctions and the NATO air watch remained in effect, but international resolve to protect and assist the newly resettled refugees no longer had the same profile. Among the factors

Iraqi refugees crossing the border into Iran.

Refugees, June, 1991, p. 30.

Photo: UNHCR/J. Crisp

that made the story more difficult to tell were public divisions between Kurdish leadership regarding the political future of the area, the embargo imposed from Baghdad on relief supplies and fuel bound for the north, and, as time went by, the Iraqi refusal to comply with the detailed provisions of UN Security Council resolutions following the war.

As the continuing humanitarian plight of the Kurds in northern Iraq ebbed in visibility, some aid workers expressed a concern that international fear of Kurdish self-determination had now replaced fear of Kurdish extermination. The international community was no longer receiving the kind of headline news coverage reserved for the earlier crisis and for military intervention – the media were following the lead of policymakers much as they had in the course of the Gulf War. Those close connections resulted in post-mortems about issues of journalistic independence and media access during war situations.

Humanitarian agencies were sidelined for much of the early crisis by the presence of the military, which brought a unique security and logistic capability to the task of assisting civilians affected by the conflict. For the American military, it was the first of a new breed of large-scale humanitarian missions that generated experience and enthusiasm for subsequent operations. For aid groups, the experience was also a first. It taught them how to collaborate with the military and eventually, as troops withdrew, to assume greater responsibilities themselves.

In the United Kingdom, a contributing factor in the marginalization of aid groups was the campaigning activity of a populist politician, Jeffrey Archer, whose efforts resulted in the mobilization of media attention and relief funding from numerous sources. This high-profile push caused acute embarrassment for NGOs, many of whom were intent on keeping attention on Africa but felt obliged to join in both the fundraising and subsequent activities in Iraq. As a result, NGO influence over policymaking processes and resource mobilization both directly and through the media were considerably reduced.

As of late 1995, the welfare of the Iraqi Kurds remained fragile, although NATO air cover was keeping Saddam Hussein from attacking them and other UN sanctions against the Baghdad regime remained in place. Headline news was again written in April and May of 1995 in the wake of a Turkish invasion to counter Kurd nationalist force, but without stimulating much debate on long-term prospects. In short, the media and humanitarian action assumed tactical importance at a specific stage in the crisis, but were less significant in the long term compared with regional and internal Kurdish politics.

SELF-STUDY EXERCISES

Indicate whether each of the following statements is true or false.

- _____ 1. Humanitarian NGOs seemed to have a very limited leadership role throughout the initial Kurdish refugee crisis.
- _____ 2. The broad coverage provided by the news media (coupled with the political antics of Jeffrey Archer) in the United Kingdom embarrassed NGOs into paying attention to the Kurdish refugee crisis.

ANSWER KEY

1. T 2. T 3. F
 4. F 5. F
 6. a) High domestic political interest. The situation in Iraq had a high strategic profile for Western governments who were in an adversarial position relative to the Iraqi government. b) Large scale displacement – 2 million Kurdish refugees. c) News media considered it as the next episode following the Gulf War. d) Invasion by coalition troops – story could now be told with clear domestic links (concern over the troops).

- _____ 3. By the time most of the international news media departed northern Iraq, the security of the Kurds had been secured.
- _____ 4. The U.S. military was less prepared than other European military contingencies to deal with the news media.
- _____ 5. Media influenced public opinion was a primary factor which prompted the British government to participate in the creation of “safe havens” for the Kurds.
6. What factors contributed to robust international news media coverage at the outset of the Kurdish refugee crisis?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
7. Recall some of the limitations of media coverage of humanitarian crises. Explain when and how some of these limitations were evident in the Kurdish crisis.
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
8. Did the news media follow the lead of Western policymakers, or were these policymakers influenced by the news media in response to the Kurdish refugee crisis? Explain your answer.
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
9. What would be your evaluation of the quantity and quality of media coverage of the continuing humanitarian crisis in Iraq? What relation does this bear to the relative priority of the crisis for policymakers and humanitarian organizations?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

7. By July 1991, once coalition troops had been replaced with air cover, the media departed quickly. After the dramatic and sensational invasion, the ongoing monitoring role of the coalition governments was mundane and repetitive in comparison. When troops pulled out, Western domestic interest in the cause of the Kurdish refugees waned. Finally, public division in the Kurdish leadership, made it harder to tell a simple story of innocent people suffering at the hands of an “evil dictator.”

8. It is widely agreed that news coverage of the massive Kurdish exodus moved public opinion and helped frame a new imperative for humanitarian action by Western governments. However, both British and U.S. involvement reflected a continuation of previous policy, albeit hurried-up by government’s decision to participate had more to do with domestic political factors than with public opinion. The U.S. government, fearing their victory over Iraq would be undermined by Iraq’s maltreatment of the Kurds, and concerned about refugees spilling into Turkey, also had an existing political motive for action. Once the invasion took place, the U.S. military had a clearly established strategy for supporting the media and providing access and security, which raised issues of journalistic independence. When the troops departed, so did the media. Thus it seems the news media in this case followed the lead of policymakers, much as they had during the Gulf War.

9. Your opinion/assessment.

ANSWER KEY (continued)



SOMALIA

The push-pull of television

Somalia is often used to illustrate the impact of news media on foreign policy. It is argued that the news media drove the erratic course of international response to both the collapse of the state and the people's suffering. Television news is singled out as the main stimulus in the process, supposedly triggering Washington's military intervention and then its abrupt withdrawal. According to the chairman of a congressional committee: "Pictures of the starving children, not policy objectives, got us into Somalia in 1992. Pictures of U.S. casualties, not the completion of our objectives, led us to exit Somalia".⁶¹ A review of events, however, indicates that the crisis passed through several phases during which media involvement and policy formation were less clearly correlated.⁶²

As Somalia slipped into anarchy in 1991–1992, there was general but by no means uniform neglect from all three sides of the crisis triangle. "The lack of interest from the media, central government, and humanitarian agencies created a vacuum of advocacy or support", said one commentator, "which USAID and OFDA did not fill".⁶³ The response in Europe followed a similar pattern.⁶⁴

Building to a crescendo during 1992, an increasingly well-organized lobby of concerned humanitarian agencies, policymakers, and politicians



struggled to obtain appropriate attention to the deteriorating situation from both governments and the media. As of July 1992, some increase in policy and media attention on both sides of the Atlantic was evident. “By summer, a lot had been shown and written about Somalia; some of it was clear, insightful, powerful”, said one observer. “But reporting never reached that critical mass. No coherent line emerged so that people far away might pay sustained attention.”⁶⁵

The onset of a U.S. military airlift of aid from neighboring Kenya brought the expected troop-following media coverage, raising Somalia’s profile. In fact, that had been one of the explicit objectives of intensifying the existing airlift from one which used civilian aircraft under commercial contract to one involving military pilots and aircraft.⁶⁶ Keith Richburg of the *Washington Post*, who covered the military airlift, and then stayed on to monitor the Somalia situation, is said to have “made a difference” in attracting greater attention to the crisis.⁶⁷ In any event, Somalia finally, if belatedly, gained media – especially television – attention, becoming a story about conflict and famine in the “new world disorder”. Ironically, when U.S. ground troops landed in Mogadishu in December 1992, the worst of the famine had passed and the most vulnerable already had died.⁶⁸

Why the turn-around in attention and action? Many observers held that a “herd instinct” had overtaken the media, each outler concerned about being scooped by the competition. But other factors also were clearly at work. The observation in July 1992 by the UN Secretary-General that Somalia was the victim of the highly-publicized “rich man’s war” in the former Yugoslavia stung governments. A small cadre of European- and U.S.-based humanitarian agencies used first-hand accounts from Somalia in a relentless campaign for greater international attention to the crisis. In the United States, certain members of Congress and administration officials (particularly in USAID) raised the political temperature of the story.

Somalia surfaced as an issue in the presidential campaign when the Bush administration was criticized by the Clinton campaign for not doing enough. “Sustained media coverage of the anarchy and starvation certainly contributed mightily to the Bush administration’s decision to use U.S. troops to protect the relief effort”, noted an official close to the decision-making process.⁷⁰

Senior U.S. administration officials concurred on the importance of the media’s role. “Television had a great deal to do with President Bush’s decision to go in”, reported then-Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger. “I was one of those two or three that was strongly recommending he do it, and it was very much because of the television pictures of these starving kids, substantial pressures from the Congress that come from the same source, and my honest belief that we could do this... at not too great a cost and, certainly, without any great danger of body bags coming home.”⁷¹ The role of the media notwithstanding, the domestic political context in which the media operated also provided a key element in understanding the decision to commit troops. Washington, like most other Western capitals, was embarrassed over inaction in Bosnia. President Bush’s own personal determination was also indispensable.⁷²



A Somali gunman in the streets of Mogadishu.

Refugees, 1995, p. 21

Photo: UNHCR/C. Satteberger

From its pretext in the predictable images of starvation and civil war, “technical” and “khat” through the saturation coverage of the “live” landing and the periodic photo opportunities that culminated in President Bush’s New Year’s visit and the springtime return of the troops to President Clinton’s White House, to the gradual disintegration of the United Nations mission in the summer and fall, the Somalia operation has been conceptualized, practiced, and evaluated – by all parties – strictly in terms of the publicity value of the images and headlines it might produce.

– Thomas Keenan⁶⁹



Once committed to intervention, policymakers sought media approbation. As the *International Herald-Tribune* stated, “The arrival of troops in the early morning hours was perfectly timed to reach the afternoon peak television audience in the U.S., and hundreds of well-briefed reporters were on the beach and at the port.”⁷³ The *Guardian* newspaper, referring to the need to win over U.S. domestic opinion, noted that “Media complicity in the shot-free and artificially-lighted night invasion was an essential element for the mission to succeed.”⁷⁴ Indeed, the media-military cooperation extended well after the invasion. The military provided the media with security and logistics. The media reciprocated with publicity for domestic consumption and useful intelligence about conditions in the interior of the country.

However, that symbiosis changed dramatically in the summer of 1993 as security worsened and humanitarian operations faltered. Media coverage of the growing insecurity may have contributed to the pressure that something be done about the strongman Aidid. Following deadly attacks on foreign journalists in July and September, reporting became perilous and close to impossible.⁷⁵ While no American media witnessed the ill-fated Ranger raid in October 1993, the news coverage from other outlets – for once, not real time – had rapid and enormous domestic political impact. Having influenced military engagement, the media also spurred withdrawal.

Network broadcasts of Somali video pictures showing dead U.S. marines being dragged ignominiously through the streets of Mogadishu at the very least hastened – and perhaps also drove – a policy reversal by the administration. According to National Security Adviser Anthony Lake, “The [television] pictures helped us recognize that the military situation in Mogadishu had deteriorated in a way that we had not frankly recognized.”⁷⁶ Reinforcing the reassessment, “thousands of phone calls to Capitol Hill demanding that America withdraw its troops... led to intense Congressional pressure on President Clinton.”⁷⁷ A policy that had evolved from creating a safe environment for humanitarian aid to arresting noncooperative warlords then received rapid and radical revision by the White House, with a specific deadline and countdown for U.S. military withdrawal.

Analysts have stressed that the negative effect of the coverage was due not only to faulty policy formulation but also to poor communications strategy. According to one commentator, “U.S. policymakers and military leaders failed to convey to the public the reasons for shifting U.S. goals and missions”. In his view, “Media stories failed to link the complexities of U.S.-UN disagreements, Somali warlord politics, tensions between military peacekeepers and nongovernmental aid organizations (many vigorously pacifist), and shifting U.S. missions.”⁷⁸ Without fuller explanation and justification for the mission, any policy other than withdrawal was likely to face wide domestic condemnation and political fallout in the mid-term elections in November 1994.

The Somalia crisis also had taken on added strategic importance as a test case for U.S.-UN relations. At issue was how much Washington was prepared to police the new world order or, more technically speaking, the terms of U.S. engagement in multilateral undertakings. The immediate impact of the Somalia debacle was the prompt articulation of an exit strategy. The longer-term effect was a revision of U.S. peacekeeping criteria, finalized in May 1994 in Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 25. These criteria narrowed future U.S. involvement in such undertakings and also restricted approval of UN efforts underwritten by Washington in which U.S. troops were not involved.

In contrast to northern Iraq, the role of humanitarian agencies and NGOs in particular was pivotal. Nongovernmental organizations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which constituted the only international presence in Somalia after the withdrawal of the UN at the peak of the famine in 1992, formed the core humanitarian lobby. These organizations were crucial in getting the media into Somalia on relief flights, providing local transport, accommodation, communications, and, invariably, security. They also provided a national point of reference for the media. British media reported regularly on Save the Children (UK), the Irish media featured Concern, and the U.S. media focused on CARE. Some agencies felt exploited, however, especially when reporting did not provide the expected profile or concentrated on what they felt were wrong or unhelpful images.

Headline news tracked the U.S. military withdrawal from Somalia in the spring of 1994 and the withdrawal of UNOSOM II troops in March 1995. Somalia's subsequent decline into mid-1992 conditions has received little more attention than the first time around.

In sum, the correlation between media attention on the one hand, and action by policymakers and humanitarian agencies on the other, followed a series of peaks and valleys. At some stages, media interest (itself reflecting goading by aid actors) preceded policy initiatives; on other occasions, media involvement followed. Sequence, however, was not necessarily indicative of causation, nor was any one institution in total control of the process. Within governments, control of the policy process shifted as different levels and institutions became involved. The interaction is better understood as the interplay of two complex systems – not of unitary actors – with media impact dependent upon other variables in domestic and international politics.

The media were not fully autonomous actors in Somalia, dependent as they were at different times on aid agencies and taking their cues from the military. Yet they enjoyed enough freedom of action to make a difference at crucial points in the process and to influence the process itself. Television in particular played a crucial role. One commentator finds the lesson of Somalia to be that “No story lives long without TV coverage”.⁷⁹

SELF-STUDY EXERCISES

Indicate whether each of the following statements is true or false.

- ___ 1. The landing of U.S. ground troops in Mogadishu in December 1992 came at the height of the famine in time to help many of the most vulnerable.
- ___ 2. Government and military planners timed the arrival of troops in Somalia to coincide with reaching the peak television audience in the U.S.
- ___ 3. U.S. policymakers were ineffective in conveying to the public the reasons for shifting U.S. goals and missions in the Somalia crisis.
- ___ 4. Media interaction and cooperation with the U.S. military, which began with negative coverage of the military involvement, improved considerably just months after the arrival of U.S. troops.

7 F
4 F 5 F 6 T
1 F 2 T 3 T

ANSWER KEY

The News Media and Humanitarian Action

8. While the news media's coverage was undoubtedly an influencing factor, it is nearly impossible to establish causation in this case, or divorce the response from the international and domestic political context. On the international scene, the UN Secretary General accused Western governments of being more attentive to the former Yugoslavia, the "richman's war", at the expense of the Somalia crisis, an obscure African war. Somalia's political profile was raised by the lobbying efforts of U.S.-based and European-based humanitarian agencies, as well as certain Congressional members and administration officials (particularly in USAID). Domestically, in Washington, like other Western capitals, the administration was embarrassed over inaction in Bosnia. Somalia also became a campaign issue that President Clinton used against President Bush. President Bush's own personal resolve also was a deciding factor to intervene. Once the U.S. was committed to intervention, policymakers sought media approbation. The news media were not completely autonomous in the Somalia crisis. During Dec. '92, the military provided the media with security and logistics. The NGOs that were present also provided them with transportation on flights, accommodations, and communications and security.

9. The news media were not completely autonomous in the Somalia crisis. During Dec. '92, the military provided the media with security and logistics. The NGOs that were present also provided them with transportation on flights, accommodations, and communications and security.

10. The immediate impact of the Somalia debate was the prompt articulation of an exit strategy. The longer-term effect was a revision of U.S. peace-keeping criteria, finalized in May '94 in Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 25. These criteria narrowed future U.S. involvement in such undertakings and also restricted approval of UN efforts undertaken by Washington in which U.S. troops were not involved.

ANSWER KEY (continued)

- 5. The role of humanitarian agencies and NGOs in providing the media access and security in Somalia paled in comparison to that which they were able to provide in northern Iraq.
- 6. The difficulties and frustrations experienced in the Somalia crisis have led U.S. policymakers and military planners to more clearly establish criteria for peacekeeping engagement and exit strategies.
- 7. The news media was clearly the institution setting the agenda and influencing Western policymakers during their involvement in the Somalia crisis.
- 8. The news media's sustained coverage of the anarchy and starvation in Somalia was the sole determining factor in the U.S. government's decision to send troops to protect the relief effort. Explain why you agree or disagree with this statement.

9. Were the news media completely autonomous in the Somalia crisis? Why or why not?

10. What is your perception of the extent to which the so-called "Somalia syndrome" diminished the willingness of policymakers and aid organizations to respond to humanitarian challenges imbedded in internal armed conflicts?



FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

Blanket coverage, selective action

Despite virtually continuous news coverage of the conflicts since the beginnings of the break-up of Yugoslavia in 1991, the media have not had a major impact on the strategic policy of Western governments. Policymakers in both Europe and the United States were able to successfully resist pressure for a more engaged approach because of their respective concerns – the desire to insulate the rest of Europe from a local crisis and to avoid the commitment of troops before a peace agreement was negotiated.

Peace initiatives late in the summer of 1995 – marked a basic change that led to the Dayton accords – reflected political opportunities created by a changed military situation rather than a media-inspired change of policy direction. Although various forms of NATO and UN action were debated and tried, peace enforcement was never a serious policy option. UN peace-keeping forces concentrated on non-combative and humanitarian missions rather than engaging in the more coercive action that the invocation of authority under Chapter VII of the UN Charter permitted. “Collective spinelessness” rather than “collective security” was the policy.⁸⁰

Strategic policy has been largely immune to media influence, but peaks of shocking news coverage, particularly from Bosnia, have produced heightened international reactions that have influenced the tactics used by governments and the United Nations. Security Council Resolution 770 of



192 supported humanitarian aid. Subsequent U.S. air-drops of aid, emergency medical evacuations from Sarajevo by the UK, and even NATO's protection measures for the Bosnian capital were all responses to well-televised predicaments. In retrospect, these actions appear to have been exercises in damage control in response to public exposure of governmental impotence instead of key elements in established or evolving policy.⁸¹ Governments wary of public criticism for inaction soon reverted to a basic reluctance to adopt stronger measures to halt ethnic cleansing or other flouting of international norms.

As former British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd said, "We have not been [willing], and are not willing to begin some form of military intervention, which we judge useless or worse, simply because of day-to-day pressures from the media."⁸² International resolve to contain rather than confront conflict in the former Yugoslavia survived relentless pressure that at times was led by the media.⁸³ Neither the European Union nor the United States has been drawn into a ground war to halt atrocities, ensure humanitarian access, or enforce peace, despite graphic and comprehensive news coverage. Short-term palliatives have represented the limit of response, addressing individual problems and not root causes.

One of the clearest examples of media influence upon the tactical or presentational aspects of policy (as distinct from underlying strategies) was the response of policymakers to the explosion of a shell in the Sarajevo marketplace in February 1994. The bloody aftermath received detailed international television coverage and was followed by a frenzy of diplomatic activity and a NATO ultimatum to Serbs to withdraw heavy artillery from the mountains around Sarajevo. Subsequent analysis suggests, however, that the television images crystallized an international consensus that was already in the making rather than creating new policy.

Acknowledging the contributory effect of the media on this occasion, U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher remarked, "Television images moved forward a policy we had clearly started on... but television should not be the sole determinant of policy."⁸⁴ The media also figured in the decision of California Senator Diane Feinstein to change her vote to favor lifting the arms embargo in July 1995. "One image punched through to me", she commented. "That young woman hanging from a tree [near Srebrenica]. That to me said it all."⁸⁵

The case of "little Irma" Hadzimuratovic demonstrated the power of media coverage to promote specific humanitarian action. In July 1993, the plight of this young mortar victim, whose shrapnel wounds were beyond medical treatment available in Sarajevo, penetrated media and policy processes at the peak of the slow summer news season, capturing the attention of the British public and of Prime Minister John Major. The ensuing UK-led military airlift of Irma and forty other victims was condemned by some as callous and exploitative; a senior UK policymaker in an off-the-record comment described the media pressure as "irresponsible, an illegitimate use of media power". Nevertheless, though the coverage did expedite further evacuations and provoke a response from an audience numbed by two years of war coverage, there was no change in fundamental policy because of the bloodshed.



The implementation of policy decisions sometimes felt the weight of media exposure. As Major General Lewis MacKenzie, commander of UNPROFOR in Sarajevo, reported, “Wherever the media goes, a lot of serious violations of human rights either move away or stop. The media was the only major weapon system I had. Whenever I went into negotiations with the warring parties, it was a tremendous weapon to be able to say: ‘OK, if you don’t want to do it the UN’s way, I’ll nail your butt on CNN in about 20 minutes’. That worked, nine times out of ten.”⁸⁶

The media also highlighted efforts by international organizations to reach and assist civilians caught in the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. The difficulties encountered by aid convoys made good footage and also provided Western governments good televisual material to show that they were “doing something” in a climate in which they were accused of doing too little. While governments emphasized their own humanitarian role, aid agencies were calling for stronger security measures, often finding an ally in the media. The lead UN agency in the former Yugoslavia, UNHCR, was uncharacteristically outspoken in condemning human rights abuses and the obstruction of aid. Media attention undoubtedly kept pressure on governments to persevere with aid operations in the face of mounting casualties and a potential domestic political backlash. Humanitarian aid was directed occasionally to areas where suffering had been uncovered by the media.

The power of the indigenous media in former Yugoslavia was both a negative force that inflamed the conflict and a positive force in the cause of reconciliation. Serb, Croat, and Bosnian authorities all made cynical and brutally effective use of the media as weapons of war. Direct threats and attacks on foreign and independent media limited their power to counteract such bias. Aware of the critical influence of Western public opinion, warring factions went all out to manipulate foreign media where they could not contain them.⁸⁷

SELF-STUDY EXERCISES

Indicate whether each of the following statements is true or false.

- ___ 1. The news media had little impact on the strategic policy of Western governments towards the former Yugoslavian states.
- ___ 2. The West’s policy collectively was one of containment of the conflict, as opposed to confronting conflict.
- ___ 3. The news media coverage in the former Yugoslavia again revealed that specific humanitarian action is quite resistant and immune to its influence.
- ___ 4. The indigenous media in the former Yugoslavia has proved both an inflammatory voice in the conflict as well as a positive force in reconciliation.

- 1.T 2.T 3.F 4.T
5. Despite wide and near continual coverage of the crisis and atrocities occurring in the former Yugoslavia, Western policymakers remained determined to resist all pressure for a more engaged approach. Peace initiatives late in the Summer of 1995 reflected political opportunities created by a changed military situation rather than media-inspired change of policy direction. UN resolutions, U.S. air-drops, U.K. emergency evacuations from Sarajevo, and NATO protection measures for the Bosnian capital appear to have been exercises in damage control in response to media exposure of governmental impotence instead of key elements in established or evolving policy. Western policies reflected their resolve to confront the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. Television coverage of the shell explosion in the Sarajevo marketplace hastened Western policymaking that was already under way which included diplomatic activity and a NATO ultimatum to the Serbs to withdraw heavy artillery from the mountains around Sarajevo.
6. The case of "little Irma", Hadzimiratovic, in July 1993, expedited further evacuations. Also, humanitarian aid was directed occasionally to certain areas where suffering had been uncovered by the media.
7. This is based on your opinion and assessment.
8. This is based in your opinion and assessment.

5. The news media's coverage of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia had a visible impact on tactical or presentational aspects of policy, not on the strategic aspects. Based on your reading of the case study, explain why you agree or disagree with this statement.

6. Give an example where the news media had a demonstrable impact on the implementation and nature of specific humanitarian action.

7. Given the reality that the conflict in the former Yugoslavia involved, "humanitarian problems requiring practical solutions, to what extent did the focus of the media on human suffering render more difficult the necessary diplomatic and military responses?

8. What is your appraisal of the adequacy of the media coverage of the continuing humanitarian crisis in the aftermath of the Dayton agreements? Has that coverage had a discernible influence on policymaking and/or humanitarian action?



ANSWER KEY

HAITI

A domestic agenda, a divided public

For the crisis triangle in the United States, the emergency in Haiti was analogous to that in the former Yugoslavia for institutions in Europe. In policymaking and news terms, Haiti was a humanitarian crisis with strong U.S. domestic overtones. Its location within the traditional U.S. sphere of influence elevated its geopolitical importance. The threat of refugees continuing to flow into the United States kept the crisis high on the national political agenda, with the OAS and the UN also monitoring the situation closely. Humanitarian issues in the form of well-documented human rights abuses and refugee hardships put pressure on successive administrations to live up to foreign policy objectives such as the support of democracy and human rights. A synergy between policy concerns and media interest gave Haiti a high profile in the waning months of the Bush administration, in the 1992 presidential campaign, and in the early months of the Clinton presidency.

Following the ousting of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in a military coup in September 1991, the twin issues of democracy and human rights were kept alive by the U.S. media. “Haiti didn’t drop away like other humanitarian crises”, noted a Washington observer.⁸⁸ Early attention to events in Haiti, including the coup, soon gave way to a focus on the “boat people”. The Haitian crisis received sustained attention throughout 1992



with the advent of new leadership in the UN secretariat and, in 1993, in the White House. News coverage in 1993 focused on the Governors Island negotiations in July and on the viability of a policy that accepted nothing less than the restoration of Aristide. During this period, the debate in the media and among U.S. policymakers became polarized, reflecting the highly politicized situation in Haiti itself. Despite independent confirmation of human rights abuses by the military regime, the exiled Aristide often received very critical press coverage about his own personal qualities and conduct while in office. One senior diplomat, studying media reports closely in preparation for his new assignment in Port-au-Prince, would later recall that the radical, fiery priest portrayed in the media bore little resemblance to the political leader whom he would observe at close hand after his restoration to power.

The contribution of the media as participant was felt acutely in October 1993 when the U.S.S. *Harlan County*, intent on a more robust assertion of U.S. policy, turned away from Port-au-Prince at the sight of a hostile mob on the shore. Aware of the sensitivity of the Clinton administration immediately following the debacle in Somalia, the military regime made calculated use of CNN coverage to threaten United States with a repeat of the Somalia experience. The de facto regime had been equally manipulative of media and policy processes in the United States – in sharp contrast to the Aristide camp, which at the outset of its exile was described as “clueless” about Washington.

Throughout 1993–1994, vigorous media coverage of the cases for and against intervention contributed to pressure on U.S. policymakers.⁸⁹ However, the steady increase in headline coverage of human rights abuses and the refugee exodus eroded the credibility of both diplomatic and sanctions policies, neither of which was proving effective. This coverage was reported to have a personal effect on President Clinton and to have helped build the administration’s case for military coercion at a time when public opinion remained “divided and malleable”.⁹⁰ Public ambivalence paralleled headline coverage that focused as much, if not more, on the perceived refugee threat to the United States as on the actual dire circumstances in Haiti.

Debate in news commentary about the nature of U.S. interests was also divided. Editorials in the *Washington Post* generally supportive of Aristide were offset by columnists in the same paper who were highly skeptical of intervention. In the *New York Times*, the balance was reversed and the editorials were more critical. With policy in flux, the media and public opinion exerted a push-pull influence. As a senior State Department adviser put it, the administration policy review of May 1994 reasserting sanctions “was driven as much as anything by criticism from media and Congress”. A well thought-out political strategy on the part of the administration was not available to buffer policy from these pressures.⁹¹

Once the decision for military intervention was made, the administration changed from reacting to the media to trying to manage it. This had mixed results at an operational level. An attempt by the Pentagon to control coverage of the occupation through the pool system broke down. There were too many journalists already on the island, and events moved too quickly for the pool to keep up. Subsequent relationships with the media were easier. “All major U.S. networks”, reported General Shalikashvili, “had agreed to use night vision devices and to delay broadcasting for some

time after the troops were safely on the ground”. Once the troops were on the ground, he added, “we received, with very few exceptions, excellent press, and the operation and the country benefited”.⁹² Military-media relations resembled those in northern Iraq rather than Somalia.

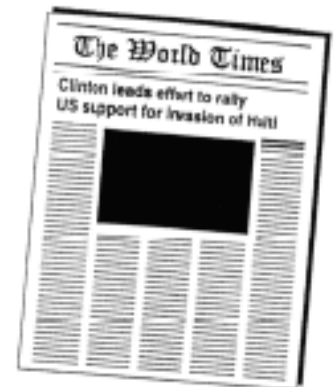
In building hogy case for military intervention, human rights organizations were more instrumental than aid agencies. The testimonies of the UN civilian observers provided an objective focus for news reports and increased coverage about human rights abuses by the de facto authorities. One UN observer felt the print media did a better job of covering the crisis. Largely through use of long-term contacts and people in hiding to provide depth for their stories, rather than through the electronic media. CNN, however, infuriated the human rights community by interviewing those not afraid to speak out – that is, persons who were inevitably backers of the regime. The media were also the fist to pick up on tensions between UN human rights staff and senior diplomats, who, it was feared, might compromise human rights concerns in the interests of negotiating a political solution.

Following the expulsion of UN human rights observers in July 1994, there was pressure on the remaining humanitarian aid agencies to act as the “eyes and ears” of the international community, a role to which they reacted with caution. Mindful of the media’s potential, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Haiti quickly recruited a media relations specialist. In practice, this strategy was more about limiting damage than about establishing a coherent public information profile to reflect policy. With the launching of Operation Uphold Democracy, the U.S. media focused on the street activity of the U.S. military, leaving the European media to pick up on major aid stories, such as the ransacking of aid warehouses.

Some of the generic criticisms of the media as an institution already noted in Chapter 4 were directed toward its activities in Haiti. “The U.S. media by and large covered the ‘plight’ of the elites in Port-au-Prince much more thoroughly than that of the rest of the country”, noted an observer. The elites were more accessible, spoke English, and had little fear of retribution from the military government – but represented only a small minority of public opinion. The media were faulted also for referring to pro-Aristide crowds as “mobs” while describing paramilitaries and others paid to be on hand at the army headquarters at the time of the Carter negotiations as “demonstrators”.

The Haiti emergency presents a rich illustration of the crisis triangle in action.⁹³ The news media played a variety of roles. A seasoned observer noted that “When Haiti turned out not to be a bloody war, senior correspondents of U.S. networks and newspapers didn’t stick around.” In stark contrast with the five hundred or more media personnel on hand in September 1994 at the time of the landing of the U.S.-led multinational force, only a handful were present in February 1996 to witness the democratic transfer of power at the inauguration of Aristide’s successor.

The policy debate in the United States was influenced by a range of institutions, including the *Miami Herald*, National Public Radio, right-wing talk radio, and a steady drumbeat of commentators and pundits, although the nature and extent of this influence remains conjectural. Dramatic television footage of the Haitian army paramilitary group FRAPH against Aristide supporters is widely held to have influenced changes in U.S. policy, enabling troops to play a more assertive role in maintaining law and order and protecting Aristide supporters. Within Haiti, perceptions of events were influenced by the U.S. Information Service and the Voice of America.



SELF-STUDY EXERCISES

Indicate whether each of the following statements is true or false.

- _____ 1. The synergy between policy concerns and media interests in Haiti resembled the same type of synergy evident in the former Yugoslavia.

- _____ 2. In the first half of the 1990's, the U.S. media played a key role in keeping the twin issues of human rights and democracy in the public eye prior to the U.S. invasion.

- _____ 3. News commentary in major U.S. newspapers, such as the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*, bore a striking similarity in their advocacy for U.S. intervention.

- _____ 4. The Pentagon's success in managing and controlling media access in Haiti bore a strong resemblance to their success in northern Iraq.

- _____ 5. Humanitarian assistance agencies were less instrumental than human rights agencies in advocating for U.S. military intervention in Haiti.

- _____ 6. In general, the electronic media was much less effective than the print media in covering the nature and complexity of the crisis in Haiti.

7. Both Haiti and Liberia are countries with historical and political ties to the United States. The crisis in Haiti, however, received much more news media coverage. Recalling the criteria which determines the "news value" of a crisis, try to explain why this was so.

8. Three limitations of the news media are that they depend on quick and easy access, focus on breaking events, and cover only stories with immediate and direct interest to their domestic audiences. Note how each of these limitations were present in the coverage of the Haiti crisis.

9. To what extent, in your judgment, has the episodic violence experienced by Haiti in the post-Aristide period received adequate media coverage? Is there a correlation between reduced US and other military presence during the Préval years and reduced media attention? What are the implications of this for Haitian longer term development challenges?

9. This is based on your opinion and assessment.
 successor in February 1996.
 inauguration of Aristide's
 cratic transfer of power at the
 present to cover the demo-
 compared to the handful
 force in September, 1994,
 of the U.S. led multinational
 reporters on hand at the time
 collectively had 500 hundred
 population. U.S. media
 than the majority of the
 the military establishment
 elite, who had closer ties to
 accessible English speaking
 the plight of the more
 8. The media concentrated on
 military invasion.
 debate ensuing over the
 appropriateness of a U.S. led
 politicians alike with a tense
 priority for U.S. and UN
 of the Haiti crisis was a high
 Liberia crisis. The resolution
 shores, unlike those from the
 Haiti were destined for U.S.
 majority of refugees fleeing
 influence. Furthermore, the
 the U.S. traditional sphere of
 Liberia. Haiti is situated within
 the United States than
 geopolitically significant for
 government. Haiti was more
 the news media and U.S.
 Haiti's relative importance to
 Many factors account for
 7.

4.F 5.T 6.T
 1.F 2.T 3.F

ANSWER KEY



RWANDA

Media blitz and aid crusade

The Rwanda crisis was more like Somalia than the other emergencies reviewed so far. For government policymakers, humanitarian organizations, and the news media alike, the Rwanda crisis became the most severe test of institutional capacity to respond effectively in the post – Cold War world. All three sets of institutions had a gap in their understanding of the nature of the Rwandan conflict; all responded in a relatively superficial fashion, each failing to address the underlying causes of the crisis.

Media attention, international policy formulation, and humanitarian responses moved through several phases. Before April 1994, the warning signs of impending conflict went largely unreported and unheeded by all three institutions. From April to June, genocide within Rwanda received only partial coverage and thoroughly inadequate response from policymakers and aid groups. The mass refugee exodus to Zaire in July and the ensuing cholera crisis, well-covered by the media, received a massive response from government decision-makers and humanitarian organizations alike. By late 1994 and into 1995, when media coverage tapered off, the profile of the crisis for policymakers and humanitarian agencies also was reduced. In that phase, however, the media articulated some of the policy dilemmas raised by the crisis and response. Each phase requires closer review.

In late 1993 and early 1994, dire warnings by human rights and aid agencies inside and outside of Rwanda were ignored. Throughout 1993, there were clear signs of escalating regional violence from Burundi, where the deaths of up to 250,000 people went largely unnoticed by media and policymakers alike.⁹⁴ During “the first three months of 1994”, reported one





review, “there was virtually no Western media coverage of events in Rwanda. Early in the year, the main African story was the UN withdrawal from Somalia, which would prove prescient in itself” for UN peacekeeping troops in Rwanda.⁹⁵ With international media absent, local media were instrumental in spreading propaganda and ultimately fueling violence.

In the immediate aftermath of the plane crash that killed the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi and unleashed a carefully prepared campaign of genocide, few news accounts kept the outside world apprised of developments. The two international journalists in Kigali on April 6 were joined by a few others who stopped en route from the inauguration of Nelson Mandela on May 10, an event witnessed by an estimated 500 journalists. The ranks of journalists in Rwanda proper in the early months of the crisis were limited not only by the priority attached by the media to the story but also by the prevailing insecurity. The UN peacekeeping operation, which had assumed responsibility for protecting journalists, “limited the numbers to just six or seven at any one time because of the difficult conditions and lack of resources. The lack of security meant that live, satellite broadcasting facilities were not established in the city of [Kigali] until late May.”⁹⁶

Early reporting of the Rwanda crisis contained numerous inaccuracies, demonstrating the weaknesses of “parachute reporting”, the technique of dropping news teams into unfamiliar terrain. The relative absence of news personnel in Rwanda and Burundi contributed to the general lack of understanding of the dynamics of the situation. In external headline news, the conflict was rapidly and automatically characterized as a tribal, Hutu versus Tutsi struggle for power and focused on the evacuation of French, Belgian, and other expatriates who were fleeing the bloodbath in the early stages.

If government policymakers had a more sophisticated understanding of the conflict, they did little to challenge the media depiction of an ancestral tribal struggle that surpassed the capacity of external powers to influence. With “historical feud” explanations giving governments a welcome cover for inaction, domestic political contexts determined overall policy response more than media pressure or public opinion. The conflict had elements involving both civil war and ethnic strife. But had the media been clearer from the outset in identifying its genocidal core, coverage might have reduced the convenient excuse that governments enjoyed.

Contrasting sharply with the inattention and low priority of the media early on, the mass exodus of refugees into Goma in July attracted a surge of headline news and television coverage and an overwhelming humanitarian response. The coverage and the response accelerated with the onset of the refugee camp cholera epidemic. The refugee events not only involved drama and human interest but also a simplicity and accessibility that earlier developments lacked.

The need for simplification was something that American TV reporters saw as essential for any Rwanda piece which would meet the criteria applied by editors. “Television needs to take something complex and strip the complexity out of it”, said one U.S. television reporter in explaining the attractiveness of Goma stories to her editors. “For a U.S. audience”, she added, “you have to find the qualities that make the refugees the same [as viewers] to explain the difference”. A colleague confirmed that the story had to be a version of “refugees are good people to whom bad things are happening”. Close observers of the Goma crisis felt the print media were more successful than the electronic media in reflecting the complexities of the situation.

The July cholera outbreak in Goma provided the ingredients for a more straightforward “innocents-in-hell” story and for a domestic angle. In Ireland, where RTE carried daily live broadcasts of the Irish aid agencies at work in Goma a massive \$12 million in donations were forthcoming from a public of only two million.⁹⁷ Israeli television told the story of Rwanda by concentrating on the Israeli Defense Forces medical team. Eurovision set up satellite feed facilities for broadcast to over thirty member states. U.S. media highlighted efforts by U.S. troops in Operation Support Hope to set up a water purification system.

Media coverage tapered off in the waning months of 1994 and, with the exception of the violence in May 1995, at the Kibeho camp for internally displaced persons, remained at a low level throughout 1995. One factor in the downturn was the completion of tours of duty by many soldiers of the national military contingents, leaving at year’s end only the UN peacekeepers, who in their own right never attracted much publicity. Another factor was the impasse in repatriation that had developed, with refugees reluctant to return to their homes (or intimidated by Hutu elements from doing so) and the Kigali authorities not in a position to guarantee safety and due process for those venturing back. A third was the fact that Bosnia was again prominent, first with military successes by Croatia and the Bosnian government, then with successful efforts to secure a peace agreement, and finally with the deployment of 60,000 soldiers as part of the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) to foster reconstruction and reconciliation.

Reviewing the influence of the media on government policy across these various phases, it is clear that the two moved in parallel. It is less clear, however, whether more media coverage early on would have produced more robust government action. U.S. policy was constrained by PDD 25, and Rwanda was the first crisis in which the newly restrictive ground rules, reflecting the debacle in Somalia, were applied. U.S. officials from the President down, reported the *Washington Post*, agreed “that Rwanda simply did not meet any test for direct U.S. military involvement”.⁹⁸ Televised pictures of the pandemonium in Goma accelerated the decision to press U.S. troops into service. The troops were on their way before the Pentagon’s advance mission had completed its work.

European governments at the outset were equally restrained in their responses. France alone took a more assertive approach, deploying military forces in southwest Rwanda in late June. Rather than reflecting pressure from French or European media, however, *Opération Turquoise* was more the product of French political interests in Francophone Africa. As one analyst observed, the French president, who has extraordinary latitude in foreign policy, did not need encouragement from the media or the public to act.⁹⁹

Reviewing the influence of the media on humanitarian action, several tentative conclusions may be drawn. First, the media influenced the scale and the pattern of activities by emergency assistance and human rights groups. Within the Rwanda emergency, humanitarian organizations tended toward activities, which attracted media coverage. Thus, “only a limited number of agencies were prepared to work in the sanitation sector... a situation that contrasted starkly with the number of agencies working in the higher-profile activities, such as establishing cholera treatment centres and centres for unaccompanied children.”¹⁰⁰ Few agencies chose to work in areas with less media coverage, notwithstanding the greater need in these areas.



Mass exodus of refugees into Tanzania

DHA News, Mar/April, 1994.

Photo: UNHCR/P, Moutziz

The media consequently contributed to the serious imbalance between resources committed to refugees outside Rwanda and those directed toward improving the situation for the internally displaced persons within the country. The more ample provision for those outside Rwanda compounded the difficulties of the new regime in encouraging people to return to their homes and delayed rehabilitation. Whereas the picture-fixated nature of television news coupled with portable satellite links made the Goma refugee story irresistible, later events did not lend themselves to the convenient formulas of “victims in flight” or prove as logistically accessible.

The media also influenced the action of humanitarian organizations and those who provided them with resources by its narrow and initially inaccurate framing of the issues of the conflict. In its need to simplify, “the media got Goma wrong”, said an NGO press officer. Among the refugees were perpetrators as well as victims of violence, and the complex issue of guilt went unexamined. Goma “was never portrayed as what it was”, commented a television reporter, “the byproduct of genocide”. Even reporters who attempted an in-depth look from the start at the tougher issues, including how much Hutu power structures were using refugee camps to serve as the staging ground to retake power, had difficulty in presenting the issues.¹⁰¹ Moreover, like the media, many agencies settled for simplistic formulas for describing and responding to the Rwanda crisis.

As in Somalia, the news media and humanitarian agencies were dependent on each other in achieving logistical and professional objectives. But the humanitarian agencies demonstrated an increased dependence on the media that was more about fundraising than influencing policy. “It was the battle of the numbers and the T-shirts”, commented a disillusioned journalist, referring to the seemingly universal quest for publicity. Agencies citing the highest numbers of victims stood a better chance of media coverage, he reported, and visibility in the media of agency logos was considered essential for domestic fundraising. The media circus that resulted, as more than one hundred agencies set up shop in Goma in the first weeks following the refugee influx, reduced the effectiveness of humanitarian agencies to run relief operations and to relate in concerted fashion to the media and policymakers.¹⁰²

Several lessons emerge from the Rwanda experience. First, the case illustrates the dangers of relying on the news media to provide early warning or comprehensive analysis of a complex crisis as the basis for better policy and humanitarian action. Second, it confirms strong links between media coverage, especially television, and humanitarian responses. Third, the media’s focus on massive relief operations around the perimeter of Rwanda obscured the failure of the international community to prevent the slaughter within the country and weakened its effort to bring justice and rehabilitation thereafter. Finally, although the interactions within the crisis triangle remain difficult to assess, similar weaknesses in each suggest the need for structural improvements and improved cooperation.

SELF-STUDY EXERCISES

Indicate whether each of the following statements is true or false.

- ___ 1. In the Rwanda crisis, the failure of human rights and aid agencies to provide ample early warning of the pending crisis contributed to the lack of media attention to the crisis.
- ___ 2. Humanitarian assistance agencies stood alone in their understanding of and response to the underlying causes of the Rwanda crisis.
- ___ 3. The news media, on the whole, provided balanced coverage of the crisis within Rwanda as well as the mass exodus of Rwandan Hutu refugees into Zaire.
- ___ 4. The news media influenced the scale and pattern of activities by emergency and human rights groups.
- ___ 5. In the Goma emergency, many NGOs dependent on privately donated funds gravitated toward humanitarian activities that received major media coverage.
- ___ 6. Most news media sources failed to understand and report the genocidal core of the Rwandan crisis.
- ___ 7. Media coverage of the Goma crisis waned after the completion of tours of duty by the national military contingents.
- ___ 8. The decision by the French president to deploy French troops in Southwest Rwanda in late June, was a reaction to the strong pressures he was experiencing from the French and European media.

Circle the correct answer for the following question.

9. The interaction of the crisis triangle institutions in the Rwanda experience provided which of the following lessons?
 - A. The news media's coverage of a pending crisis provides a good substitute for government and humanitarian agency early warning systems.
 - B. The links between television coverage and humanitarian response are weak.
 - C. The news media should not be relied on as the principal source for crisis early warning.
 - D. News media coverage has little effect on the scale, location and nature of humanitarian response.
 - E. B and C
10. Recall the criteria for determining "news value" and the limitations on media response to humanitarian crises. Which of these may help explain why the mass exodus of refugees into Goma, Zaire in July, 1994, received far more news media coverage than the preceding slaughter of hundreds of thousands which occurred within Rwanda?

10. Prior to July, 1994, the news media's coverage was partially limited by the prevailing insecurity within Rwanda. During the first few months of 1994, the Rwanda conflict was overshadowed by the UN withdrawal from Somalia, and the inauguration of Nelson Mandela in South Africa on May 10th. In contrast, the crisis developing in Goma involved drama and human interest angles and had a simplicity and accessibility which earlier developments lacked. While the crisis in Rwanda seemed to be a "historical feud" between two tribes, with little commonality to domestic audiences, the refugees in Goma were portrayed as "innocents in hell", a situation we could all relate to. Finally, the accompanying international humanitarian relief effort mounted for the refugees in Goma provided the news media with a domestic angle.

1.F 2.F 3.F
4.T 5.T 6.T
7.T 8.F 9.C

ANSWER KEY

1.F 2.F 3.F
 11. Discovery phase: "Discovering" the mass exodus of Rwandan refugees into Goma. Following the "discovery" of these refugees, there was an "inundation" of headline news, television coverage and an overwhelming humanitarian response. Following stories on the cholera outbreak and the arrival of Western troops a "business as usual" phase set in, with media coverage "winding down" in the waning months of 1994, and remaining at a very low level for most of 1995.
 12. 1. Completion of tours of duties by many of the soldiers from the national military contingencies. 2. The impasse in repatriation which developed, with refugees refusing to go back to Rwanda. 3. The reemergence of Bosnian issues on the international scene including a successfully brokered peace agreement and the deployment of 60,000 soldiers as part of a NATO-led implementing force.
 13. In its need to simplify, the news media initially portrayed the Goma refugee crisis as "innocent people" to whom bad things were happening, not as people fleeing the byproduct of genocide in Rwanda. Among the refugees were perpetrators as well as victims of the Rwandan violence.
 14. This is based on your opinion and assessment.

11. Analyze the Rwandan case study, using the "discovery" to "wind-down" typology presented in Chapter 5. Note where you identify examples of this typology.

12. What three factors contributed to the tapering off of news media coverage of the Goma crisis in the final months of 1994?

13. "The media got Goma wrong", reported one NGO press officer. Explain why this criticism has been hurled against some in the news media (as well as humanitarian agencies) in this emergency.

14. The crisis in Eastern Zaire in 1996/1997 has confronted the institutions of the crisis triangle with some of the same challenges experienced in Rwanda in 1994/1995. In your judgment, has each of the three institutions taken to heart any "lessons learned" from the earlier experience in responding to the more recent challenges? has the triangle functioned any better the second time around? How?



Better policy, better action, better coverage

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- *Identify recommendations for improving government, humanitarian agency and news media response and accountability in humanitarian crises.*
- *Describe the future contexts and trends affecting each set of institutions.*
- *Understand why the news media can only play a limited role in crisis early warning and response.*
- *Understand why government policymakers carry the preeminent responsibility for developing appropriate and effective responses to complex emergencies.*

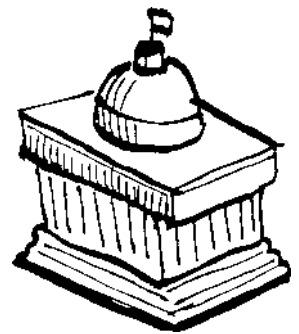
Three sets of recommendations address policymakers, humanitarian organizations, and the news media and identify the context in which each institution will need to function and the areas in which accountability needs to be improved. Reflecting the view that governments carry the preeminent responsibility for responding to complex emergencies, the contribution of each of the actors to better policy is highlighted. A concluding section frames more general recommendations for all three institutions.

Recommendations for government policymaking institutions

***Q.** By now you should have a better understanding of the shortcomings and inconsistencies of government responses, the influence of the news media, and the collective shortcomings of the crisis triangle in humanitarian responses. Based on this understanding, what general recommendations would you make to government policymaking institutions to improve the timeliness and effectiveness of humanitarian action? What recommendations would you make regarding government policymaker interaction with the news media? Compare your response with the discussion that follows.*

A. _____

LEARNING OBJECTIVES



The future policy context

Western foreign policy priorities have not yet crystallized amidst the uncertainties of the post-Cold War era. Criteria for consistent or appropriate intervention in humanitarian crises are yet to be defined by individual governments, let alone by intergovernmental organizations. The appropriate roles for military forces in complex emergencies – a key element in government policy, a major interlocutor for humanitarian actors, and a focus of news attention – have yet to be clarified, much less codified, for either unilateral or multilateral settings. While some form of humanitarian response to many crises seems inevitable, the levels of international involvement and the resources to be committed remain unclear.

Reflecting governmental attitudes, the levels of political will and the resources necessary to combat humanitarian crises are likely to fall far short of demand in the years ahead. The uneven results of international initiatives mounted during the early post-Cold War years probably will contribute to a retrenchment. Yet the actual and potential demand for assistance will grow. One estimate in late 1995 placed the number of states with the potential for civil collapse at no less than eighty.¹⁰³ Despite the need for clearer criteria for action and greater cost-effectiveness in the activities mounted, the most likely response of the international community for the time being will be to judge and manage each crisis on a case-by-basis. In such a context for reasons examined earlier, there is greater potential for media influence on policy debate and outcomes.

Making better policy: beyond traditional interests to responsibilities

The post-Cold War vacuum in international policy and in retooled institutions provides an occasion for reaffirming time-tested humanitarian principles and finding new ways to enhance their implementation. A redefinition of national interests should take a broader view of the critical importance of a world in which humane values are nurtured, international law respected, and international responsibilities discharged. It is unrealistic to expect governments to make significant bilateral responses to every emergency. They may be encouraged, however, while working together, to devise a more effective institutional apparatus for responding to the most serious incidences of need.

Three major recommendations to policymakers are explored here. One relates to the need for policymakers to enhance their early warning capabilities. These capabilities need to be married to the second and third set of recommendations. The second set includes shifting from containment to prevention of conflict and from emergency aid to reconstruction assistance. The third set includes implementing more comprehensive and collaborative security measures.

Early warning. While the news media may function occasionally as an early warning system, they are no substitute for other systems that monitor and anticipate major humanitarian crises. Often, by the time a crisis is headline news, it has already erupted into violence. The news media offer not so much an early warning system as an imminent alarm signal. Although broader news coverage can flag growing problems in a society, such reporting is too uneven and often too late to be a dependable warning.

The media have the capacity “to educate the public on the new global challenges of human rights and humanitarian crises... and to explain why meeting them is in our national interest”.

– U.S. Assistant Secretary of State John Shattck¹⁰⁴

Policymakers should have independent and reliable information on the sources of internal conflicts and pending crises. This is the role of government intelligence services – often aided but not supplanted by NGOs and the media. Developments in information technology (in particular the Internet) promise more consistent and comprehensive systems for collection and dissemination of early-warning information.

Policymakers should make more use of the media to influence public opinion on the value of preemptive action, and, since headline news is more concerned with what is than what might be, they should encourage documentary and commentary news to help put across this message.

Prevention and reconstruction. The policy challenge in relation to civil wars is to shift from containment to prevention, avoiding the need for face-saving and media-induced placebos, and to support measures for reconstruction. By the time headline news makes the public aware of a crisis, governments are likely to be on the defensive, often using the media to explain or rationalize their own limited or belated actions. Greater attention to preventive measures is needed. A recurring lesson from the crises reviewed in this module is that prevention would have been more effective—and less expensive—than hurry-up responses to existing emergencies.

Since many of these crises occurred in States that received a substantial amount of development assistance—normally viewed as an investment in crisis prevention—tough questions need to be asked about its failure to forestall conflicts. It may be naive, pointed out a senior government policymaker, to expect that longer-term aid could head off such tensions, but the reduction of aid in the name of budget austerity may end by costing more in the medium and long terms.

Comprehensive and collaborative approach to security. Policymakers should take the lead in establishing a more comprehensive and collaborative approach to security, whether through UN or regional institutions, or through bilateral arrangements. They should avoid using aid as a palliative; instead, they should make determined humanitarian action both a component part and an independent element in comprehensive economic and security strategies. Doing so would require concerted use of nongovernmental institutions, including the media.

Beyond meeting pressures to be doing something, governments need to confront honestly the inherent limitations of emergency aid-only responses. Comprehensive security and aid programs are required to address complex emergencies. With both global security and economic and social responsibilities, the United Nations is a crucial arena for synchronizing such action, although exercise of the UN's responsibilities in these matters has been remarkably uncreative and ineffective.

Government accountability to public opinion via the media

In the U.S. and the E.U., foreign policy is rarely conducted exclusively by elites behind closed doors. Public opinion matters, whether it runs ahead of or lags behind policy; governments have to maintain a fine balance between leading and reflecting public opinion. Research suggests that the news media, and especially television, increasingly act as the primary source of information for the public about foreign affairs and particularly about the developing world. The media, in effect, provide a common stage for the debate about the new parameters of national and international interests. This is a platform that policymakers should use more assertively.

Government officials would be well-advised to take the media more seriously in the process of policymaking and promotion. “Failure to consider the press aspects of a policy can often mean trouble down the road”, observes Martin Lipsky. “A professional attitude toward and sophisticated knowledge of the press creates the opportunity, but only that, for a policymaker to deal with the press – and, yes, to manage relations with the press – so as to better serve the interests of policy goals.”¹⁰⁵

Despite their function of supplying information to the public and spotlighting the actions of governments, the media are unlikely to be in the vanguard of forces promoting the evolution of an international community in which humanitarian principles are paramount and international commitments honored. Limitations on the contribution can be expected from an institution geared to domestic audiences and largely focused on the short run. The newly understood importance of prevention, for example, is “inherently non-photogenic”, notes a seasoned humanitarian campaigner.

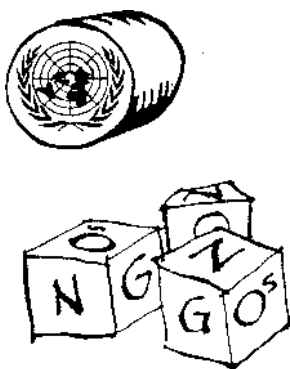
Government officials should guard against letting either the media or humanitarian actors set or preempt their agenda. Government policy must avoid being either driven or inhibited by public opinion; it should instead use the media for public education and thereby reduce the need for government management of public opinion in a crisis. The more clearly government policy is articulated, the less policymakers risk overreacting to the media. Policymakers need improved communications strategies to support a leadership role in this regard.

Understanding media-policy relationship. More research is needed to understand the complexities of the relationships between the media and policymaking. Most instructive would be a shift from analyzing the role of the media in particular crises to more general findings regarding their effects and potential. State-centric attitudes toward the media regard them as a tool of foreign policy that manipulate political support for or against a decision to intervene in an internal conflict. Humanitarian actors, in contrast, see the media as a powerful champion of human rights, employing their resources with greater regularity to force governments into meeting their respective responsibilities. Post-Cold War experience suggests that consistent policy over time will produce a less radical but more responsible role for the media, particularly in relation to public opinion.

Recommendations for humanitarian agencies

***Q.** By now you should have a better understanding of the limitations of humanitarian assistance agencies and their shortcomings in influencing the news. Based on this, what general recommendations might you make to humanitarian agencies to improve the timeliness and effectiveness of their response? What general recommendations might you make regarding humanitarian agency interaction with the news media. Compare your response with the discussion that follows.*

A. _____



The future humanitarian context

The likely increase in internal armed conflicts during the coming years presents humanitarian agencies with major dilemmas. For example, they stand to win greater backing for their actions to provide emergency assistance as they lose support for the more difficult but ultimately more critical tasks of tackling the root causes of distress and of development education in their own societies. Moreover, as governments lose a taste for security interventions, humanitarian agencies find themselves increasingly in the vanguard of international action, dealing with warring factions that are quickly learning how to manipulate external actors. Media attention to humanitarian activities is also likely to continue its erratic course, with increased or sympathetic coverage by no means guaranteed.

Contributions to improved government policy

The enlarged roles of humanitarian organizations and the expanded expectations of their performance are welcomed by some in these agencies and some in governments, yet caution is in order.

Newly aware of the contributions to humanitarian action that only governments can make, humanitarian actors, spanning as they do governmental, intergovernmental, and nongovernmental institutions, find themselves in a prime position to influence policy. These organizations form a link between more generalized policymakers and the news media. They often have early, local, and detailed information about potential crises. NGOs generally have fewer restrictions than governments on sharing such information and are able to make extensive use of the media in the process.

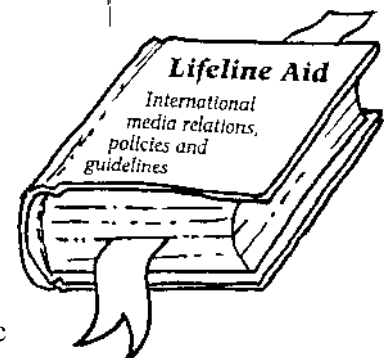
However, the range of humanitarian institutions also constitutes its weakness when it comes to influencing government policy. As the preceding analysis suggests, the community of humanitarian organizations often disagrees on the fundamental questions of what it wants from policymakers and which strategies should be pursued to reach that objective. Ambivalence about the necessity for security interventions in support of humanitarian action contributes to a diversity of views about whether and how military and humanitarian actors should work together. Equally divisive is the relative priority accorded to an emergency as contrasted with a longer-term action.

More sustained and effective influence on government policy will require that humanitarian organizations wrestle more energetically with complex policy issues and work harder to identify issues on which consensus may be found. The process of achieving greater clarity on policy objectives also would provide the basis for joint strategies vis-à-vis the media.

Relations with the media and public opinion

Comprehensive media relations strategies. For many humanitarian agencies, media relations are dominated by fundraising. Experience demonstrates, however, that the media play many roles that result in humanitarian consequences, only one of which relates to the mobilization of resources. Strategies currently geared to promoting name recognition of individual organizations need therefore to be harmonized with broader and more community-wide objectives in the areas of public education and public policy.

Aid agencies should develop a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between policy and the media, drawing on the increasing body



of research in this area. This in turn would inform their media relations and communications strategies, which also should take account of the plurality and complexity of the news media as an institution and the possibilities offered by new technologies.¹⁰⁶ Since headline news remains a volatile forum, greater use of documentary and commentary news could stimulate more thoughtful policy debate about complex emergencies in which humanitarian organizations have a strong interest.

The next two chapters present many well-tested guidelines and techniques for better media relations. Many agencies already have skilled teams exploiting the numerous angles of media coverage; other agencies have yet to acquire those skills. All agencies should do more to coordinate their relations with the media where messages are, or might be, common.

There is no substitute for well-conceived strategies among humanitarian institutions in their interaction with the media. These strategies need to communicate the activities of individual organizations and of the broader family of agencies. Once in place, the strategies will help to guide the resources committed to media relations, both by individual organizations and by the wider family of agencies. Strategies need to become part of the humanitarian culture and to be shared with agency supporters. For practitioners and contributors who place a priority on keeping all expenditures focused on direct assistance to those who suffer, the proposed reorientation will require major changes.

Facilitating the media's access to information. Public opinion research and comments by working journalists alike suggest that humanitarian agencies often overestimate the degree of public and media understanding of their work. The onus is on practitioner organizations to improve the media's access to useful and accurate information about humanitarian mandates and programs.

At a practical level, the task of better facilitating the work of the media may be a matter of logistics: for example, of more readily sharing privileged access to conflict zones. Few organizations would question the value of assisting the media to do its job better. In concrete terms, however, taking scarce staff time out to brief journalists or transporting them to where the action is can involve serious trade-offs. For example, should agencies "bump" aid cargo or personnel off flights to make room for news crews? Should agencies spend limited resources to service the needs of itinerant reporters? Such judgments benefit from agency policy that provides supportive general guidelines and that clarifies for donors the approach to be taken.

In a broader sense, facilitating the work of the media involves agency-wide decisions about the extent of resource allocations to be made for media relations. Policy issues also are involved when agencies are forced to weigh the value of publicity for an overlooked cause against their own operational needs. A clear understanding of the potential and the limitations of the media may help humanitarian organizations struggling with these matters.

Understanding the complexity of the media. Humanitarian agencies often criticize the media and their perceived shortcomings without understanding the institution's structures and operational constraints. Differentiation within the media by news category and market is essential. For example, CNN, despite recent slippage in audience ratings, remains an effective vehicle for reaching editors globally and policymakers, particularly in the United States,

who use it as a kind of 24-hour-a-day wire service. National newspapers can influence policy agendas of the elite; regional papers still have a deep connection with a cross-section of public opinion. In the United States, regional newspapers also syndicate material among themselves, often across regional lines. Since policymakers in the Pentagon and State Department receive a daily digest of all such sources (the “Early Bird”), any particular item of news covered may find its way to the highest level.

Achieving greater in-depth coverage. Humanitarian agencies are keen that the media help promote a wider understanding of the root causes of crises. Headline news often reduces complex crises to buzzwords like “chaos” or “anarchy”, while overlooking such factors as poverty, repressive regimes, weapons proliferation, and outside interference. In hard-news terms, these factors are difficult to present intelligibly in the space available and often are relegated to more analytical coverage. But agencies cater to this weakness by scripting humanitarian action as a morality play, with victims (“teeming masses of Africans and Asians”), heroes (usually “angels” from the Red Cross or other NGOs), and villains (“local military authorities”, “UN bureaucrats”, and the like). Simplistic approaches may help raise funds but ultimately work “against the long-term interests of the relief agencies”.¹⁰⁷

Humanitarian agencies could reduce their complicity in stereotypical “formula reporting” by “educating their own workers better”, said a journalist renowned for her in-depth reporting of East African crises. They also should provide better briefings for journalists, especially for those departing to an unfolding crisis. There is much room for improvement in what aid organizations do to foster more thoughtful and comprehensive coverage of humanitarian action.

That said, media coverage probably improves only in tandem with greater public education and public demand. Humanitarian agencies should therefore conduct their media relations as part of wider public affairs strategies addressing public education challenges and informing public opinion. Telling the “whole story” also carries risks for humanitarian agencies – already under political fire, greater media scrutiny of aid and its limitations may weaken political and public support of humanitarian missions. But there is no substitute for transparency and accountability. This challenge too has ramifications both for individual agencies and for the wider humanitarian family.

Coordination of purpose and publicity. The heterogeneity of humanitarian organizations makes it difficult for them to engage the media and public opinion in any concerted way.¹⁰⁹ It is unrealistic and even undesirable for NGOs in particular to organize themselves into a monolithic mouthpiece; however, cacophony and disarray often makes them, in the eyes of the media and policymakers, their own worst enemies. Agencies should devote more time and resources to forging a shared message in various emergencies. The message should go beyond “something must be done”, but stop short of getting entangled in complex and divisive political and operational issues.

Aid agencies must be aware that their media relations can affect other players in the field, especially in complex emergencies. Tension exists between providing news and commentary to the media, which in complex emergencies are often necessarily critical of government and insurgent groups, and the continued functioning of aid groups in the crises. There are

While we will cooperate with the media in order to enhance public response, we will not allow external or internal demands for publicity to take precedence over the principle of maximizing overall relief assistance.

We will avoid competing with other disaster response agencies for media coverage in situations where such coverage may be to the detriment of the service provided to the beneficiaries or to the security of our staff or the beneficiaries.

– IFRC Code of Conduct in Disaster Relief¹⁰⁹

also tensions between denouncing observed human rights abuses and enjoying the continued cooperation of the authorities. While advocacy is designed to expand the available humanitarian space, it may end by contracting it. Assertive media relations by one agency can shrink the space enjoyed by others.

Coordination of media relations is only one aspect of the challenge of greater interagency collaboration at the planning and operational levels. Coalitions of like-minded NGOs in both Europe and the United States have shown the value of interagency collaboration in the form of enhanced resource mobilization and expanded influence on policymakers and public opinion. The UN's Department of Humanitarian Affairs has begun to play a role in the coordination of information flows among humanitarian organizations and between them and UN officials, government policymakers, and the media. Though news institutions vary in Europe and North America, more could be done by humanitarian organizations to encourage the utilization of available materials on both sides of the Atlantic.

Accountability. There is obviously much room for improvement in the functioning of each of the three sets of institutions comprising the crisis triangle. However, it is humanitarian organizations that have been the most widely faulted and the biggest target of efforts to ensure greater accountability. The welter of agencies flocking to Goma had precedent in the inundation of groups turning up in Jordan while third country nationals fled Kuwait and Iraq in 1990. Little has changed since Jordanian authorities described their difficulty of distinguishing "the charlatan from the humanitarian".¹¹⁰

In highlighting the activities of humanitarian organizations, the media has played a role in encouraging increased effectiveness and greater professionalism. To date, however, the changes instituted have not improved appreciably the functioning of the system. The desire of governments for greater accountability of UN organizations following their disarray during the crisis in northern Iraq led to the creation of the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) in 1992. DHA has encouraged information-sharing among humanitarian organizations in the UN and beyond, and has been a part of efforts to train practitioners to cope with new challenges. However, fundamental changes have yet to be introduced in the area of coordination or system-wide accountability.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has promoted a useful code of conduct for agencies in disaster response programs, including guidance on information activities. As well as safeguarding the dignity of victims, the code commits agencies to beware the pitfalls of competition for media coverage. In keeping with the voluntary sector ethos of its organizations, the code of conduct is self-policing rather than backed up by an effective enforcement mechanism. Other codes of conduct and sets of principles have been devised and promoted, but with limited appreciable effect.

Given the likelihood of continued major emergencies and of increasing scrutiny of their operations by the media, humanitarian organizations would be well-advised to continue struggling to find ways and means to upgrade their effectiveness and accountability.

Recommendations for the media

Q. *By now you should have a better understanding of the possibilities and limitations of news media response to complex emergencies. Based on this understanding, what general recommendations might you make to news media institutions which would contribute to improved news coverage and humanitarian action? Compare your response with the discussion in this section.*

A. _____



The future context: new technology and increased commercialism

A technological revolution in communications has changed the political landscape. In the words of President Bill Clinton, “Because of a communications revolution, symbolized most clearly by CNN... we are front-row history witnesses. We see things as they occur. Now we are impatient if we learn about things an hour after they occur instead of seeing them in the moment.”¹¹¹ The major advances, however, have not been limited to news-gathering by television. The universal applicability of digital information, the spread of the Internet, and a new level of interactivity in communications are all testing conventional wisdom about the ownership and power of information.¹¹²

The revolution in information technology and the proliferation of news media channels have left commentators divided about future media coverage of foreign affairs.¹¹³ In one assessment, consumers using the new technology are more likely to have access to a greater variety of information sources, allowing them to bypass traditional gatekeepers in the media. “The monolithic empires of mass media are dissolving into an array of cottage industries”, Nicholas Negroponte, a commentator on mass communications, has observed.¹¹⁴ Moreover, an increase in the number of television channels and electronic sources of news information could increase the opportunities for the broadcast and circulation of foreign news. In another assessment, however, there has been a narrowing of the space for “an educated general audience”, with the market “now more divided into specialist and tabloid”. In the latter view, coverage of foreign news will lose out in the increasingly competitive market to other more powerful and more numerous constituencies.

New technology and newly available news sources notwithstanding, the major television networks are far from obsolete, at least in the United States. At the time of Disney’s \$19 billion merger with the American Broadcasting Companies, an observer noted that once “dismissed as dinosaurs in a world of ever-expanding information options, broadcast networks and

television stations have become the glittering jewels in the media business".¹¹⁵ Although the networks' share of television audiences has slipped from 90 percent to 60 percent in the last fifteen years, they still possess a decisive hold on viewers and attract the greatest advertising revenue.

There is no firm evidence, however, that technological changes, public demand, or commercial responses will result in using the increased capacity for foreign coverage. If public demand drops and commercial imperatives follow, foreign news may find itself marginalized in specialized public information broadcasts of the C-span variety. The explosion of "infotainment"—that is, the packaging of news in an entertainment format—has underscored the upsurge of commercial priorities in the media. Most apparent in the U.S. market, the trend is general and extends well beyond television. Newspapers, described candidly by a U.S. journalist as "a device to deliver consumers to producers", now have finely tuned advertising strategies that affect editorial content and layout decisions. Such developments do not augur well for greater in-depth coverage of foreign affairs in any medium.

The implications of parallel developments in cyberspace are not yet fully clear. Although the Internet promises an unequaled information system for those involved in humanitarian crises, more information does not necessarily bring greater understanding. The main attraction of the Internet is its anarchy and freedom of access, but this attraction may also become its major drawback. Controlling the quality of information on any Internet site takes major resource commitments, as the UN's Department of Humanitarian Affairs discovered while developing ReliefWeb. Journalists and editors already have vast information from which to select news. Likewise, policy-makers and others with specialized interests will turn to new information services only if they offer faster access to better information.

In summary, there is no conclusive evidence yet that the public is turning away from traditional news sources or local preoccupation. Nor is there any assurance that technological progress will result in improved quantity or quality of media coverage of humanitarian concerns.

Media contribution to government policy

Clarifying the roles of the media. Differences persist among and beyond journalists about the appropriate role and motivation of the media in influencing government policy. While some profess to be objective reporters without a political agenda, others expect – and some even intend – that their output will produce a policy reaction. The latter perspective was articulated by a U.S. network television reporter who felt that "journalists and NGOs work well together; it is a bonding experience. They go to the same areas for the same reasons: that is, to alleviate suffering". Expressing a more common view, a CNN reporter saw gains in the area of humanitarian action as "a side benefit more than an objective".

Certainly, the dedication of many journalists securing stories of conflict and suffering cannot be doubted. Surveying the casualties suffered by reporters around the world, one report noted that during 1994 at least 72 journalists were killed, 58 of whom were deliberately targeted, and another 173 were imprisoned.¹¹⁶ Such journalists are crucial to the improved coverage of conflicts, but over time the perils of the trade may deter coverage.

The newly founded International Centre for Humanitarian Reporting (ICHR) in Geneva and its associated journal, *Crosslines Global Report*, are examples of a concerted effort to encourage “humanitarian journalism”. Illustrative of the ICHR’s practical approach is its initiative in developing a database of global contacts to provide journalists with speedy and reliable sources in war zones.

The extent to which the media, whether as an institution or in the guise of its working professionals, should project themselves as agents of change with an agenda to influence policy remains a much-debated point. Should the media lead or reflect public opinion? As with governmental policymakers, the media have a fine line to tread. One British diplomatic television news editor commented, “Our job is to report, but there is a secondary hope that it will change things, a hope of enlightenment, a hope that this wakes them up in Whitehall”. Another journalist confirmed that the optimum media contribution to policy should remain a general rather than a specific one: “to tell the truth, improving understanding and analysis”.¹¹⁷



Early warning. Earlier, more consistent, and more probing coverage of potential conflicts, while desirable, is unlikely to become the business of headline news. Early warning remains the primary responsibility of governments and of the United Nations system, although the media may undoubtedly assist, and in certain instances already have, through more comprehensive foreign affairs reporting. To this end, the international media should make better use of aid agencies and local media to follow developments rather than waiting for the herd instinct to direct the attention of the institution toward a particular crisis.

Local media. Western media should make more use of local journalists to help offset the inadequacies of parachuting outside correspondents into crises. Although there are often problems associated with impartiality of local media in war zones, external support for cash-strapped and independent media institutions in vulnerable countries may contribute not only to improving local journalism but also to conflict prevention.

The issue of “captive” media being used to promote internal conflict needs additional research. In counteracting local propaganda, external media clearly have a crucial role to play, as the earlier discussion of Rwanda indicates. Reaching a local audience remains a major challenge for external media that will require changes in policies as well as practices.

Accountability: a responsibility to report and educate

Covering conflicts. The media have a widely acknowledged responsibility to contribute to the education of domestic audiences about the wider threats of complex emergencies, if not through headline news then through other types of coverage. At the same time, however, they are well-advised to retain an independent perspective on humanitarian crises.

This will require keeping their distance from the agendas of both governments and humanitarian organizations, each of which is an important source of information, but each of which also has special interests to promote. Thus, while the temptation is perennial for journalists to produce formulaic

accounts of Western humanitarian aid workers and Western diplomats riding to the rescue of distressed populations, the realities of the situation are far more complex and ambiguous.

Retaining an independent perspective will require developing the expertise to evaluate rapidly changing events – and the interpretations given to them by other actors. Foreign-based correspondents with local knowledge are more likely to take an independent view than are news teams parachuted into the middle of a conflict. Although headline news probably will not change formula reporting, documentary and commentary news offer opportunities to explain the domestic relevance of foreign conflicts. The media inevitably will require some time before they are in a position to make their own judgments on the spot in each new crisis, but there is no reason why hard-hitting commentary should wait until the winding down of a relief operation or of media presence.

A subject well within the purview of media attention would involve analysis of why major emergencies sometimes recur in the "same setting (for example, Ethiopia), and why they occur in settings that have received ample development assistance over a period of years (e.g., Rwanda and Liberia). The media also have a contribution to make, and a responsibility to make it, in monitoring post-conflict reconstruction, even though policymakers and relief groups may have moved on to the next crisis (as in Haiti). Again, the retrospective role is more likely to be covered in documentary news.

Exercising accountability will require an ability to make discriminating judgments. Unwarranted criticism – of the strategies of donor governments in dealing with warring parties, of the warring parties themselves, and of humanitarian actors – can represent a setback to effective responses. As with the other two major actors in such conflicts, the media will need to balance its responsibility to "tell it like it is" against its need for access and information.

In addition to exercising accountability in relation to other institutions of the crisis triangle, the media should subject itself to higher standards of accountability. As the activities of governments and humanitarian organizations come under greater scrutiny, so, too, will the effects of the media as a humanitarian actor. Certainly the impact of its activities can be profound. The media in general, and television in particular, are well aware of the power of the picture. Not only do the most dramatic pictures dominate headline news but they also can have an impact on other media. The impact on donor publics is palpable.

A television reporter observed that where her BBC team chose to put the satellite link in Bosnia might well affect the deployment of other media, resulting in a concentration of policy attention and humanitarian activities in one area to the detriment of another. Once a satellite link was positioned in Goma, the news flow that it facilitated about refugee distress was massive—in decided contrast to the trickle of news from Kigali during the genocide. As a result, the media contributed to an undesirable imbalance in international activities and resource flows that compounded the difficulties of the new Rwandan regime in the areas of rehabilitation and reconciliation. At a minimum, the media should beware of this danger and take steps to correct imbalances created by picture seduction.

Recommendations for the institutional triangle working together

A crisis mentality and an ambivalent public

Among the many elements shared by the institutions of the crisis triangle is the crisis-driven nature of foreign policy, headline news, and humanitarian action. Despite institutional needs, pressures, and cultures that tend to focus minds and resources on the present, all three institutions would benefit from looking further ahead. However great the need for each institution to review individually its performance, doing so together also has special value.

The fact that public opinion waxes hot and cold on humanitarian crises suggests that the process of institutional reflection will need to be sustained by the actors on their own. “Public opinion in matters of foreign policy tends to be shallow, transitory, and lacking in salience” reported a British pollster. In the United Kingdom, he noted, foreign policy rarely features among the top two or three issues polled. Even issues concerning the European Union, he found, are largely regarded as an extension of domestic politics. Public opinion on foreign policy assumes importance only at select times, such as when national troops are deployed or national leaders are playing a high-profile role.

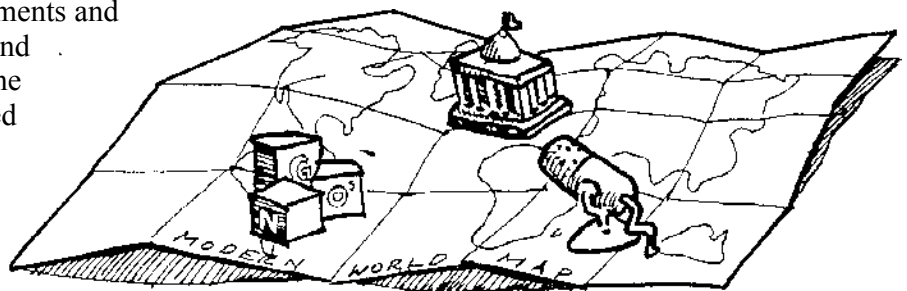
Under these conditions, how should the institutional triangle operate differently to improve international response to humanitarian crises? Overcoming the crisis mentality and stimulating public awareness represent two key challenges.

Cooperation on media matters

The most likely common ground for building cooperation within the institutional triangle is more accurate and urgent coverage of headline news, with greater audience impact. Documentary and commentary news will continue to provide the most fertile are of cooperation to address the root causes of complex emergencies – but, however welcome by policymakers and humanitarian organizations, greater depth, continuity, and sophistication will be sought by the media only when their public demands it.

Whatever the state of public awareness, the news media provide one of the few common platforms on which complex emergencies can be debated and undergo arbitration among the various external actors. Governments and humanitarian organizations may resist having a full-fledged public debate on their policies and practices on “opinion pages” or talk shows. In democratic societies, however, that is a major device for articulating interests and hammering out consensus. All institutions can benefit from the town meeting function of the media. The dangers of the perennial short-term focus of governments and aid groups on emergency responses and the absence of strategy to deal with the new world disorder can be highlighted while the media exercises a public service role in the process.

Although each of the three institutions working in civil wars can benefit from greater



cooperation, increased contact among them is unlikely to replace the current mistrust and distance with altogether harmonious or synergistic interaction – nor should it. Each set of institutions has and will continue to have its own agendas, constituencies, procedures, mandates, and accountabilities. The media will not cease to play a watchdog role simply because government policymakers and aid officials seek to forge more effective working relationships with them.

At the same time, more collegial working relationships with the media—and a media better informed to understand the complexities of major crises—will improve both policy and action. Benefits of a humanitarian nature should accrue from the media’s potential to move public opinion and power elites at critical moments in the policy process.

Better coverage, better policy, and better action would result from the three institutions tempering their normal crisis perspectives and higher levels of professionalism and greater collaboration between the three should be urged.

More specifically, policymakers are urged:

- to move beyond narrowly defined national interests in framing post-Cold War foreign policy
- to cultivate sources for early warning other than the media, which are usually too late and often sporadic in picking up and passing on the signs
- to develop a better understanding of the complex relationships between the media and policymaking, enlisting the media’s interpretive power rather than responding defensively

Humanitarian organizations are urged:

- to improve media relations, reflecting a greater understanding of the complexity and limitations of the news media as an institution
- to view the media as a partner in educating public opinion rather than simply as a fundraising device
- to take concerted action, involving the media as part of a comprehensive strategy, to bring about improved government policy

The media are urged:

- to resist the worst outcomes of increased commercialism such as the trends to infotainment and reduced foreign news coverage
- to provide fuller and more probing coverage of humanitarian crises, utilizing more fully humanitarian agencies and local media
- to contribute to fuller accountability by governments and aid agencies by scrutinizing donor government policies and emergency aid activities.¹¹⁸

SELF-STUDY EXERCISES

Indicate whether each of the following statements is true or false.

- ___ 1. One challenge for governmental policymakers is to establish criteria which could be used consistently for determining valid interventions in humanitarian crises.
- ___ 2. News media influence on government policymaking is greatest when their foreign policy is clear and focused.
- ___ 3. Humanitarian assistance agencies would do well to increasingly rely on the news media to provide reliable early warning of pending crises.
- ___ 4. There is little agreement among Western governmental policymakers and humanitarian agencies on the appropriate role for the military in complex emergencies.
- ___ 5. The majority of journalists and news media sources covering humanitarian crises have a good understanding of the humanitarian assistance players and the nature of their work.
- ___ 6. Despite the advent of new technology and newly available news sources, network broadcasts and television stations maintain considerable reach and influence.
- ___ 7. The advent of new technologies and newly available news sources has done little to stem the emphasis of commercial media on “infotainment”.
- ___ 8. News media professionals in Western countries generally agree that the news media should serve as a vehicle for setting and influencing government policymaking agendas and decision making.
- ___ 9. As news media professionals gain experience in covering humanitarian crises they are relying less on stories which resemble “infotainment”.
- ___ 10. Government policymakers can count on public opinion on foreign policy issues to be consistent and their interest sustained over time.
- ___ 11. In the United Kingdom, foreign policy rarely ranks among the top two or three issues polled.
- ___ 12. The most likely common ground for building cooperation among the institutions of the crisis triangle is more accurate and urgent coverage of headline news.

Circle the correct answer for each of the following questions.

13. This chapter recommends that policymakers make use of the news media:
- A. As a reliable source of early warning information about internal conflicts and pending crisis
 - B. As a way to educate the public on the value of preemptive action
 - C. As a way to communicate with belligerent parties or factions in a crises
 - D. A and B
 - E. B and C
 - F. All of the above

14. The best and quickest vehicle for globally reaching editors and policymakers, particularly in the United States, is/are:
- A. Tabloid news journals
 - B. National newspapers, such as the Washington Post
 - C. BBC
 - D. CNN
 - E. Commentary/Documentary News sources
15. Which news source most often influences the policy agendas of the elite in Western countries?
- A. Tabloid news journals
 - B. National newspapers, such as the Washington Post
 - C. BBC
 - D. CNN
 - E. Commentary/Documentary News sources
16. Which following news source or medium generally provides the most in-depth coverage of a crisis?
- A. CNN
 - B. Commentary News
 - D. Tabloid news journals

13.B 14.D 15.B
10.F 11.T 12.T
7.T 8.F 9.F
4.T 5.F 6.T
1.T 2.F 3.F

ANSWER KEY

Media relations

This part of the module provides an introduction to dealing with the news media and dealing with media interviews. As such, this part can serve as a guide, or springboard, for agencies interested in formulating or updating their media relations policies and guidelines. You are encouraged to read this part critically, recalling that the news media is not a monolithic actor, and understanding that each agency's needs are different and require different approaches. For those readers desiring a more sophisticated and comprehensive treatment of this topic, you are referred to the list of selected readings at the end of this part.

Chapter 8, "Dealing with the Media", provides general guidelines for establishing a credible and pro-active media relations strategy and for developing agency policy. Chapter 9, "Guidelines for Media Interviews", provides the reader general and specific interviewing tips and reminders which will help them prepare successfully for an actual interview with the news media.

This part draws directly and in part from ideas and information found in one of the following five sources.

1. *The News Media, Civil War & Humanitarian Action* by Larry Minear, Colin Scott, and Thomas G. Weiss. Lynne Rienner Publishers. Boulder, London. 1996.
2. *CARE Media Relations Handbook: Getting CARE's Message Across*. CARE USA Public Relations Staff, October 1994.
3. "Public Information", training module of the UNHCR Training Service, Geneva. 1989.
4. "General Media Relations Guidelines", UNHCR/EMTP Training Module, April 10, 1995.
5. "Dealing with the Media", WFP Emergency Operations Training Notes.

In synthesizing these sources, Part 3 does not necessarily express the viewpoint of any single resource, individual, or organization.

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PART **3** Chapter 8

Dealing with the media

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you will be able to:



- Understand the importance of establishing credibility with the news media.
- Identify essential strategies for establishing your credibility.
- Understand the importance of developing pro-active media relations.
- Identify five pro-active media
- Distinguish between the nature and purpose of a press conference, press release, and editorial.
- Understand the importance of establishing internal agency policies and guidelines.
- Describe policy checklist items which should appear on internal media policies.

Establishing credibility with the news media

Good media relations are rooted in trust. Journalists need immediate and unimpeded access to sources of information and must be able to rely on the veracity of their sources. Like reputation, credibility is a fragile object. Once credibility is lost, it is not easily regained. Those who try to manipulate the media, for example, by exaggerating refugee numbers and suffering, overstating agency accomplishments, or suppressing important facts, may gain positive coverage in the short-term but will lose out in the long-term. An individual's credibility can be enhanced or undermined by their agency's credibility, and vice versa thus, the importance of clear and consistent agency procedures.

Q. *How might you establish credibility with the news media? Compare your responses with those that follow.*

A. _____



Be honest

Respond honestly and accurately. Tension can arise in trying to accommodate the media when you are not in a position to supply credible information, or you need more time to prepare it. Inadvertent provisional, inaccurate or misleading information can undermine credibility. If you are in one of these situations, find the appropriate person with whom the reporter should speak, or request that the reporter give you more time to prepare an accurate response. Also, remember that honesty does not mean that you have to tell everything that you know. There are many times when you must be discreet about what you say to the media.

Be prompt, available and helpful

Provide reporters with prompt answers to their queries. If they call and you are not in, try to return their call as soon as possible. Whenever feasible, facilitate the media's access to useful and accurate information. At a practical level, this may mean helping them gain privileged access to conflict zones and interviews with major players in the emergency or conflict. Make yourself or a designated representative available at all times for media follow-up questions, additional information, or to provide photographs, interviews, or other materials.

Provide factual and concrete information

Provide accurate facts and figures about the emergency and your operations. Journalists want factual information on the number of refugees/returnees, methods of transport, dates of displacement and return, country and place of origin, names of other agencies in the operation, major humanitarian assistance needs, sources of funding, appeal figures, as well as human interest stories for domestic audiences. In a general sense, talk about your work in concrete terms.

Understand media priorities and interests

Effective media relations depend on understanding the priorities, interests and needs of the various news media sources. (To review this information, refer back to Part 1, Chapter 4.)

Your story, or your side of it, will appear in the media in direct proportion to the interest that it holds for viewers and readers, as judged by the editors and news directors who make such decisions. Avoid complaining about the way your story was handled and getting into fruitless disputes with individual journalists. Responses to unfavorable or inaccurate media coverage should only be made by agency directors, or their spokesperson.

Be open and transparent

Journalists also want to know about the problems you face and what you are doing to overcome these difficulties. never ask for a story to be suppressed —attempts at censorship always backfire. Agencies should not try to hide problems or mistakes. In fact, it is almost always best to talk about problems before the media find out about them on their own —they usually do.



Developing pro-active media relations

One aspect of media relations involves knowing what to say to journalists and reporters who take the initiative to seek you out. But media relations should not stop here. Knowing how to interview, conduct press conferences, or write press releases does not guarantee that the news media will give you a forum. To increase the chances that your messages will be heard requires that your agency become pro-active. To achieve maximum effect with the media will require that your agency nurture media contacts, diversify its media contacts, understand various news mediums for getting your message across and join with other agencies when there are common interests.

Nurture constructive media contacts

Humanitarian agencies should spend considerable resources nurturing constructive working relationships with the news media. Nurtured over time, these contacts give greater confidence to media professionals, encouraging them to proceed with important stories for which full collaboration is time-consuming or impossible. Personal contacts are equally important with gatekeepers in the system, such as editors and owners. Having trusted contacts in the media world is essential for agencies intent on alerting the public and policymakers to impending humanitarian crises, exposing human rights abuses or advocating serious policy changes. When you have nurtured your media contacts, they are much more likely to listen when you have a story to tell. There are many ways of telling your story. Provided you tell it in a lively and interesting way, it will have a good chance of getting into the news.



Diversify media contacts

By virtue of their personal motivations, some journalists may be easier to engage in the humanitarian sphere than others. There should be no presumption, however, that the news media are involved for any reason other than to produce objective reporting. Since headline news necessarily remains an ever-changing forum, agencies should make greater use of documentary and commentary news to stimulate more thoughtful policy debate about complex emergencies in which humanitarian organizations have a strong interest.

There is fierce competition for headline news; agencies should not overlook opinion page columnists, feature writers, and documentary filmmakers who often have the luxury to consider subjects beyond the main news. A good concerted media strategy, whether of an individual organization or a coalition of aid groups, will allow for differentiated approaches depending on the objectives being advanced.

Use various news mediums

There are many ways of relaying your message to the news media. In addition to interviews, your agency may issue a press release, hold a press conference, develop a documentary film, or write and submit an editorial. Understanding the distinctions and uses of each will help you identify when to use each medium.

Press conference

Agencies hold press conferences to publicly announce significant and newsworthy initiatives, changes in policy or official statements regarding controversial issues to a variety of news media outlets. The basic rule for press conferences is to have something significant to announce and somebody significant to announce it. Nothing else works. If overused, or inappropriately used, people will stop attending them and your credibility with the news media will be damaged. Little irks reporters more than a badly timed, ill-considered press conference of limited news value. When in doubt issue a press release (see next section).



The ideal press conference lasts no more than 30 minutes and consists of a brief (five-minute) introduction and prepared opening statement, followed by questions and answers from the audience (usually journalists and television reporters). Many of the general guidelines for interviewing discussed in Chapter 9 should be followed by those holding the press conference. A press release should be distributed to all at the beginning of the meeting.

Press releases

A press release is a brief written statement, under a page long, which announces a significant agency policy, initiative or real-life story. Press releases should be written in a newspaper format and convey the basic who, what, when, where, how and why of your story. A carefully crafted, well-written and well-timed press release gives reporters a ready-made story, or something they can quickly edit, cut or rewrite, according to their needs and time constraints. Like the press conference, you should only issue press releases when you have something newsworthy to say, either something so immediate that you cannot wait for a press conference to be called or organized or, as in the majority of cases, the matter is not of major importance and does not warrant a formal announcement with questions from print, radio and television reporters. Do not bombard journalists with press releases: the more you send, the less impact they will have. Call the journalists after you have sent it to ensure that they received it.

May 1997

Press Release 97/15

Zaire: Ten volunteers of the Zairian Red Cross Killed in Kenge
Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was deeply shocked to learn of the death of 10 first-aid workers of the Red Cross Society of the Republic of Zaire, killed some hours ago in Kenge, a town 200 km east of Kinshasa. According to information received by the ICRC delegation in the Zairian capital, the tragedy occurred as the volunteers were assisting people wounded in the fighting which had been raging in Kenge. Some 200 civilians were reportedly killed in the clashes, and 126 wounded have been admitted to hospital, 25 of them in critical condition.

The ICRC calls on the belligerents to respect all persons not taking part in the fighting, in particular civilians, prisoners and the wounded, and also the staff and buildings placed under the protection of the Red Cross emblem. ICRC delegates and Zairian Red Cross personnel will attempt to reach Kenge in the coming hours to provide medical assistance to the hospital.

—ICRC Internet Announcement.

Editorials

Editorial writers differ from news reporters in that their writing reflects more idealism, advocacy and personal opinion. Every day they must find an issue or topic to announce, denounce, expose, praise, analyze and comment on. Their purpose is to further the debate, influence public opinion and shape public policy on issues of concern to them. Good editorial writers, however, will want to learn all sides of an issue prior to establishing their own opinion. For these reasons, you may be able to assist them while they help publicize your cause or perspective.

You can help them by suggesting coverage and offering information on an issue, story or cause which is timely, controversial, and in the public interest. You can pique their interest by first sending them a brief description and agency perspective on the issue, followed by a phone call to answer questions. You may also suggest a visit with them at their office. Keep this visit brief and informal. In this meeting, quickly describe your organization, why this issue warrants an editorial, and what measures or changes your agency is proposing. During this meeting, you should provide them with a press release, information packet, fact sheet or newsletter related to the issue. This will facilitate their task by providing them with ready references for their story. If the editorial is printed, you should follow-up with a note or call of appreciation.

News documentaries

Documentary news, which enjoys a longer shelf life than headline news, may offer more detailed background and analysis of an issue, demonstrating the investigative or analytical skills of a particular news outlet or reporter. This kind of coverage is typically found in specialist broadcast features and on inside pages of newspapers and journals. Some newspapers have little space for documentary news and, in their allocation of what they have, give preference to local or national over international topics. Documentary news can stimulate more thoughtful policy debate about complex emergencies, and provide a more complete image of a developing country and the challenges it faces.

Larger humanitarian agencies already have begun to pay for the independent production of news or documentary footage to provide broadcasters with a news package. Television networks, although rightly wary of their loss of control over reporting and editing functions, may still utilize prepackaged material if news holes appear and their own products are not available on time. Partnerships with reliable independent production companies decrease the potential bias and increase the quality of the product and the chances of broadcast or telecast. Given the substantial cost of documentary coverage, however, these undertakings are more feasible for coalitions of organizations than for individual agencies.



A. Holman

Coordinating with other agencies

At the operational level, interagency coordination is essential and difficult. In Part 1 Chapter 3, we learned that humanitarian organizations are heterogeneous and largely independent actors. These factors make it difficult for them to collectively engage the media and public opinion or influence government policy in any significant or concentrated way. Nevertheless, more sustained and effective influence on government policy will require that humanitarian organizations wrestle more energetically with complex policy issues and work harder to identify issues on which consensus may emerge. Agencies should devote more time and resources to forging a shared message in various emergencies. The message should go beyond “something must be done”, but stop short of getting entangled in complex, divisive political and operational issues.

Q. *What common media interests might a coalition of humanitarian agencies have? Compare your responses with those that follow.*

A. _____



CHECKLIST FOR COORDINATION

A checklist to help determine opportunities for coordinating interagency media relations:

- ✓ Increase public awareness about the plight of a certain group of refugees or the human rights abuses against a certain ethnic group.
- ✓ Monitor and evaluate the media content for accuracy, quality, completeness, timeliness and professionalism.
- ✓ Educate the public to gain support and funding for relief and development activities.
- ✓ Jointly produce and facilitate costly alternative programming such as documentaries.
- ✓ Select a clearly identified point of contact for the media seeking information about rapidly changing complex emergencies, like what occurred in Rwanda or Somalia.



Internal guidelines and policies

Media relations are an integral component of your organization's work: what you do or say to the media will affect other people in your organization. At the same time, staff members who are designated to deal with the media cannot be effective without the assistance and support of everyone else. The importance of cooperation, coordination and communication within the organization cannot be overstated. Your agency's staff can more professionally, effectively and consistently relate to the media when your agency has established clear internal guidelines and policies for this purpose.

Q. *What might you want to include in your agency's manual on media relations guidelines and/or policies? Compare your response with the list that follows:*

A. _____



Agencies differ in their groundrules for media contacts. Some will delegate media contact to their front lines. Others will limit this contact to headquarters, or only to capital-based aid staffs in operational theaters. An agency may also develop media relations guidelines which distinguish between crisis and non-crisis situations. Crisis situations, where lives or agency reputation are threatened, may require a more disciplined, coordinated and centralized media relations strategy, than non-crisis situations. To prepare for crisis events, many agencies, such as the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), have developed a "Crisis communications plan", which includes the formation of a crisis management team. Examples of what MCC might consider a crisis event includes: criminal activity or sexual misconduct by someone on staff, a hostage taking, an accident involving MCC staff, and/or the perception of gross incompetence or poor stewardship of resources.



CHECKLIST OF MEDIA RELATIONS POLICIES

In developing agency-wide media relations policies or guidelines, a checklist of considerations might include:

- ✓ Routing procedures for when the media calls. Either refer them to the public relations department or to a staff member charged with these responsibilities.
- ✓ Guidelines concerning fundraising opportunities and limitations.
- ✓ Coordination of media relations with other humanitarian agencies.
- ✓ Facilitation of news media access and transport in conflict zones.

- ✓ How to handle and manage a public relations crisis.
- ✓ How to respond to unfavorable or inaccurate media coverage.
- ✓ Whether to accept or decline news media interviews.
- ✓ Interviewing do's and don'ts.
- ✓ Whether/when to challenge and voice opposition to government policies or human rights abuses.

SELF-STUDY EXERCISES

Indicate whether each of the following statements is true or false.

- ___ 1. During an interview it is better to make something up or speculate on an issue than to admit that you do not know the answer.
- ___ 2. Press releases should be released as often as possible in order to keep your agency's name fresh on the mind of the journalists you are courting.
- ___ 3. Agencies should develop media relations guidelines and policies to assist their staff in dealing consistently and effectively with the media.

Match the description with the news medium which it best describes:

- A. Tabloid journalism B. Headline news C. Editorials
D. Press release E. press conference

- ___ 4. These are held to physically meet with a number of news media sources at one time
- ___ 5. A brief written statement which announces a significant agency policy, initiative or event.
- ___ 6. These are written by news reporters whose writing often reflects their idealism, advocacy and personal opinion.

7. Describe three strategies for developing more pro-active media relations.

8. Why is it critical for your agency to establish its credibility with the news media?

- 1.F 2.F 3.T
4.E 5.D 6.C
7. Nurture your media contacts; diversify your media contacts; coordinate common messages with other agencies.
8. According to George C. Cullip of the Wood Communications Group, "The universal rule for long-term satisfactory relationships with the media is credibility. Good media relations are rooted in credibility and trust."

ANSWER KEY

PART **3** Chapter 9

LEARNING
OBJECTIVES

Guidelines for interviews

After reading this chapter, you will:



L. Barco

- *Understand the importance of assuming you are always “on the record”.*
- *Know different ways to attribute information.*
- *Understand the importance of being brief, preparing objectives, speaking memorably, and staying positive.*
- *Recognize prototype interview situations and questions.*
- *Learn effective ways to deal with these prototype situations and questions.*

General interviewing tips

Journalists and reporters are interested in stories. At their worst, they ask tricky and leading questions, misquote sources, and can seem arrogant and abrasive in pursuit of a story. At their best, they educate and inform the public about important issues and trends, expose instances of corruption, inefficiency and incompetence, and use the power of information for the public good.

To get your message or story across, you must provide information that is useful to the journalist in a way that will capture the intended audience’s attention. You must also be careful about what you say and how you say it, otherwise you may severely damage or erode your agency’s image.

Remember that a 10-minute interview may wind up being 20 seconds on the air, or three lines in the newspaper. It is essential to crystallize your thoughts in a few hard-hitting sentences. The following guidelines are meant to help you interview successfully.

Assume you are “on the record”

While it is important for your agency to develop good and friendly relations with the media, a word of caution is necessary. Although you may develop a friendship with a reporter, remember that reporters are reporters 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you do not want to be quoted on a particular item, choose to remain quiet. The best policy is to assume that everything you say is “on the record”. When the news is important, there is no such thing as “off the record”.

Use common language

Keep language non-inflammatory, simple and candid. Attempts at humor may alienate many people. Use a layman's terms (not jargon) that the reporters and their audience will understand. In everyday conversation, ordinary people do not use terms like “modalities”, “durable solutions”, “NGOs”, “humanitarian mandates”, “implementing partners”, and “internally displaced persons”.

Be brief

When you finish answering the question, or presenting your perspective, stop. There is no law that compels you to say more than you want or intend to say. Avoid suggesting follow-up questions, unless you need to do so in order to share valuable or important information of which the reporter is unaware or has overlooked.

Prepare objectives and rehearse

Have one or two key ideas you want to get across and make sure to get them in early; add the detail later, the print media generally edits in a “pyramidal fashion”. Prepare objectives, rehearse and develop a focused story. Do some role-playing and rehearse on your own, with colleagues or, even better, with someone who is not involved in your concerns. You can probably anticipate the journalist's questions. Keep your thoughts simple and clear.

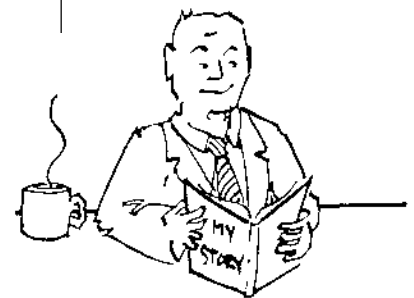
Develop your own focused story

Sometimes reporters may not have the time to properly prepare for a productive interview. This often presents an opportunity for you to raise the issues you want. Present yourself as a good story subject. The press is always looking for interesting news stories, and no one knows what's going on in your field better than you do. Take the initiative. Be prepared to take the lead and direct the interview into areas of information you can present with a focus and a positive slant. Avoid wandering into new topics or issues for which you have thought little about, or are ill-prepared to discuss, much less defend.

Speak memorably

Once you have identified what your primary message is going to be, you will need to think about how to say it concisely and memorably. The use of “soundbites”, “personal anecdotes”, “messages with a domestic link”, and “statistics” can help you accomplish this.

Soundbites. For headline news coverage, you will have to think and speak in “sound-bites”—powerful, but brief statements which sum up your point in just a few words. A sound-bite can be a metaphor, a memorable quote, or a startling fact or figure which will illustrate the situation for the listening or reading audience. Keep in mind that sound-bites are like humor – they can be misunderstood—so use them with care.





Use personal anecdotes. Journalists and their audiences are often interested in the human angle of a story. You can bring a story to life by inserting personal anecdotes or by establishing a personal stake in what you are doing. For example, "This is the worst flood I have seen in my fifteen years of disaster relief work." You can also personalize the message by sharing a story about a refugee family or person that your program has helped. In certain hostile situations, however, you will need to use careful judgment, as an interview may jeopardize a victim's safety. If you want to arrange interviews involving refugees, explain to the refugee the purpose of the interview, and make it clear that he or she can refuse.



Localize the message. In Part 2, we learned that reporters are often interested in an event's impact on their local reading or viewing audiences. Find ways to relate what you are doing and what is happening to the "home town" of the media conducting the interview. For example, in describing the number of refugees and displaced persons affected by civil war to a reporter from Zurich, you might say something like, "Imagine that over half of the city of Zurich's population was forced to abandon their homes and evacuate the city with only the clothes on their back."

Present statistics effectively. When presenting statistics, present them in a colorful way that will help one visualize their impact. For example, "We are delivering two tons of grain every week to the country of Yurgistan," can be converted to, "We're delivering enough food every week to fill a soccer stadium."

Know your interviewer

Use the interviewer's name once or twice in the course of the interview and maintain eye contact. If possible get to know your interviewer ahead of time, either in person, or by previewing programs on which you will appear or reading some articles by the reporter who will interview you.

Prepare a press packet

Provide your interviewer with a press or information packet which includes organization brochures, brief biographies of those interviewed, feature articles, photographs, graphs, charts, and factual background information on the history and magnitude of the emergency. You may also want to provide journalists with a condensed, easy-to-read, one-page fact sheet containing basic data and key points – either in the press packet or as a substitute for it.

Be positive

Avoid criticizing colleagues or other humanitarian agencies or their personnel. Rather, emphasize where possible the positive aspects of inter-agency cooperation and the successes of other agencies. Similarly, avoid arguing with reporters or interviewers. Remember, they always have the last word.

Maintain control and composure

Maintain your calm and composure in the face of what may seem to be hostile, irrelevant or accusatory questioning. Do not let reporters put words into your mouth. If they ask a leading question such as, "Don't you think that...?" or "So you are saying that...", correct their error, or redirect the interview, in a courteous, non-threatening manner.



Use bridging statements

According to CARE, your responses should be message-driven, not question-driven. When faced with a contentious question, use a “bridging” statement to introduce your message or points. Examples of bridging statements are:

“I understand your concern, but the real issue here is...”

“Your concern is important, but let us not overlook the fact that...”

“I’m sorry you feel that way, but let me ask you to consider this...”

Be honest and accurate

If you do not know the answer to a question, say so and offer to get back to the journalist with a reply. Erroneous information, as we have already discussed, will ruin not only your credibility, but that of your organization. Similarly, be willing to defer to a senior officer when you are asked policy questions which are too sensitive or controversial for you to answer.



Answer the question, but send the message that you want to send.

Common situations and suggested responses

In this section you will get a chance to practice your interviewing skills in specific situations. Imagine that you work for the fictitious Lifeline Aid International. You are doing an interview with a reporter about your agency’s current relief effort in the complex emergency evolving in Yurgistan (an imaginary country). The intent is to help you anticipate and prepare for interviewing situations which will be very similar to the eight common interviewing scenarios listed below. These give you an idea of the types of questions you need to anticipate and prepare for. Read the scenario and then note how you might respond or manage the situation. Where specific questions are asked, provide specific responses.

A. *Question is preceded with a hostile, negative or inaccurate remark.*

How would you deal with this situation? _____

B. *You are asked a question that has no bearing on your agenda, or on the stated focus of the interview.*

How would you deal with this situation? _____

C. *The reporter attempts to ask you a question in such a way that will draw out your criticism of another agency.*

How would you deal with this situation? _____

SCENARIO RESPONSES

A – Gently counter the remark or assumption. Otherwise you will be tacitly agreeing with it. State your correction in a positive way, but avoid repeating the initial remark

B – Try to “bridge” to a relevant point, or to your intended message.

C – Never criticize other agencies. Stay focused on your agency’s mission and message.

D. *You are asked to comment on a hypothetical or highly speculative situation.*

How would you deal with this situation? _____

E. *You get a series of critical or hostile questions from one individual who is dominating the question and answer period.*

How would you deal with this situation? _____

F. *You are interrupted by a heckler's hostile remark or question during your comments.*

How would you deal with this situation? _____

G. *There are no questions.*

How would you deal with this situation? _____

H. *You are asked to choose between two or more options or scenarios.*

How would you deal with this situation? _____

*D – Do not speculate unless there is a positive message to share about your agency.
E – Acknowledge the disagreement, ask them to summarize their statement. For example, "You seem to be in fundamental disagreement with what I am saying. It might be useful if you would summarize your views in a few words". An acceptance quickly exposes his or her bias or ignorance; or he or she may make a vulnerable statement that you can readily refute.
F – Look at the person asking the question or making the remark, acknowledge the remark or question, and say that you will address the issue after you have finished your comments.
G – Suggest the issues to talk about. For example, "You may be interested in one or two questions I've received from other groups". Then ask a question that will enable you to emphasize one of your major points or objectives.
H – Don't choose unless there is a clear and positive message you can deliver.*

SCENARIO RESPONSES

Interviewing: beyond words

Communication consists of more than spoken words. The tone of your voice, your appearance, your dress and your body language also communicate messages.

SCENARIO: You are about to be interviewed on TV. You have already prepared the messages and stories on which you will focus. Now imagine what non-verbal communication elements are important during the interview. List these below. Compare your responses with the checklist that follows.



TELEVISION INTERVIEW PREPARATION CHECKLIST

- ✓ Maintain eye contact with the reporter.
- ✓ Smile when appropriate and use natural facial expressions.
- ✓ If given a choice, stand for the interview, as your voice will project more authority.
- ✓ If standing, maintain an open body position by keeping your arms at your side, not crossed.
- ✓ Gesture freely yet avoid exaggerated movements or covering your face with your hands.
- ✓ Speak in your natural tone of voice.
- ✓ Speak clearly, concisely and confidently.
- ✓ Remain calm, comfortable and relaxed.
- ✓ If sitting, sit upright, with your hands in your lap, just above your knees. Cross your legs at your ankles; it looks better.
- ✓ Wear subdued, colored clothes – medium-tone grays, blues, and tans are best.
- ✓ Avoid clothes with stripes, checks or small patterns.
- ✓ Check your appearance before appearing in the studio – tie, hair, button, zipper?
- ✓ Do not smoke on the air.
- ✓ Request a stationary chair. Do not sit on a revolving or moveable chair.
- ✓ Keep your hands still. Do not fidget with pens or pencils.



SELF-STUDY EXERCISES

The following examples are questions that reporters may ask you. They are asked in a way that touches on some of the scenarios discussed earlier. After reading each question, write the linking phrases or words that you would use to actually respond to these questions.

Sample question: Lifeline Aid has closed all of its food distribution sites in the northeast region even though there are thousands of starving refugees in Bole. Why is Lifeline Aid turning its back on the refugees at such a critical time?

Your response: "While two of the sites have been temporarily closed down, we have not closed all of them. Our sites in the cities X, Y and Z are still open. Regarding those that were closed, let me explain what we did, why we did it, and under what conditions we can recommence distribution at these closed sites." (Situation A.)

1. **Reporter:** Given Lifeline Aid International's complete failure in the Somalia relief effort, what makes you think that you can be successful in Yurgistan?

Your response: _____

2. **Reporter:** There have been reports of fighting occurring near the site where you are distributing food. The rebels seem to have made incredible advances in recent days. Which side does Lifeline Aid support?

Your response: _____

1 - "Many relief agencies were challenged by the Somalia emergency. Lifeline Aid has made great strides since this emergency, and has incorporated the lessons learned into our current effort. For example, we are now..."
2 - "The conditions we are working under are indeed intense. However, Lifeline Aid is a humanitarian agency dedicated to providing for the needs of the suffering - wherever it occurs regard- less of politics. Lifeline Aid is one of only two organizations to have reached agreements with both sides to this conflict. These agreements have allowed us to set up food, health and water distribution centers on both sides."
SUGGESTED RESPONSES

3. *Reporter:* The European relief agency, Refugee Support, has said that Lifeline Aid International is opportunistic and cares more about “high-profile relief operations” where television coverage is certain than it does about providing for the most needy refugees who may be difficult to reach. Why would they say this?

Your response: _____

4. *Reporter:* There have been reports that the rebels have been blocking aid convoys in the northeastern region of Yurgistan. What if this happens to your convoys?

Your response: _____

5. *Reporter:* “That’s a bunch of garbage”, or “That’s a lot of bull...”

Your response: _____

6. *Reporter:* Is Lifeline Aid opening an office in rebel-held territory because the United States supports the rebels and has made funding available, or because Lifeline Aid believes that the rebels are on the brink of victory?

Your response: _____

3 – “If this is what was said, you will have to ask them why they said it. If you look at our record you will quickly see that Lifeline Aid International has always conducted its operations in an impeccable and professional manner. Our 15 years of experience have earned us a world-wide reputation of delivering relief to where it is needed most.”

4 – “We have no reason to believe that this will happen given our record of negotiating and maintaining continual open communication with both sides.”

“At this point, John, I would rather not speculate on something that has not yet happened. However, you may be interested in knowing that in other areas, Lifeline Aid has received unconditional access guarantees from both the government and rebel forces.”

5 – “We’ll take up your special interest in a moment, sir.”

6 – “Lifeline Aid is an independent, private charity dedicated to impartiality and neutrality. We do not make political or military predictions, nor do we serve as the pawns of any political entity. Our primary aim is to provide assistance to needy populations wherever they may be and to help them regain self-sufficiency as rapidly as possible.”

SUGGESTED RESPONSES



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NOTES

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61. Lee E. Hamilton in "Impact of Television on U.S. Foreign Policy", Congressional hearing, 1.
62. For a detailed tracking of media coverage and policy decisions, see Livingston and Eachus, "Humanitarian Crises", 413–429.
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95. Steering Committee, *International Response*, 2, "Early Warning and Conflict Management", 46.
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100. See Steering Committee, *International Response*, 3, 72.
101. For an account of how an experienced regional journalist struggled to understand the ethnic power politics, see Lindsey Hilsun, "Where is Kigali?" *Granta* no. 51 (Autumn 1995): 145–179. Hilsun was reportedly only one of two international journalists in Kigali in early April.

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104. John Shattuck, “Human Rights and Humanitarian Crises: Policy-Making and the Media”, in Rotberg and Weiss (eds.), *From Massacres*, 175.
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106. A number of NGOs, including the Mennonite Central Committee, already have development strategies and train their headquarters and overseas staff accordingly.
107. John C. Hammock and Joel R. Charny, “Emergency Responses as Morality Play: The Media, the Relief Agencies, and the Need for Capacity Building”, in Rotberg and Weiss (eds.), *From Massacres*, 115–135.
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109. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *World Disasters Report 1994*, (Geneva: IFRC, 1994), 26–32.
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111. On “A Global Forum with President Clinton”, CNN, May 3, 1994.
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117. Taken from workshop discussions in preparation of the original book.
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GLOSSARY

Civil war	An intrastate armed conflict
Complex emergencies	Internal political crises and/or armed conflicts complicated by an array of political, social, and economic factors
Donors	External actors committing resources to humanitarian action, normally governments or groups of governments acting through governmental, intergovernmental, or nongovernmental channels
Emergency aid	Life-saving humanitarian relief – normally food, shelter, and medical care
Humanitarian action	The provision of emergency aid and the protection of basic human rights
Humanitarian intervention	Nonconsensual humanitarian activities mounted from outside an area in crisis, sometimes involving the threat or the use of military force
Impartiality	The relief of suffering according to need without regard to such factors as nationality, race, religion, politics, or ideology
Media	The broad range of Western news media, except where otherwise defined
Neutrality	The avoidance of taking sides in hostilities or political conflict
Peacekeeping	The interposition of neutral troops between or among warring factors with their consent to observe and monitor a cease-fire or other peace agreement
Peace enforcement	The imposition of external military force to achieve peace or to advance other objectives against the wishes or without the consent of the warring factions

