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Abstract

Technological developments over recent years have ensured that the mainstream mass media will play a growing role in social and political processes, and in shaping perceptions and policies relating to domestic as well as international conflicts. Keeping in perspective the potential capability of the news media in situations of conflict and conflict resolution, this article maps the underlying trends in the role of the mainstream international news media in contemporary conflicts, and the issues and challenges that characterise media coverage of such issues. Identifying some of these trends to be—the reflection of the dominant discourse, framing of news along official lines, dehumanising language of war, media management by governments, selective reporting, demonisation of enemies, and so on—the article throws light on the concept of ‘peace journalism’ as an alternative to conventional news coverage of conflict.

Keywords

Media, conflict, conflict resolution, framing, peace journalism, embedded journalism, demonisation

Introduction

Over the last several decades, the world has been witness to innumerable conflicts of multifarious dimensions, the humanitarian implications of which necessitate concerted efforts at various levels for conflict prevention and resolution. It also serves to emphasise the need to understand the role of various actors in international conflicts. Besides international organisations, national governments or non-governmental organisations, the mass media also play an important role in this regard. Given their significance in the dissemination of information, shaping of perceptions and setting agenda, the manner in which information is framed plays a crucial role in moulding public opinion. The quality of information being disseminated by the media could help determine the behaviour of social and political structures. The media, thus, play a significant role in facilitating the construction of the public sphere and democratic politics, and as such, the quality of information disseminated is of major concern. News frames determine what is selected, what is excluded and what is emphasised. It is through the process of framing that factors which support one’s position are selected and highlighted. Identifying media

frames is, therefore, essential to understanding the media and how public opinion is shaped. Frames give a different meaning than would have been the case had the subject not been placed within such a frame. While the media may not determine policy per se, they do shape the circumstances in which policy-making takes place.

Being an integral part of the democratic processes of any society, the media have an increasing influence in the context of foreign policy making. The media often shape agenda by means of placement, tone and repetition, and the frames of analysis and facts, which it chooses and excludes. Policy-makers pay close attention to news stories, watching for events that might have escaped normal diplomatic observations as well as for analyses and evaluations of developments and proposals. Consequently, the manner in which events and opinions are reported may narrow the policy choices available to public officials, engender governmental action when no action might have taken place otherwise, or force a halt to ongoing or projected policies. The media could, therefore, legitimise or undermine decisions taken by policy-makers.

The mass media are of particular importance in the context of international conflict, having the potential to play a decisive role in the promotion of peace and resolution of conflicts or in fostering tension and conflict, and acting as destructive agents in the process of conflict resolution. While the media may assist or accelerate political change, they do not determine the political outcome of crises. But the nature of reporting often has an impact on public opinion which may influence decisions taken by policy-makers. From a wider perspective, the critical role of the media in defining security and shaping perceptions of threat and insecurity needs to be emphasised. This has serious implications for formulating policies relating to security in the national as well as international context. The impact of this becomes explicit in the context of the changing trends in the security scenario.

Traditionally, 'security' was viewed solely from the perspective of the State and military-strategic threats. As such, military-strategic means were advanced to achieve security. However, there is a growing realisation today that security needs to be viewed from a larger societal perspective, focusing on economic, social, political and environmental concerns. In view of this emerging perspective that security can no longer be viewed merely from the traditional perspective of the state and its territorial concerns, the way in which the media engage with issues of security or shaping security perceptions has a profound impact on state and society. It is in this context that an understanding of the role of the media in situations of conflict and conflict resolution gains significance.

Technological developments over recent years ensure that the mainstream mass media will play a growing role in shaping perceptions and policies relating to domestic and international conflicts. In fact, the news media have emerged to become a central arena of conflict. The role of the news media in conflicts ranging from Bosnia, Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Kashmir to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and the Gulf Wars, has become an issue of major concern to policy-makers, journalists, social scientists and concerned citizens. Keeping in perspective the perceived role of the media in democracy, and its potential capability in situations of conflict and conflict resolution, this study attempts to map the role of the mainstream international news media in contemporary conflicts.

The international news system is largely an outgrowth of the western news media, especially those of Britain, the United States and, to a lesser degree, France and Germany. Editorial policies and perspectives, the selection and presentation of news—including the nature of headlines, location and sources of news—all help to place in context the orientation of the media. The nature of this coverage has its own impact on the news media within countries. Acknowledging the plurality of coverage by various

media in diverse situations, over various periods of time, the article strives to identify the underlying trends in the mainstream global media coverage of international conflicts. It attempts to understand the underlying factors influencing the nature of coverage, the issues and challenges that characterise the media coverage of such situations, and to throw light on the concept of 'peace journalism' as an alternative to conventional news coverage of conflicts.

Media Coverage of International Conflict

The performance and role of the mass media cannot be overly generalised, nor can the media be seen in isolation. The media need to be viewed within the context of the political, economic and socio-cultural institutions of a given country. The role of the media in international conflicts also needs to be viewed in the larger context of the specific social, political, historical and institutional circumstances in which the media are situated. The nature of coverage will be influenced by factors such as the ideological basis of media ownership, the nature of ownership of the media, whether privately owned, state controlled, owned by trusts or political parties, etc. There will also be differences in the nature of coverage of the same conflict by various media on the basis of the location of the conflict, who the participants are, the intensity of the conflict, strategic implications, etc. The performance and role of the world news media in international conflict, therefore, need to be understood in this context. The nature of this coverage has major implications for the coverage of the issue in any national media. The role of the news media in international conflict drew public attention with the Vietnam War. But it was particularly after the first Gulf War of 1991, which witnessed live television coverage of conflict, that the issue came to the forefront. While divergences do exist, an attempt is made here to identify the underlying trends in the mainstream global media coverage of international conflict.

Reflecting the Dominant Discourse

Being dependent on other parts of the system, there is a tendency for the media to participate in conflict by reflecting the perspectives of the centres of power of the home country. The media is often moulded by national viewpoints and stereotypes. The increasingly market-driven mainstream media largely ignore dissenting voices to favour the government, especially where foreign policy/security issues are concerned. It is often only in cases where consensus begins to disappear that the media is forced to reflect public debate. This was evident in the news coverage of United States intervention in Vietnam, Grenada, Panama, Somalia, Haiti, bombing of Libya, the Gulf wars, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc.

In his study on the media coverage of military interventions of the United States in the post-Vietnam era (i.e., in Grenada and Panama, bombing of Libya, the first Gulf War, and interventions in Somalia and Haiti), Mermin (1999) points out that when official sources were in consensus, the media played a relatively passive role and tended to reinforce the official management of public opinion. According to his 'indexing hypothesis', the 'spectrum of debate' in Washington determines the spectrum of debate in the news. The impact of the media is to reinforce the spectrum of debate produced by government politics, and to exclude from the public sphere, perspectives that do not have political support inside the

government. Similarly, Chomsky (2007) documents the contributions of the American media to the Government project of ‘demonising the Sandinistas’ in Nicaragua, while praising the ‘violent terror states’ backed or directly installed by the United States in the region.

It has been widely argued that the reason why Americans were persuaded to support the invasion of Iraq was because the United States’ media coverage during the days leading up to the war portrayed protest as unpatriotic and arguments against war as irrelevant. CNN’s coverage of the 1991 Gulf War and other international conflicts during the following years led to advocates of the ‘CNN effect’ arguing that the media play an important role in determining foreign policy action, particularly with regard to ‘humanitarian intervention’. The understanding was that the media set the agenda, and when they focus on an issue, political action follows. CNN’s role in the United States intervention in Somalia is shown as the best example. The United States intervention in Iraq in 1991 and other US interventions in Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan were all presented by the western media within a humanitarian framework. However, a detailed study of CNN’s coverage of Somalia revealed that it was initially the government that manipulated the press. More recent studies, particularly, those relating to the impact of media coverage on decisions to intervene during humanitarian crises have shown that media influence usually occurs when official policy towards the crisis is uncertain and media coverage is framed so as to empathise with suffering people. On the other hand, when policy is certain, media influence is unlikely to occur (See Robinson 2000). A few weeks after the war in Afghanistan began, CNN President Issacson authorised CNN to provide two different versions of the war: one for the global audience and another a sugar-coated one for Americans. Instructions were given that any story that might undermine support for the war be balanced with a reminder that the ‘War on Terror’ was a response to the attacks of 11 September 2001 (see Sahay et al. 2006, 10).

Framing of News and the Language of War

Over the years, the media have clearly become a battleground for war—the means through which societies experience war. It has been argued that historically the media have helped the prosecution of national wars far more than they have ever hindered them. This has been possible through the process of securitisation carried out by the media. The media tend to propagate official versions of conflict as was evident in the ‘War on Terror’, the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan, etc.

Drawing from the examples of Libya, Iraq, Vietnam, Grenada, etc., Gan (2005, 341–348) points out that many of the conflicts fought by the United States were possible only because of the process of securitisation by the media and the fact that the mass media misinformed the public and drew a very negative picture of opponents, one such example being the misinformation that led to the invasion of Iraq. This helped generate popular support for previously unknown or unpopular causes. The United States intervention in Iraq in 2003 was originally framed by the media as part of the ‘War on Terror’. Western media played a major role in the securitisation of Iraq by projecting stories of existence of weapons of mass destruction. The media in both United States and Britain securitised Iraq and supported the policy of going to war. The media created the perception that war was the only option or solution to the conflict. Similar reporting contributed to the Gulf War, bombings of Libya, invasion of Grenada, the Vietnam War, etc.

The mainstream media often accept and reproduce dominant definitions of concepts such as ‘terrorism’ (what others do to us) and ‘self-defence’ (what we do to others) in order to mobilise popular consent for military action against ‘rogue states’. This results in the securitisation of ‘enemy countries’. Other similar usages include ‘just war’, ‘war on terror’, ‘collateral damage’, ‘axis of evil’, etc. On 11 September 2001, CNN broke the news with the headlines ‘America under Attack’. This news frame soon changed to ‘America Strikes Back’. The distinction between official accounts and reports of the media were difficult to discern. The media language of the 2003 attack on Iraq dehumanised the entire conflict situation. It has been argued that United States news media’s framing of the United Nations contributed to the normalisation of war (See Barker-Plummer 2005). This was especially evident in the new euphemisms that began to be used in abundance. The Anglo-American forces in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 were referred to by the media as ‘allies’ or ‘coalition forces’ which were involved in a ‘liberation mission’. News media coverage of the Israeli–Palestine conflict reveals major differences in the manner in which Palestinians and Israelis are described.

Media Management and ‘Embedded Journalism’

Aware of the importance of the mass media in justifying or legitimising conflict, participants in international conflicts increasingly attempt to manipulate news coverage and use the media as a ‘force multiplier.’ Where the media are controlled by the state there is a more explicit bias towards official interpretations of events and securitisation of the ‘enemy’. The media are needed not only to report from the battlefield, but also to justify or legitimise war. This has its impact on the understanding of international conflicts.

Examples of government manipulation of the media to bolster its own policy issues are numerous. There was strong censorship of media coverage during the First and Second World Wars. But Vietnam was covered without official censorship. Yet, throughout the war the American media gave a misleading impression that the United States was winning the war. The Falklands War of 1982 saw the emergence of a new trend in government–media interaction. The war was waged between Britain and Argentina over the Falklands islands in the South Atlantic, about 8000 miles from the former and 400 miles away from the nearest land mass. Correspondents could go there only if taken by the British Ministry of Defence. Only British reporters were permitted to accompany the armed forces, and reporters were carefully selected. The journalists who were chosen were given Government handbooks with necessary instructions, and had to accept censorship at source. Consequently, the war was reported as the military wanted it to be. The world learnt that the media could be handled by denying access and then allowing them in when they were ready to do a deal. During the conflicts in Grenada in 1983 and Panama in 1989 also, American governments reduced the access of reporters to battle zones and placed obstacles on the path of timely independent reporting.

This approach was also used in the first Gulf War, when the term ‘embedded journalism’ emerged. This referred to journalists accompanying combat troops during the war. Often reporting was only through a military censor. Even otherwise through daily briefings, press conferences, interviews, etc., there emerges a tendency to empathise with the military and accept their values. This results in the use of military language that identifies the opposition as the ‘other’ and ‘dehumanises’ the experiences of the

'other'. Over 1500 journalists were said to have been embedded during the first Gulf War and over 2700 accompanied NATO forces in the bombing of Kosovo.

Cockburn (2000) reported that a handful of military personnel based in the US psychological operations units worked as regular employees for CNN, and that according to a US Army spokesman 'they would have worked on stories during the Kosovo War'. Often other methods of media management are also used. For example, UN Weapons Inspector Scott Ritter revealed that during the late 1990s Britain's MI6 had recruited him to help in 'Operation Mass Appeal'—a propaganda campaign to give the impression in the media that Iraq under Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction (see Leitenberg). Blix in his book *Disarming Iraq* (2004) refers to the repeated attempts by the Bush administration to feed doubtful and unfair information about his and the International Atomic Energy Agency's work to the media. Similarly, at the press conference of President Bush announcing the invasion of Iraq, questions were pre-approved and questioners were predetermined. Prior to the invasion, hundreds of United States reporters participated in Government organised programmes that taught journalists basic battlefield survival, military policy and skills to handle weapons (Strupp 2003). From 1991 to April 2009, the United States Government banned the coverage of the return to the country of bodies of those who died in Iraq. By not showing Americans dying/dead, or engaging in abuse, they obliterated the real casualties of war, reducing the possibility of criticism and protest against the war. In the name of national security, most of the photographs of torture of Iraqis in Abu Ghraib were also withheld.

One fallout of 9/11 was the realisation of the significance of the media in winning the hearts and minds of the people of the Arab world and the resultant strategy of 'glocalisation' adopted by various international media. In 2003, the United States government launched its channel Al-Hurra and Radio Sawa with the aim of promoting American public diplomacy, and democracy and freedom in the region. Similarly, BBC and CNN launched their own Arabic-language media networks to cater to the local Arab audience (Lahlali 2011, 56).

Selective Reporting

News involves the conscious selection of events. This selection of news is often based on the interests of the home country. Conflicts and suffering within the Third World often go unreported by the international media unless the West has its own interests in the region. The Iran–Iraq War resulted in over a million deaths and was of major political importance but received relatively little media coverage in the West, as both parties were out of favour with the American public. However, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan received much more coverage, at least until the Soviets withdrew from the conflict. As Herman and Chomsky (1998) point out the Vietnam War was defined by what it excluded: the voices of the anti-war movement in the US, the motives of the Vietnamese people and the point that it was the US and not North Vietnam that was the aggressor in the conflict.

The world was kept largely ignorant of the impact of the United States invasion on the ordinary citizens of Iraq, or the large number of over half a million children who died in Iraq as a result of sanctions against the country. The media oversimplified the conflict and created the feeling that war was the only solution. The plight of the thousands of displaced persons, and the hospitals overcrowded with victims of 'precision bombing' or 'collateral damage' was ignored. Such reporting clearly obscures the terrible reality of war and its human costs. Analysing western media coverage of Sierra Leone and

Congo, Helm (2002) argues that humanitarian crises in failing states are often forgotten by the media and political leaders. This is because of the dominance of national foreign policy in framing the agenda of the news media.

Since the Gulf War of 1991, the number of cancer patients in Iraq has risen, and 'strange vegetables' have begun to appear on the market. An official American military document states that: 'depleted uranium dust can be spread in battles and lead to serious illnesses in humans', but this was not reported by the international media. Pictures of the harsh reality of war and its impact on innocent civilians were also hard to find. Halliday and Sponek, both Assistant Secretary Generals at the United Nations resigned after more than 30 years at the United Nations in protest against the impact of sanctions on the children of Iraq. But this went unreported in the media. Neither was the fact that, up to July 2002, more than \$5 billion worth of humanitarian supplies, which had been approved by the UN sanctions committee and paid for by Iraq, were blocked by the United States. They included food products, medicines and medical equipment, as well as items vital for water and sanitation, agriculture and education. Scott Ritter stated that by 1998 Iraq's infrastructure for chemical weapons had been completely dismantled or destroyed by UNSCOM, the major facilities for biological weapons programme were gone, and the long-range ballistic missile programme was completely eliminated. Yet, Ritter's statements were barely acknowledged. Up to the fall of Baghdad, the misinformation by American and British governments were amplified and legitimized by journalists, notably by the BBC, which according to Pilger (2004) defines its political coverage by the pronouncements, events and personalities of Whitehall and Westminster. War atrocities by American forces were not considered newsworthy, whereas the kidnapping of any foreigner by Iraqis was 'breaking news' on CNN and BBC. Similarly anti-war demonstrations were largely avoided by the media. Coverage, if any, during the early years was restricted to demonstrations in Muslim countries, reinforcing the view that only Muslims opposed the war.

Demonisation

Construction of a common enemy has become an integral part of political processes. Governments use the idea of a common enemy as a method of social control, of reinforcing its own values and getting the support of its opponents. In justifying strategic geopolitical policies and corporate interests around the world, the demonisation of opponents is considered useful or even essential. Enemy images are used in propaganda and war preparation by both sides in a conflict and the mass media are often willing participants in this process of demonisation. How the media frame and present threats, as well as the amount of attention that is paid to such issues influence the threat perceptions and responses of the audience.

Adversaries are seen to be of interest only as threats. Thus, news stories about them essentially focus on the level of danger that they pose. Whatever be the orientation of editorials and opinion pieces, the angling of articles through headlines, illustrations and cartoons may reveal the attitudes of news desks as to who the 'enemy' is, even when the text itself may be written in a 'neutral' language. An important element of war reporting is to 'demonise' the enemy. The media tend to willingly participate in the demonisation of 'enemy' nations.

This trend was particularly evident in the western media during the post-cold war era when the projection of radical Islam replaced communism as the main threat to western interests. Herman and Chomsky (1998) posit that a 'propaganda system will consistently portray people abused in enemy states

as *worthy* victims; whereas those treated with equal or greater severity by its own government or clients will be *unworthy*'. Worthy victims will be reported prominently and dramatically. They will be humanised and their victimisation will get detailed coverage, generating reader interest and sympathy. In contrast, unworthy victims will get only minor coverage with minimal humanisation. At the same time the media also tend to modify enemy images when attitudes among the political elite changes.

Decontextualising Conflict and the 'National Security' Paradigm

The tendency of the media is to focus on the outbreak of conflict. The social and political developments which were precursors to conflict are not considered newsworthy. Similarly, issues framed within a national security paradigm are often given priority over issues emerging from a notion of the security of the people. There is a little space for democratic struggles and human rights concerns of the majority of the population. The media may therefore distort the public perception of security issues, focusing attention on immediate aspects and military solutions, while largely ignoring more complex and abstract issues. Often conflicts revolving around socio-economic issues are downplayed or depoliticised as law and order or 'ethnic' conflicts. This makes conflict appear normal and inevitable and irresolvable. The media largely emphasises news framed in the realist, state-centric, territorial paradigm of security, thereby marginalising voices of dissent. This ignores the larger socio-economic and political dimensions of the issues concerned. There is often a reductionist construction of conflict as a territorial dispute or as a border conflict. The outbreak of conflict is located as an 'event' without situating it within its historical, social, economic and political context which is of critical importance (Manchanda 2001).

In times of crises, the media often succumb to patriotism at the expense of objectivity, resulting in jingoistic reporting, reinforcing stereotypes and prejudices. Conflict is often an occasion for whipping up patriotism and sidelining dissent. In the process of this consensus-building and inculcating of a culture of nationalism and patriotism, events/reports, which reinforce the same, are selected and emphasised while those that contradict them are often ignored. The media tend to stress issues of national or state security, even if it is at the cost of human security or the human rights concerns of the people. This reflects the traditional state-centric approach to security which emphasises military security against external threats. This should be seen in contrast to the more recent recognition of the need for wider notions of security to emphasise questions of human rights and social justice.

Mediating Non-State Actors

The role of non-state actors in the perpetration of violence, and their capacity, record and potential in inducing international conflict is widely acknowledged, especially since the events of 9/11. The emergence of non-state actors as major players on the international scene poses serious concern for states regarding the conduct of war, which had traditionally been conducted against other states. They have also become a major challenge for the international news media. Acts of international terrorism by non-state actors are often perpetrated to capture the attention of the media, and as such the manner in which this is framed and represented in the media becomes of crucial importance. However, the media are often

faced with difficult choices in constructing a narrative of the role of non-state actors. Western news media have played an important role in informing the world, as well as in organising and facilitating responses to terrorism. The end of the Cold War saw a homogenised view of Islamic militancy and the projection of militant Islam as a transnational threat, particularly through organisations such as the Al Qaeda. Together with Lebanon's Hizbullah, Palestinian Hamas, Indonesia's Jemaah Islamiyah, etc., they were all depicted as part of a global terror network, the underlying thread reflecting the concerns of the US that weapons of mass destruction may fall into their hands.

One of the difficulties faced by the media in reporting from the perspective of non-state actors is the involvement of states themselves. After 9/11, the American media was faced with the dilemma of whether to adopt a patriotic or independent stance. American President George Bush's statement—'you are either with us or against us' put the media in an awkward position. Going against the government position would place them under the risk of being isolated and deemed unpatriotic. This resulted in the media generally reflecting the government position (Lahlali 2011, 58–59). World news reports of 9/11 are claimed to have elicited unprecedented responses of sympathy and support for the United States from other nations. The US attack on the Taliban forces was projected not only as an attack on forces that supported the perpetrators of the 9/11 act, but also as against forces that violated human rights especially that of women, who were excluded from schools and social affairs, and who were forced to wear the burqa, etc. President Bush also requested the American-based television networks not to air Osama bin Laden's video recordings stating that they may contain coded messages to terrorists in the US.

Post 9/11, Al-Jazeera the pan-Arabic satellite television channel was the only channel that allowed access to the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan and the only one to be able to report the war from within Afghanistan. The opportunities that Al-Jazeera gave by providing space for opposing viewpoints including that of political parties, the academic community human rights activists, as well as through its regular broadcasting of press releases of Al Qaeda and video tapes of Osama bin-Laden gave it a singular space in the sphere of international communication. The network paid a high price for this with its Kabul bureau being struck by a US missile in November 2001. Although the US military argued that it was struck inadvertently, a leaked top secret British Government memo contained information about President Bush's suggestion of bombing Al-Jazeera's headquarters in Qatar (Lahlali 2011, 82).

Events of 9/11 resulted in the international realisation of the need to win the hearts and minds of the people of the Arab world and the significant role that the media can play in this. However, the media in general tend to reflect the framework of the political and military leadership, and the values of the political and economic systems of the nations within which they operate. Views that run counter to official sources are often deemed unacceptable.

Reporting Conflict: Issues and Challenges

In reporting international conflict, the media is faced with a range of constraints ranging from the individual or the state, to the organisational or the ideological. News essentially entails a selective production process leading to the presentation of one version of reality. News does not happen but is constructed with economic, political and social considerations, or a country's specific interests, exerting pressure on the selection and presentation of themes. The media should therefore be seen as a social

institution, interacting with the other institutions within the wider social system. Herman and Chomsky (1998) maintain that the mass media serve to mobilise support for the dominant interests of the state and private activity, and that their choices, emphases and omissions can best be understood by analysing them in such terms. Their 'propaganda model' suggests that the 'societal purpose' of the media is to inculcate and defend the economic, social, and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the society and state. Through the selection of topics, distribution of concerns, framing of issues, filtering of information, emphasis and tone, and keeping debate within the bounds of acceptable premises, the media serve this purpose. The propaganda model traces the manner in which money and power can filter out news fit to print, marginalise dissent, and permit the government and dominant private interests to publicise their messages.

The mainstream news media often tend to ignore alternative perspectives and voices of dissent, and to favour the realist paradigm of foreign policy and security. It is only in cases where consensus in the dominant discourse begins to disappear that the media is forced to take a different course and reflect public debate. The media tend to promote rather than contest the policies of governments in the external sphere. This is particularly the case if events are placed in the 'national security' frame by the political elite. Media coverage in such situations tends to be cautious about offending a patriotically aroused audience by criticising the views of government officials. Divergence in coverage occurs only when there are differences in the 'spectrum of debate' in the dominant discourse. Through the very process of selection and presentation of news, the use of sources, framing of threat/insecurity, etc., the mainstream media reflect the dominant security discourse in society. The media thus play a crucial role in the processes of securitisation (Joseph 2009, 337–338).

When information itself becomes a commercial product, facts are distorted to give a sensational and attractive image, projecting certain aspects of events, which will make them more marketable. In the era of 24×7 coverage, war tends to be a spectacle and a part of infotainment with market forces tending to commercialise it. The increasingly market-driven media are constrained in what they report by their need to sell their product to readers and advertisers, often resulting in sensational and trivialised reporting. As a result, the media distort the public view of what is important in national security, focusing attention on short term issues and military means, while largely ignoring longer range and more abstract issues. The trivialisation of news only contributes to the erosion of the 'public sphere', as well as to desensitisation as to the tragedy and horror of war.

Governments also, in varying degrees, tend to dominate, direct, influence or manage the flow of information on grounds of concerns for national security and social stability or fulfilling national development goals and programmes. References to national security suggest a broad and powerful range of meanings through which to convince a population that its existence and unity are threatened and that collective protection can be ensured. Such rhetorical moves can be affected in a variety of ways, especially through the media.

Wolfsfeld (2001) argues that the success governments have in mobilizing consensus among political elites in support of their policies is an important factor affecting news coverage: 'The greater the level of elite consensus, the more likely the news media are to play a supportive role in implementing such policies. Positions taken by the major political parties serve as the most important indicator for the news media in these situations. Journalists depend on party leaders as their dominant sources for assessing the state of the political environment'.

The role of the media is also considerably influenced by the values that prevail among journalists. Halloran (1998, 9–34) observes that the presentation of news is governed by professional values and occupational routines that are assimilated in the course of ‘professional socialisation,’ a process which itself reflects prevailing values about the role of the media in society and about the final requirements necessary for the media to stay in business. Most biased choices in the media arise from the selection of right-thinking people, internalised preconceptions, and the adaptation of personnel to the constraints of ownership, organisation, market, and political power. Censorship is often self-censorship, by reporters and commentators who adjust to the realities of source and media organisational requirements, and by people at higher levels within media organisations who are chosen to implement, and have usually internalised the constraints imposed by proprietary and other market and governmental centres of power. Media leaders often do similar things because they see the world through the same lenses, are subject to similar constraints and incentives, and thus feature stories or maintain silence together. Various mechanisms of social control in the newsroom, which curtail acts of deviance by those working there, include institutional authoritarianism or feelings of obligation for superiors, mobility aspirations, etc. The attention given to a fact, its placement, tone, and repetitions, the framework of analysis within which it is presented, and the related facts that accompany it and give it meaning are also of importance in this context.

In order to maintain the image of objectivity and to protect themselves from criticisms of bias and threats of libel suits, the media look for the material that can be portrayed as accurate. This so-called objectivity favours the use of sources, particularly official sources that are considered to be credible by the public (Manchanda 2001). In order to consolidate their predominant position as sources, government and business-news promoters take serious efforts to make things easy for the news organisations, by providing all required facilities, including advance copies of speeches and forthcoming reports; scheduling press conferences according to news deadlines; and writing press releases in usable language. Powerful sources may also use their leverage to deny critics access to the media. The process of creating a body of experts has been carried out on a deliberate basis and a massive scale. Thus, the media also provide ‘experts’ who regularly echo the official view. By giving them plenty of exposure, the media confer them status and make them the obvious candidates for opinion and analysis. These corporate and government sources are recognisable and credible by their status and prestige. Anti-elite sources, on the other hand, are regarded with utmost suspicion. Media contribution to ‘consensus’ therefore occurs in various ways with dissent from the mainstream being given little coverage.

Selective reporting, the sidelining of dissent, and censorship – whether it be imposed or self-motivated, all have very serious implications. This helps to reinforce the spectrum of debate produced by government policies and to exclude from the public sphere perspectives that do not have political support inside the government. The temptation to suppress dissent on grounds of ‘national interest’ in a conflict situation, although understandable, precludes informed public discussion of the situation and fosters a jingoistic climate where alternative means of conflict resolution receive little consideration. Furthermore, disinformation can lead to dangerous misperceptions among the protagonists about each other’s intentions, which could have devastating consequences (Dreze 2000, 1171–1183).

Clearly, the response of the media in situations of conflict is shaped by a number of factors, and consequently media objectivity in such situations is often a myth. Various examples have shown that in the sphere of foreign policy, the mass media have generally promoted and legitimised, rather than

contested, the policies of their governments. This is especially the case if events are placed in the ‘national security’ frame by the political elite. Although there are differences among the media in their subtlety of reporting and responsibility in editing, there is a general unanimity in the demonisation of enemies, correspondingly justifying government policy. Many have found that the media is more prone to hinder peace processes than to promote them. Due to the inherent contradiction between the nature of peace processes and news routines, the media often play a destructive role in attempts at peacemaking. While a successful peace process requires patience, a calm environment, and a minimal understanding of the needs of the other side, news media requirements call for immediacy, focus on threats and violence, strife and discord, and reinforce ethnocentrism and hostility towards adversaries (Wolfsfeld 2001). The nature of the political environment in which the media operate also has its influence on the role of the media in any peace process. A peace process resulting from political consensus will be covered very differently from that of a controversial one. In mediating perceptions of threat, the media have often facilitated the inculcation of values of militarism. It is in this context that the relevance of the concept of ‘peace journalism’ gains significance.

Towards ‘Peace Journalism’

Although ‘peace journalism’ as a concept is relatively new, the general idea has its roots in the Mass Media Declaration which was adopted by the 20th session of the General Conference of UNESCO in Paris in 1978. Article III of this declaration is as follows:

1. The mass media have an important contribution to make to the strengthening of peace and international understanding and in countering racialism, apartheid and incitement to war.
2. In countering aggressive war, racialism, apartheid and other violations of human rights which are inter alia spawned by prejudice and ignorance, the mass media, by disseminating information on the aims, aspirations, cultures and needs of all peoples, contributes to eliminate ignorance and misunderstanding between peoples, to make nationals of a country sensitive to the needs and desires of others, to ensure the respect of the rights and dignity of all nations, all peoples and all individuals without distinction of race, sex, language, religion or nationality and to draw attention to the great evils which afflict humanity, such as poverty, malnutrition and diseases, thereby promoting the formulation by States of the policies best able to promote the reduction of international tension and the peaceful and equitable settlement of international disputes (UNESCO 1978, 128).

The concept of peace journalism emerged as an alternative model to traditional ways of conflict reporting, and refers to efforts to promote the use of the media to facilitate conflict resolution. Peace journalists consider conventional mainstream international news coverage—its typical emphasis on violence and conflict as a win/lose struggle, its reliance on government and military sources, its focus on ‘our’ suffering versus their ‘villainy’—as comprising war journalism. Peace journalism contends that conventional journalism typically avoids the context of the conflict being reported. The causes of the conflict and its

development, the undeclared vested interests involved, the alternatives to war, and possible solutions to resolve or transcend hostilities, etc., are often ignored.

Galtung's view of peace journalism as an alternative to conventional news coverage of conflicts is of particular relevance in this context. According to Galtung (1998, 2010), conventional news coverage of conflicts decontextualise violence. The reasons for unresolved conflicts are ignored, the number of parties in a conflict are often reduced to two—even when more are involved, one side is portrayed as good while the other is demonised, violence is presented as inevitable (ignoring alternatives), individual acts of violence are often the focus of attention while structural causes like poverty, government neglect and military or police repression are avoided. There is often a focus only on the conflict arena ignoring the forces and factors that influence the violence, the objectives of outside interventionists (especially the major powers) are not identified, and there is often a failure to explore peace proposals and to offer images of peaceful outcomes, ceasefires and negotiations are confused with actual peace, disregarding reconciliation. Galtung states that the media generally follow the 'low road' in reporting conflict—chasing wars, the elites that run them and a 'win-lose' outcome. He urges an alternate route: the 'high road' of peace journalism that focuses on conflict transformation. Galtung advocates a practice of journalism that places peacebuilding as an essential value and defines it as the lens through which to see and report events and to frame information (Also see Lynch 2005, 2008).

Peace journalism thus refers to efforts to promote the use of media to facilitate conflict resolution. It examines the root causes of conflict, humanising situations rather than creating enemies. It attempts to de-escalate conflicts by highlighting peace and conflict resolution as much as violence. Other advocates of peace journalism introduced structural media reform into the discussion, arguing that market forces, ownership structure and regulation need to be addressed first if peace journalism is to succeed.

Critics of peace journalism, however, consider it as an unwelcome departure from the enduring values of journalism such as objectivity, neutrality and detachment, and a normative model that fails to take into account the actual constraints imposed by the dynamics of news production (including professional values and organisational imperatives) and hence may have little to offer to journalists (Hackett 2006). Criticism is often based on an alleged loss of objectivity linked with the promotion of peace; theoretical and practical questions about what version of peace should be promoted; and economic, political and institutional constraints built into the media structure (Irvan 2006). There is also the criticism that structural constraints (such as media structures and professional routines) limit and shape the work of journalists, a fact that is not considered by peace journalists.

A number of obstacles on the path to peace journalism have also been stressed—ranging from the individual to the institutional and ideological levels. At the individual level, two types of values come into play: professional values of objectivity and news values. Research on the processes of news selection demonstrates that journalists tend to choose those stories which fulfill the basic criteria of newsworthiness. At the institutional and structural level, the problem arises from the fact that commercial media are profit oriented, and the peace process, at least in the short run, does not produce profit. It is often pointed out that the greater the influence of commercialism on news content, the less likely that the media can serve as serious and responsible forums for public debate. At the ideological level, the nationalistic tendencies in media circles results in journalists finding it easy to follow the official line, or they 'index' themselves to 'official politics'. This protects the journalists from criticism, and helps them to "frame" the conflict in a consensual manner. As Wolfsfeld (2004, 15–23) points out the media usually

foster an ethnocentric view of the world. Wolfsfeld highlights four news values that make the application of peace journalism difficult: focus on the immediate, search for drama, emphasis on simplicity and ethnocentrism. He claims that the default mode of operation for the press is to cover tension, conflict and violence. At the same time, the worldwide web seems to offer potential for facilitating the expansion of expression and global human connection, over and above the reach of conventional international media, thus transforming the very terrain of peace journalism.

While peace journalism may seem to be a kind of activism on the part of journalists, in reality it only strives to ensure a balanced and more comprehensive portrayal of conflict by journalists. Despite the criticism and obstacles on the path to peace journalism, the broad ideals for which it stands cannot be ignored. Given the fact that security is not an objective condition but is socially constructed, the significance of the mass media in the process of rearticulating and reshaping security concerns cannot be sidelined. Clearly, the mass media can play a critical role in situations of international conflict. The nature of media coverage of conflicts or the manner in which issues are framed by the media can help to either reinforce and legitimise the policies of governments or bring about change in existing policies. The media can serve to increase conflict or serve as destructive agents in the process of conflict resolution by emphasising the risks and dangers associated with compromise, raising the legitimacy of those opposed to concessions, and reinforcing negative stereotypes of the enemy. On the other hand, the media can play a central role in the promotion of peace by emphasising the benefits that peace can bring, raising the legitimacy of groups or leaders working for peace, and transforming images of the enemy (Wolfsfeld 2001). It can not only be a channel of communication between conflicting parties, but can also play an educative role by providing an understanding of the factors that gave rise to the conflict. The media can systematically analyse the conflict to provide a better understanding of the situation and the dynamics of the efforts to manage the situation. It can also help to identify any underlying interests of the issues concerned. Similarly the media can help frame issues and define the conflict in such a way that it becomes possible to manage. It can focus on long-term processes of reconciliation, rather than on sensational stories of conflict. By helping to prevent demonisation of the 'other', counteracting misperceptions, allowing each side a more positive vision of the other, etc., the media can help reduce suspicion and show that compromise is possible. Yet, history has shown that the actual role of mainstream international media—with its selective reporting, reflection of the dominant discourse, processes of securitisation, demonisation of enemies, dehumanisation and decontextualisation of conflict, etc.—has been far from satisfactory. The constraints of state and private power can by no means be underestimated.

The potential and capability of the media to play a positive role in reorienting perceptions of conflict and security would primarily necessitate addressing the structural constraints of news production. It would also require a delinking of news frames from its preoccupation with the dominant traditional state security perspective. Such a change in approach is imperative, given its possible implications for informed debate and policy making. In the very selection of facts and in their presentation there will always be an interpretative framework which shows bias. But if complete absence of bias is not possible it is also vital to understand that not all biases are equal. The increasing importance of non-military threats and socio-economic insecurities serve as a context for challenging the basic underlying assumptions of the existing security paradigm. Security needs to be viewed from a holistic perspective rather than as privileging the state and its military power. There is evidently a necessity to widen security

perspectives in the media, a need to reformulate security in less exclusionary terms, emerging from a concern for societal security. There is a need to harness the power of the media for peacebuilding and to develop new strategies to counter the abuse of media during conflict. While the media by themselves may not be able to make peace, they can, and certainly should, pave the way towards it.

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