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A Critical Analysis of the Liability of the Media for the Incitement and Continuation of Conflict

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Abstract

This dissertation will study the influence the media may have in inciting conflict. The analysis will examine three conflicts; the civil war in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the American war in Vietnam, and the civil war and subsequent genocide in Rwanda in 1994. The theme of this work will be that a media operating within a democratic setting is arguably largely impotent when it comes to exerting a measurable influence on the progress of conflict. Conversely, media controlled by autocratic states with malign aims and propagandist intent can exert decisive and destructive influence, thus rendering conflict highly likely.

A Critical Analysis of the Liability of the Media for the Incitement and Continuation of Conflict.

It is encouraging to know that the news media are also undertaking a process of self-examination as we collectively remember this tragedy. Media were used in Rwanda to spread hatred, to dehumanize people, and even to guide the genocidaires toward their victims. Three journalists have even been found guilty of genocide, incitement to genocide, conspiracy and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. We must find a way to respond to such abuses of power without violating the principles of freedom, which are an indispensable cornerstone of democracy.¹

Message from the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, to the Symposium on the Media and the Rwandan Genocide at the Carlton University School of Journalism and Communication, Ottawa, 13th March 2004.

Introduction

Hammond relays the following account of an event in Saigon in Vietnam, during the American intervention in that country in the 1960s:

One hot noonday, Arnett [Peter, an American war correspondent] stood outside the Saigon market watching a Buddhist monk squat on the pavement, squirt himself with gasoline and flick a cigarette lighter. "I could have prevented that immolation...by kicking the gasoline away," Arnett said later. "As a human being I wanted to. As a reporter I couldn't...I would have propelled myself directly into Vietnamese politics. My role as a reporter would have been destroyed along with my credibility." Instead he photographed the man burning in the street, dashed back to his office to file his pictures and, by giving the Buddhists the means they needed to publicize their cause to the world, assumed the very role he had sought to avoid.²

The media, as defined by the various activities and bodies to which this awkward term is usually applied,³ cannot simply be seen as just a conduit for the sterile relaying and reporting of events,

¹ *United Nations Press Release SG/SM/9197 AFR/860: Tenth Anniversary of Rwanda Genocide should Prompt Remorse, Resolve says Secretary-General to Ottawa Symposium* [online]. Available at, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2004/sgsm9197.doc.htm> [accessed 2 May 2007].

² Hammond, William M., *Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998), p.18.

³ Indeed, so awkward is the term that it is tempting to place it in quotation marks whenever it is used. However as this would be annoying to the reader this temptation will be resisted. The study will make consistently clear throughout its text

with which it remains unconnected and without influence. It is arguable therefore that media outlets are now, and arguably have been for a considerable period of time, an inevitable, intrinsic and influential part of the unfolding order of events upon which they report, publish and broadcast. As such, there is considerable evidence that in certain circumstances their near omni-presence and subsequent comment can play an important role as an enabler in the shaping of public appetite for conflict, and for better or for worse, unwittingly or otherwise, directly or indirectly, propagandising and encouraging the activities and aims of the belligerents. As Laity states '...news is more than a mirror to events. It does not just reflect events it influences them and...influences them increasingly powerfully.'⁴.

It is the aim of this study to critically analyse this idea of media influence and in particular to demonstrate that in certain situations this influence can be a powerful effect on the incitement of conflict. The study will determine that such situations appear to involve a number of recurring factors without which the media's influence becomes increasingly impotent. These factors will be discussed in full but in short they appear to include the existence of non-democratic regimes seizing and utilising a state-controlled media, as well as a reasonable degree of pre-existing civil discontent, which may be further inflamed and indeed fabricated by the media. Where these factors do not exist it appears that the media's influence on either inciting (or indeed curtailing) conflict is at best sporadic and limited in its effect.

The notion that the influence of the media is something that one could possibly classify as a form of soft-power is an important one. When certain circumstances and factors congregate and conflate as they did in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda in the 1990s, it is also likely to be an accurate one. As such, the so-called 'CNN effect'⁵ may well have real consequences on the outcome of armed struggle, or may even act as a catalyst, initiator or inciter of conflict in the first place. In support of this idea of the media sometimes carrying its own degree of serious political value and influence, Badsey describes Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the then Secretary-General of the UN, characterising in 1995 the CNN television news station as '...the sixteenth member of the [UN] Security Council.'⁶. However, such notions as these are still surprisingly generalised and it is therefore in determining the exact level of such influence, and the collection of evidence in support of this, with which this study is concerned.

that the term needs further dissecting and that the media is not to be considered a single homogenous and unitary body; to do so would be an error.

⁴ Laity, Mark, *Straddling the Divide – Spinning for both Sides*, in Connelly, Mark and Welch, David (eds.), *War and the Media, Reportage and Propaganda 1900-2003* (London: I.B. Tauris and Co.Ltd, 2005), p.289.

⁵ The term 'CNN effect' broadly implies an impact on policy formulation, or at least public opinion, by such large media outlets as the American Cable News Network. This may be particularly apposite during conflict, when the opportunity to broadcast harrowing or motivating images and text may arise more frequently with corresponding effects. Robinson dissects the term much further than its popular understanding, however the complexity of his dissection is mostly outside the scope of this essay. See Robinson, Piers, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁶ Badsey, Stephen, *Introduction*, in, Badsey, Stephen (ed.), *The Media and International Security* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000), p.xviii.

On occasion the influence of the media can be malevolent and malign. This can particularly be the case if public opinion is involved and if those holding such opinion hold power in addition to opinions.⁷ On the majority of occasions such malignancy may simply be an unwitting and genuinely innocuous by-product of journalists going about their business; at its simplest journalists will relay facts and people and parties will react. A certain journalistic disingenuity and disregard of the consequences of their stories may play a slightly mendacious part, but often only a small part nevertheless. As Jamieson and Waldman state:

...[the reporter] can choose from among the myriad events that seethe beneath the surface of government which to describe, which to ignore. He can illuminate policy and, as with an undeveloped film, cause its destruction. At his worst, operating with arbitrary and faulty standards, he can be an agent of disorder and confusion.⁸

But simple disorder and confusion could be considered to be relatively benign and furthermore are often limited as effects in their scope and impact, particularly within normally functioning democratic states. On other occasions the aforementioned media malignancy and mendacity may be more wilfully and precisely targeted to cause harm and generate strife. There may be a desire by some media elements to cause violence, whether through unrest as a result of extremely controversial agenda setting or indeed through the facilitation and ordering of direct physical action.

If as this dissertation maintains, one accepts these views as an accurate representation and description of the media's varying degree of influence across its constituent elements, then it follows that one must also accept that with such influence must come an apposite degree of responsibility. Laity supports this when he further states, 'The media's task is now to think more about the handling of its increasing power with responsibility, firstly by accepting that it is a potentially decisive participant in what it reports.'⁹ An indulgence for whatever reason in irresponsible, sensationalist, de-contextualised, or overly-simplistic reporting during conflict could well be shown to have serious consequences in certain circumstances; consequences which may include the inflammation, incitement and continuation of the conflict. Indeed in his introduction to the legal findings of the International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda's (ICTR) case against certain Rwandan journalists accused of crimes against humanity, the prosecutor stated:

This case raises important principles concerning the role of the media, which have not been addressed at the level of international criminal justice since Nuremburg. The

⁷ *Public opinion* is itself an overly generalised term. The study will examine further what is meant by this in due course.

⁸ Jamieson, Kathleen Hall, and Waldman, Paul, *The Press Effect: Politicians, Journalists, and the Stories That Shape the Political World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.95.

⁹ Laity, Mark, op. cit., p.289.

power of the media to create and destroy human values comes with great responsibility. Those who control such media are accountable for its consequences.¹⁰

Such a serious level of consequence naturally leads us to the search for mechanisms which may exhibit a restraining influence on media behaviour in order for the damage of armed conflict not to be further exacerbated or inflamed. An opposite view may be taken of course, depending on the interests of the actors within a conflict, and the pursuit of, or at least the representation of, further damage could well be within the interest of the groups involved if they wish to perhaps sustain rather than curtail hostilities. This opposite view could include for example the takeover and manipulation of select media outlets in order to encourage and fabricate ethnic identification and tension in the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s,¹¹ as well as similar cases in the Rwandan genocide of 1994. However in cases such as these, it is likely that inhibiting mechanisms would be welcome if an international consensus could be achieved to meet this end. This search for the legal control and termination of malevolent media entities was visible in the activities of the United States government following the genocide in Rwanda and is a notion that will be returned to periodically throughout this study.

Conversely there are isolated and limited examples of media reporting where conflict could in fact have been *shortened* (or at least lives saved) through media exposure; these might include the UN coalition decision not to further attack decimated and retreating Iraqi convoys in Kuwait in 1991, and the decision to insert troops to eradicate oppressive Iraqi police activity and provide relief to Kurdish refugees in northern Iraq in the same year.¹² Finally there are cases where the influence of the media is not at all clear and may in fact have been negligible, despite claims by groups who may wish to blame the undermining of arguably poor policy execution on literal reporting. The behaviour of certain politicians during the American war in Vietnam may be an example of such inflation of the estimate of media liability. Any restraining influence or desire to impose curbs on the media's behaviour must therefore be undertaken with great care within a country existing under democratic norms.

Whilst examining all of these views, this dissertation will take the cultural (and to a fair degree professionally sensible) corporate stance of the British armed forces, of which the author is a member, that the most reasonable desire would be to initially discourage conflict and then, if engaged in it, to curtail it as readily as possible. One who adopts this stance would logically therefore wish to encourage the media to behave in a responsible manner consistent with this

¹⁰ *International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda; The Prosecutor v. Ferdinand Nahimana, Jean Bosco-Barayagwiza; Case No. ICTR-99-52-T; Judgement and Sentence, Chapter 5: Legal Findings*, dated 3 December 2003, p.317 [online]. Available from, <http://69.94.11.53/ENGLISH/cases/Ngeze/judgement/mediach4.pdf> [accessed 21 April 2007].

¹¹ Seaton, Jean, *The New 'Ethnic' Wars and the Media*, in Allen, Tim and Seaton, Jean (eds.), *The Media of Conflict; War Reporting and Representations of Ethnic Violence* (London and New York: Zed Books, 1999), p.46.

¹² Halliday, Fred, *Manipulation and Limits: Media Coverage of the Gulf War, 1990-91*, in *ibid.*, p. 143. Robinson however disputes this level of media influence in northern Iraq and presents a case that the media did not drive policy but merely built domestic support for a policy that was already in place. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p.71.

desire. Informal, formal and semi-formal regulatory mechanisms do of course exist, but they exist and are selectively applied within certain, almost unyielding structures of behaviour-governing apparatus. Such structures include the market pressures the media contends with as a revenue generating business, the valued state independence of the media as a fundamental of Western pluralistic democratic culture¹³, and the various media businesses' perceptions of the prevailing appetites of their consumer audiences. More formally they may include the absolute formality of legal stricture and the industry body codification¹⁴ of acceptable journalistic practice that exists in many countries. Whilst from a Western military perspective these apparatus are welcome, it is perhaps unfortunate that some media behaviour often appears to be regulated *solely* by them rather than by any strictly ethical desire of journalists to recognise the sometimes unpleasant secondary effects of their stories, semantics and contextual style of reporting. This however is a situation that is perhaps simply not improvable beyond the realms of superficial idealism or unwelcome official media control; as such it is an ethical reality and a state of affairs which this study will not dispute.

Structurally speaking, this dissertation will be divided into three sections and areas of analysis. Following this introduction the initial section will critically examine the destabilising role some elements of the domestic Yugoslavian media adopted during the various civil conflicts there in the 1990s. This analysis will demonstrate that it is often necessary for a media to be state-controlled, as was the case there with some central and powerful elements of it, for it to truly have an impact as an inciter of conflict. It will also be seen that an autocratic individual or regime plays a significant part in such media behaviour.

The second section will demonstrate that a non-state controlled, democratic media arguably has little impact, or certainly less than may be commonly assumed, on the incitement or indeed curtailment of conflict. Using the behaviour of the American media during the war in Vietnam as a model for analysis, the study will conclude that a free media is often more benign than policymakers may hold it to be. Without such circumstances and factors as those mentioned above and witnessed in the former Yugoslavia, it is arguable that the media becomes largely impotent. Or rather the effect of the media's stories becomes increasingly limited. Whether or not a free media has malevolent, benevolent or partisan business generation aims and agendas is irrelevant as its impact is possibly little, except in special cases of the targeting of so-called elite public opinion. This idea of elite opinion will be discussed and expanded upon in full in the context of the American executive and other opinion formers of the late 1960s and early 1970s. This notion of limited effect is without doubt highly arguable but this study can find no concrete evidence to contradict it, and indeed the supporters of a contrary view can arguably tend to either indulge in generalisation, or

¹³ Badsey, op. cit., p.xx.

¹⁴ For example the Press Complaints Commission within the UK.

simply speak from positions attained through limited analysis and nothing more than a strong layman's feeling.

The final section of the study will return to the area of the thesis presented in the first section in the case of the former Yugoslavia; that of the power that can be wielded by a state-controlled media under autocratic influence. This section will examine how such power and corruptive, malign influence was brought to bear in the Rwandan genocide, where it is clear that certain elements of the media were unequivocally responsible for inciting and coordinating a level of violence which resulted in hundreds of thousands of civilian murders. The analysis of this situation in Africa in 1994 will confirm the position developed in the first and second sections regarding media influence and the conflation of factors necessary for such influence to be raised to a critically destructive level.

The behaviour of the media can be an emotive subject within military circles, but such emotion has no part to play here. As such this study is absolutely not a trial of the media by dissertation. Nor despite Laity's assertions that the media '...requires a tough self-examination in a trade which can be more self-regarding than self-analytical...',¹⁵ is it in any sense an anti-media polemic. For the reader to view it as such would represent a failure on the part of the author. Despite the author's professional military background, the view that there supposedly exists within the Armed Forces a, '...resilient belief that untrammelled media may stab the military in the back...', as stated by Carruthers,¹⁶ is not held here to be an accurate one.¹⁷

Additionally in terms of scope, the study will limit itself to what have become the traditional media outlets of print, radio and television and will not engage in analysis of any of the forms of 'new-media'. This constraint will mean for example that the various non-professional, yet startlingly journalistic, activities of individuals publishing on the World Wide Web will not be under consideration here. This is for two main reasons. First, the scope of such a study, although no doubt interesting, would be very large indeed; certainly too large for a dissertation such as this to deliver the credible analysis it would deserve. And second, such media forms were either non-existent or utterly embryonic during the time of the conflicts under consideration in this work, and as such would have had no impact.

The Media and the Promotion of Hostilities in the former Yugoslavia 1992-1995

¹⁵ Laity, Mark, op. cit., p.289.

¹⁶ Carruthers, Susan, *The Media at War* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000), p.9.

¹⁷ Indeed this author has little in the way of evidence, anecdotal or otherwise, to substantiate such a simplistic claim and in his experience this view is inaccurate. Although the media are sometimes held in a not particularly high regard by many military officers, it is not often accompanied by the blind vitriol which is perhaps being indicated here by Carruthers in her statement, but rather by studied and disinterested conclusions drawn from more reasonable and professionally considered deliberations.

The media is not of course a coherent organism in possession of a single unitary purpose or an all-enveloping identity. Nevertheless the liability of certain elements of it, particularly domestic Serbian elements, in furthering fighting in the former Yugoslavia between 1992 and 1995 appears to have been significant. The media seem to have served at least two quite distinct ends during the various wars that made up this conflict. These were first, in the case of certain elements of the domestic Yugoslavian media, to act as a catalyst for the outbreak of conflict; and second, in the case of elements of the wider global media, to act as a means for generating international attention and possibly galvanising international intervention. This study contends that it is important not to exaggerate the media's role in this second role as it appears in specific examples only. In noting the domestic media's role Hudson and Stanier write:

As Yugoslavia disintegrated, the media of the various republics served not to inform their respective publics but to bolster support for the stances taken by their respective leaderships. Years before the first shots were fired, the media were already at war and the journalists who deliberately fanned the flames of national hatred must bear a heavy responsibility for the carnage.¹⁸

And in noting the role played by the wider, international media in the second end of stimulating international reaction (although it is arguable that they do overplay the media's impact), they further state:

The catalyst which finally compelled the world to react was the combined force of the world's press and television. Probably never before had the influence of the media been more powerfully felt by the governments of the world than in the ensuing months and years of the war in Bosnia.¹⁹

This section of the essay will concentrate primarily on an analysis of the first end to which the media was put. In particular the study will examine the manner in which Slobodan Milošević employed elements of the Belgrade media. In doing this the analysis will demonstrate one of the central contentions of this work, that of the apparent necessity for autocratic governance of media outlets if significant influence is to be made by such outlets on promoting hostilities.

In the context of Serbia in the early 1990s, this autocratic seizure occurred once the company which controlled the largest media organisation in Yugoslavia, the Politika Group,²⁰ came under the control of Milošević's Socialist Party of Serbia.²¹ Milošević's control saw the Politika Group act as an important tool for the Serbian Republic for the spreading of propaganda and thus the

¹⁸ Hudson, Miles and Stanier, John, *War and the Media: A Random Searchlight* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1997), p.263.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.278.

²⁰ This group, which remains in existence today under different ownership arrangements, is an organisation which publishes widely circulated newspapers and magazines and also owns a television and radio broadcast station which covers most of Serbia. See Đoković, Dragan, *Serbia*, in Petković, Brankica (ed.), *Media Ownership and its Impact on Media Independence and Pluralism* (Slovenia, Peace Institute, Institute for Contemporary Social and Political Studies, 2004), p. 434 [online]. Available at http://www.mirovni-institut.si/media_ownership [Accessed 12 Mar 2007].

²¹ Bennett, W. Lance, *News: The Politics of Illusion* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman Inc., 2003), p.265.

deliberate incitement of ethnic tensions between initially Albanian Muslims and Serbs in Kosovo, and later between the Serb and the non-Serb populations of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia. Once Milošević assumed editorial control he formulated in Hudson and Stanier's words a, '...media campaign of ethnic hatred...'. Thompson records the methodology that lay behind this deliberate and considered spreading of enmity:

...a media model [was created] which was extended to embrace other targets of the Serbian leadership. It was a model which identified and stigmatized a national enemy, homogenized Serbs against this threat and called for resistance. After the Albanians of Kosovo, the enemies were the Slovenes and Slovenia, then Croats and Croatia, then Bosnia and its Muslim population.²²

This deliberate 'othering' of perceived enemies by governments in advancing a case to wage war is perhaps not unusual and has arguably been seen to occur to varying extents in all conflicts, including those fought by democracies.²³ But what is perhaps most striking about the Yugoslavian case is the scale of the seizure of such a large media group by a relatively modern (albeit authoritarian and socialist) European state (or republic at least). The result of this was a carefully crafted and controlled propaganda campaign, enabled by the many and diverse media outlets owned by the Politika Group, and conducted with a singular unified purpose. This stands in contrast to the sometimes hit and miss media relations methods employed by modern democratic regimes in order to attempt to influence the largely free press of their own countries. As Hudson and Stanier remind us:

The media which supported Milošević in this...campaign...designed to expand the boundaries of Serbia, was not of course a free press. The Serbian organs of the media were under the direct control of a totalitarian government and carried the messages required by that government. Nevertheless, it is significant that without the support of the media, it is unlikely that the first steps could have been taken down the long road which led to the bloody dissolution of Yugoslavia.²⁴

Comparing such journalistic practices to the behaviour of Goebbels during the Second World War, the British General Sir Michael Rose, (who from 1994 to 1995 was the commander of the United

²² Thompson, Mark, *Forging War*, Article XIX, International Centre against Censorship, p.54, in *ibid.*, p.266. An unsuccessful search for the original reference was made by the author at the Article XIX website (www.article19.org). The original reference, not accessed by this author, may be better found in: Thompson, Mark, *Forging War: The Media in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Hercegovina* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1999).

²³ For example Panke and Thomas see elements of such 'othering' used against Iraq in the case of the United States government's attempts to set publicly acceptable conditions for war, through the use of rhetoric coming from the administration of George W. Bush during the run up to the American led invasion of Iraq in 2003. This is the central thesis of their analysis (which comes from a liberalist constructivist perspective) of the possible failures of democratic peace theory to explain the perceived lack of domestic impediment on the American decision to go to war. In that case their conclusions are useful but the effects they propose as having been made are arguably inflated and exaggerated. Indeed their identification of such an officially sanctioned, 'social construction of enmity' by the United States administration, and media complicity in such a construction, appears mild and secondary compared to the efforts made by elements of the Yugoslavian media in conjunction with the Serbian administration. Panke, Diana and Risse, Thomas, *Liberalism*, in Dunne, Tim and Kurki, Milja and Smith, Steve (eds.), *International Relations Theories-Discipline and Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 98-105.

²⁴ Hudson and Stanier, *op. cit.*, pp. 266-267.

Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia) states, 'Mischievous, propagandist or distorted reporting will always further division and conflict. When emotions are being stirred, distorted images of suffering make it very difficult for policy to be developed on a reasonable basis.'²⁵ Whilst not of course denying journalists the right to question policies or possess and publish their own moral standpoints, Rose further calls for them to, '...live up to their responsibilities.'²⁶ As a central participant in this difficult and confusing Balkans conflict, Rose's view is of particular value and although not unique to him, his subsequent identification that elements of the media became knowingly caught up in certain aspects of the belligerents' propaganda industries is crucial.²⁷

Whilst not specifically referring to Bosnia in the following quote, it is (perhaps mischievously) intriguing to question whether Rose himself has perhaps fallen victim to the influence of certain expediencies and simplicities employed by elements within the media, when he states that in similar conflicts of this type, '...the issues being fought over are often more ancient than the personal memories of the people in the region and remain wholly incomprehensible to outsiders.'²⁸. This sort of promotion of belief in an esoteric, deep cultural well of antagonism, and the acceptance of it by populations can be fertile ground in which propagandists can operate. This would be whether such propagandists were operating officially as part of the state or whether publishing and broadcasting independently. In the case of the former Yugoslavia (and Rwanda) beliefs such as these can be promoted in an entirely unwitting and innocuous manner; this was a role played by some elements of the international media in both of these situations.

Until shaped, distorted or even invented by the media, such issues as those to which Rose refers may actually be incomprehensible and of little importance even to *insiders*. Thus the level of what is arguably little more than mythmaking, deliberately employed by certain actors in order to promote hostilities in Bosnia and the other Yugoslavian republics appears to have been considerable. This mythologizing tactic, having commenced during the late 1980s, was further pursued until the cessation of major hostilities in 1995. Witting or unwitting media complicity in this generating of myths is very apparent in this and other conflicts and of importance in this case is that such complicity and activity appears to have been of central importance to the outbreak of war, and in a wider sense to the attraction to the fighting of otherwise disinterested rogue elements from abroad.

As such the mythmaking does not appear to have been confined to elements of the domestic media. Allen supports this view and is critical of both the Yugoslavian and the international media's reporting of the fighting in Bosnia. He identifies such reporting as being responsible for inflaming

²⁵ Rose, Michael, *The Media and International Security*, in Badsey (ed.), op. cit., p.7

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 5.

conflict through the reinforcement of mythical ethnic (that is, in the Bosnian case, anthropologically non-existent biological or primordial) stereotypical divisions, categorised by arguably overly simplistic terms such as 'Serbs', 'Croats' and 'Muslims'.²⁹ He states that, '...the main thrust of international coverage was...to confirm as "facts" the constructed populist nationalisms of local politicians and war leaders.'³⁰ He further asserts that, '...this lent credibility to views within former Yugoslavia, and probably helped encouraged [sic] participation in the conflict by many migrants and others with no direct experience of the fighting.'³¹ He also notes that this has not been restricted to the Balkans and that similar observations can be made about international reporting of recent wars in Africa.³² This dissertation shall return to this point later in its study of the media's role in the conflict in Rwanda, but for now it is worth noting Allen's concluding judgement regarding media irresponsibility and the unpleasant results of overly simplistic and sometimes malicious reporting. He summarises this in his statement that, 'If the power of ethnicity to propel people towards war rests in the subjective acceptance, by at least some protagonists, that social divisions are natural, then the fact that international news coverage promotes such views is grounds for serious concern.'³³ .

Measuring the effect that the wider, global media stereotyping of ethnic division had on the level of hostility is however difficult. Hammond has offered a thesis that such behaviour allowed Western government to delay decisive intervention, as by characterising conflict as taking place due to centuries old, incomprehensible ethnic hatreds, the international media '...provided a convenient excuse for Western governments [to resist or delay decisive intervention].'³⁴ He quotes the BBC journalist Allan Little in support of his position when Little suggests that:

...the consensus about Bosnia was the Balkan tribes had been killing each other for centuries and that there was nothing that could be done. It was nobody's fault. It was just, somehow, the nature of the region. It was a lie that Western governments at that time liked. It got the Western world off the hook.

This is an arguably dramatic and rather conspirational conclusion, however it bears a fair degree of accuracy. In mitigation and in a relative sense it remains the case that the effects of much of the wider, external media's interpretation of the events were generally unlikely to be as wilful and maliciously intended as elements of for example, the state-controlled Serbian media were (there were however exceptions as we shall see later).

²⁹ Of course the division of the Yugoslavian coalition government along similar party lines prior to 1992 would have influenced and inspired these categorisations.

³⁰ Allen, Tim, *Perceiving Contemporary Wars*, in, Allen and Seaton (eds.), op. cit., p.39.

³¹ *ibid.*, p.39.

³² *ibid.*, pp.39-40.

³³ *ibid.*, p.40.

³⁴ Hammond, Philip, *Humanizing War*, in Allan, Stuart and Zelizer, Barbie, *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.182.

But it does raise interesting questions with regard to the depth of understanding that the media will have, or even wishes to have, of a particular set of circumstances, particularly if those circumstances are complex, as is the case here. The difference in qualitative analysis between journalistic punditry and serious academic study is brought clearly into focus. This is not to implicate all journalists of course, as some will be more studied than others and in the case of the conflict in the Balkans some certainly attempted to gain some depth of comprehension. But there appear to have been impediments to them genuinely brandishing such understanding within the dictates and constraints of the business in which they function; as Hammond states:

As senior BBC correspondent John Simpson subsequently wrote: “a climate was created in which it was very hard to understand what was really going on, because everything came to be seen through the filter of the holocaust.” The Serbs were depicted as Nazis committing genocide against innocent Bosnian Muslim civilians.³⁵

Therefore despite attempts by some journalists to dig deeper, the very nature of the media as an audience seeking, business orientated organisation may impose limits on analysis and drive the need to resort to easily understandable and digestible stereotypes.

Additionally such limits may also be imposed through the concept of *framing*, which in the context of social discourse and therefore of media reporting is defined by London as, ‘...the central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue. News and information has no intrinsic value unless embedded in a meaningful context which organizes and lends it coherence.’³⁶. A corporately accepted coherent context is likely to be rapidly developed and subsequently readily accepted by journalists working to tight deadlines. As Jamieson and Waldman state, ‘By choosing a common frame to describe an event, condition, or political personage, journalists shape public opinion...direct attention and then...guide the processing of information so that a preferred reading of the facts comes to dominate public understanding.’³⁷. The many international journalists reporting events in the former Yugoslavia were, for the majority at least, only complicit in the incitement of conflict to the extent that such strictures of their trade dictated they would be. As such it was likely to be unwitting incitement.

However there exist those whose opposing arguments do not allow the wider media such leeway. The former journalist Martin Bell states:

³⁵ Hammond, op. cit., p.183.

³⁶ London, Scott, *How the Media Frames Political Issues* [online]. Available from <http://www.scottlondon.com/reports/frames.html> [Accessed 15 April 2007]. For a detailed sociological discussion of framing, see also König, Thomas, *Frame Analysis* [online]. Available from <http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/methods/publications/frameanalysis/index.html> [Accessed 15 April 2007].

³⁷ Jamieson and Waldman, op. cit., p.xiii. These authors also make clear that politicians also use framing as a tool with which to shape understanding and thus discourse. *ibid.*

We like to see ourselves as bulwarks or beacons, standing in a principled way against censorship, manipulation and a variety of political pressures to shade the truth. Those are our enemies. But is it not possible that the real enemy lies in the hearts of journalists themselves, in cynicism and unchecked ambition and a willingness to fool with the facts for the sake of a story?³⁸

Bell's statement refers to what may be regarded as merely cynical irresponsibility amongst journalists; an unfortunate by-product of this industry and its need for stories. But on an ethical scale there appears to be worse behaviour and there is evidence that some international journalists were arguably as guilty of the incitement of conflict as some of their Yugoslavian counterparts.

In examining such cases of direct and genuinely malignant international media power in the former Yugoslavia, it is useful to return to Rose, whose views on media responsibility and morals are already clear, when he describes a discussion he had with a journalist from a British national newspaper, '...who personally declared to me that he was actively seeking to undermine the mission of the United Nations in Bosnia by falsely describing the situation'. When Rose, '...asked him whether his policy might not entail many more deaths than were actually occurring...He said that he didn't care about that at all as an unjust peace simply could not be allowed.'³⁹ This journalist had clearly misplaced himself in the hierarchy of those who are correctly and legally empowered to decide on whether or not to resort to conflict and to decide the terms under which it is allowed to terminate.

However despite such rather extreme examples it is more commonly held in much of the literature that the main dynamic of influence the international media had, whether through the process of stereotyping and framing or otherwise, was the galvanisation of the West's (particularly NATO's) motivation to intervene. This was the second distinct end of media influence referred to in the opening paragraph of this section. Unfortunately this is difficult to measure without considering (rare) first hand statements from the Western actors who held such interventionist power and then accounting for other circumstances which may have prompted intervention rather than media influence. It is for these reasons that this dissertation urges caution when considering this second end.

However, with such difficulties in mind, Robinson assesses carefully the level of such influence and links it strongly to the decision by NATO to defend Sarajevo in 1994 and Gorazde in 1995, through the use of airstrikes against Bosnian Serb artillery and other targets. Such airstrikes were designed to strengthen the embattled UNPROFOR.⁴⁰ Robinson disentangles the influence of other important

³⁸ In Laity, *op. cit.*, p.289.

³⁹ Rose, Michael, *op. cit.*, p.6.

⁴⁰ The debate regarding the effectiveness of these airstrikes continues. Bosnian Serb hostage taking of UN personnel commenced as a result, and they were used as human shields on likely targets.

factors on this policy decision though the use of a theoretical policy-media interaction model.⁴¹ Still, he is careful not to over-exaggerate the level of galvanising media influence stating:

...under these conditions media coverage is likely to have influenced the policy process...helping to produce a decision to intervene in order to defend Gorazde. Specifically the existence of no policy regarding the use of force meant that policy-makers would have been pressured to respond to the critical coverage or else face further negative publicity.⁴²

In fact, there is evidence to suggest that the reality is often more subtle than a situation whereby a government goes from a completely non-interventionist stance and policy to a stance of decisive action. Such action is often simply accelerated as a result of media reports, with decisions assuming more prominence on the agenda of those high up in the decision-making chain. In other words the policy that is executed is likely to have existed in some form prior to the media making its intended target into news. This may well have been the case with the marketplace bombing in Sarajevo in 1994, which does appear to have forced a quicker response from the United States than would otherwise have been expected. The response was partially formulated already within the administration as a deliberate plan, but the bombing and the subsequent tone of gravity in the reports concerning the event may well have catalysed the American action (or reaction as it became).⁴³

This section has demonstrated that there is a body of evidence framing corrosive media influence as a crucial factor in the promotion of hostilities in the former Yugoslavia. Nevertheless there is some disagreement about the level of this influence. For example Mueller maintains that small bands of spontaneously forming and opportunistic marauders and thugs were responsible for the violence in Bosnia, and that the media had in fact a very small role to play in this.⁴⁴ This however does not stand up to further analysis. Whilst these groups of armed thugs did indeed exist, they were often controlled by politicians from above. These politicians would have been the same ones controlling and using the media to spread hatred and incite violence. Furthermore the members of these essentially criminal gangs would almost certainly have been influenced by the propaganda that would have been broadcast and targeted in their direction. Although the victims of their violent criminal behaviour would later be representative of all communities,⁴⁵ it is difficult to believe that a politically constructed and media broadcasted and reinforced division of ethnicity did not exist in their minds, at least initially.

Therefore it is almost certain that the fragmentation and de-federalisation of Yugoslavia, and thus the subsequent fighting, was catalysed by media activity. This is supported by Sofos' claim that,

⁴¹ For a detailed description of his model of policy-media interaction see, Robinson, op. cit., pp. 25-45.

⁴² *ibid.* p.82.

⁴³ Strobel, Warren P., *Late-Breaking Foreign Policy: The News Media's Influence on Peace Operations* (Washington, D.C.: The United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), p.157.

⁴⁴ Mueller, John, 'The Banality of "Ethnic War"', *International Security*, Vol. 25, No 1, Summer 2000, p.42.

⁴⁵ Mueller writes, 'Often the choice was essentially one of being dominated by vicious bigots of one's own ethnic group or by vicious bigots of another ethnic group. Given that range of alternatives the choice was easy.' *ibid.*, p.56.

In this process, the mass media played a very significant role by actively supporting, publicizing and amplifying nationalist definitions of the situation and by demarcating national and ethnic boundaries in the social imaginaries of the post-Yugoslav order.⁴⁶

This appears to be not only an accurate contention, but one which conveys well the degree of power the media can potentially exert, whether state controlled or not. Furthermore it illustrates the gravity of the responsibility that is borne by those with such influence and in particular by those who are involved in a free press. Yet it is important to note, for the purposes of this study, that the majorly influential domestic media organs in Serbia were indeed state controlled, and by an authoritarian state at that. This explains greatly how it was that such influence on the incitement of conflict ran so unchecked and was made possible. It is difficult to find a modern example of the incitement and promotion of hostilities on a similar scale amongst democratic governments with a free press. Certainly these latter regimes will attempt to influence public opinion, and if they can manipulate the press through various means they will indeed do so, but without an authoritarian approach and a captive press it is arguably not possible.

It may therefore be considered tempting to a democratic government for them to attempt to resort to authoritarian measures in order to manipulate the media, if such a government deems this necessary. Such a perception of necessity might arise through desperation or through a government's own misunderstanding of the degree to which public opinion actually matters. There is evidence to suggest that the various presidencies of the United States were attempting such an approach on occasion during the Vietnam War. In particular, Richard Nixon is often held to bear some responsibility for such behaviour, although there are also factors which act in his defence. This study will now examine the confluence of circumstances during this period in the 1960s and 1970s which may have led him and others in such a direction of media interaction. During this examination the study will measure the domestic (that is the American) media's influence on the continuation, and indeed the curtailment of the conflict in Vietnam. The contention will be made that such influence was arguably negligible and where it is detected it was in fact largely unwitting. In other words, the fears of Nixon and others regarding a supposedly subversive domestic media undermining American policy were likely to have been unfounded.

Media Influence on the Progress of American Involvement in the Vietnam War 1962-1975

Despite Hudson and Stanier's belief that, 'There can be few wars in history which have given rise to so many, often diametrically opposed, opinions as to origin, course and outcome among the pundits, political, academic and military...'⁴⁷, there nevertheless appears to be a select handful of

⁴⁶ Sofos, Spyros A., *Culture, Media and the Politics of Disintegration and Ethnic Division in Former Yugoslavia*, in Allen, Tim and Seaton, Jean (eds.), op. cit., p.165.

⁴⁷ Hudson and Stanier, op. cit., p.99.

reoccurring themes which are most often deployed to explain the difficulties encountered by the United States in its intervention in Vietnam. These are difficulties which between 1962 and 1975 led to the military defeat in South East Asia of one of the world's contemporary superpowers.⁴⁸

The first of these main theories concentrates on a perceived inability of the United States military to effectively conduct a counter-insurgency campaign in the face of supposedly superior tactics deployed by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and the National Liberation Front (NLF). This theory maintains that such tactics were further combined with a supposedly superior and patient Marxist/Maoist inspired strategy and political philosophy employed by Ho Chi Minh's government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The second main theory, most often encountered in a partisan way in the writings of former military personnel who served in the theatre, appears to focus on a perceived inevitability of American military defeat. This is supposedly due to contemporaneous world order factors dictating the inability of the United States' administration to countenance inflating the war beyond its classically limited nature, and taking it across the northern border into mainland China. The third main theory encountered concerns the impact of the media, often in a negative sense, in reducing the public appetite for war. This is summarised by a belief amongst some that a supposedly liberal and pacific, left-wing leaning, American media were complicit in ensuring American withdrawal, even if this were to mean loss and humiliation for the United States. This theory is met in a more extreme form with some accusing the media of inciting the North Vietnamese to action in order to expedite American withdrawal; a grave charge indeed, but mostly a far-fetched one, except in occasional isolated examples.

All of these theories, when coherently and intelligently articulated, as they can all be, hold credibility of varying degrees. However the theory which will be examined in more detail for the purposes of this section will be the third one, and the study shall consider the question of just how much influence the media actually had in forcing American military drawdown and eventual withdrawal. The answer, for which this section will provide the evidence, appears to be that some influence was made by the media, particularly in shaping the loss of public appetite for war. However the commonly held view, framed by President Nixon, that the war was lost partly due to a conspirational, duplicitous and mendacious media is not a wholly correct one. Most often encountered amongst policymakers of the period,⁴⁹ this third theory regarding American failure appears encapsulated by President Nixon's famous targeting of a supposed 'silent majority' who, in his view, apparently supported the war against the beliefs of a vocal minority. As Bennett states, '... Richard Nixon charged the press with...favoring [*sic*] liberal intellectuals and leftist activists in

⁴⁸ For the purposes of this study, it will be accepted that the United States did indeed lose in Vietnam. Other theories such as those of possible partial victory, and of military victory but political loss are acknowledged will not be under consideration, as they lie outside this study's scope.

⁴⁹ Bergerud defines this group well. Bergerud, Eric M., *The Dynamics of Defeat; The Vietnam War in the Hau Nghia Province* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1991), p.323.

covering the War in Vietnam, while failing to report the views of the great “silent majority” of Americans who favored [*sic*] his policies.’⁵⁰.

Beyond the summary of the main theories above, this section will not overly concern itself with what may actually lie behind the main cause of American defeat, as such analysis would be beyond the scope of this study.⁵¹ Rather it will concentrate on examining and thus disproving the charge that the media brought about American defeat. As such, the level of American media influence here stands in sharp contrast to that exerted later by the Yugoslavian media in the 1990s, and it is the aim of this section to demonstrate why this may be the case. The study will contend that the differing level of influence is due to the fact that the selected domestic media elements in the later case in the former Yugoslavia were state controlled, as opposed to the free press working in the former case. This will again be highlighted as a factor in the study of the domestic media in Rwanda following this section. Thus the analysis will illustrate that whilst a free, democratic media may have a small degree of influence on the outcome of conflict, whether inciting or indeed curtailing it, this level does not appear to compare to that exhibited by a media controlled by an autocratic state with more ethically questionable aims. In other words, a totalitarian orientated state, with controlled propaganda outlets, can arguably cause considerably more damage, in violent, conflictual terms, than their media cousins which exist in democratic states and publish mainly unrestrictedly.

So exactly what was the level of constraining influence or otherwise exercised by the American media during this period? Various studies draw widely different conclusions but it is perhaps the case that the media were not setting the agenda at all. They were in fact either reflecting and reporting political discontent after it had been voiced amongst the executive, or to a lesser extent doing the same with public discontent following it being voiced amongst the electorate. In support of this view, Bennett states:

...studies of the role of the press during the Vietnam War explain that the critical press coverage in the later years of the war was less a product of liberal or crusading journalists than a result of news organizations reporting views critical of government policies *after* [original author’s emphasis] those policies were attacked by powerful figures in Washington.⁵²

⁵⁰ Bennett, *op. cit.*, p.29. Interestingly, but perhaps unsurprisingly and predictably, Bennett also points out that conversely, ‘...media scholars on the left, such as Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, argue that when it comes to the important national interest issues of economics, military, and foreign policy, the press is more conservative than liberal and more lapdog than watchdog, following the political cues of corporate interests, Wall Street, and the government.’ He further states, ‘...both left and right continue to muster plenty of evidence for their charges of bias.’. *ibid.*

⁵¹ As a point of interest in a previous essay this author asserted that the American loss was actually caused by an overly optimistic American reliance on the small chance of success of only engaging in a limited war which, from the American perspective, had its parameters dictated and constrained by Cold War circumstance and not by the United States, against an enemy operating with no such parameters or inflationary concerns. As such the war should arguably have not been allowed to escalate beyond the deployment by President Kennedy of a handful of American advisors in 1962-1963. In the definitions given here this would fall into the second theory bracket.

⁵² Bennett, *op. cit.*, p.163.

Although undoubtedly capable of reinforcing them, the majority of the media were almost certainly not responsible for instigating whatever public or political perceptions they were reporting on. Although no doubt, there were small, mischievous media outlets and individuals attempting to subvert the government's war aims, many of the mainstream ones were simply providing accounts of the war which allowed their audiences to develop their own perceptions.

There are however opposing views (not least those of Nixon himself) and Hudson and Stanier maintain that the, 'Daily newspapers, weekly magazines and columnists of one sort or another undoubtedly had a great effect on public opinion.'⁵³. They further state that, 'There can be no possible doubt, for instance that Walter Cronkite...and other figures of his ilk had an enormous effect on public opinion.'⁵⁴. Nixon is absolute in his verdict with regard to this maintaining:

As *Newsweek* columnist Kenneth Crawford observed, this was the first war in our history during which our media were more friendly to our enemies than to our allies. American and South Vietnamese victories, such as the smashing of the Tet Offensive in 1968 were portrayed as defeats. The United States whose only intent was to help South Vietnam defend itself, was condemned as an aggressor. The Soviet-supplied North Vietnamese were hailed as liberators.⁵⁵

There is evidence to suggest that certain Presidents of the period were more sensitive to public opinion than others, and may well have let such opinion drive their actions. But there are others, such as President Lyndon B. Johnson, who adopted a kind of fatalism regarding what the public might have thought of him and the possibility of not securing re-election. In a speech in March 1968, Johnson stated:

With America's sons in the fields far away, with America's future under challenge right here at home, with our hopes and the world's hopes for peace in the balance every day, I do not believe that I should devote an hour or a day of my time to any personal partisan causes or to any duties other than the awesome duties of this office-the Presidency of your country. Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President.⁵⁶

Nixon was almost certainly not quite as obsessive about public opinion as some have suggested, but he did regard it as important, stating in his memoirs that:

More than ever before, television showed the terrible human suffering and sacrifice of war. Whatever the intention behind such relentless and literal reporting of the war, the result was a serious demoralization [*sic*] of the home front, raising the question [of]

⁵³ Hudson and Stanier, op. cit., p. 104.

⁵⁴ *ibid.* p. 105. Hudson and Stanier are likely referring in particular here to Walter Cronkite's famous 1968 speech on CBS news, when following the Tet Offensive, Cronkite declared that he believed the war to be unwinnable for the United States. President Johnson is popularly maintained to have declared, 'If I have lost Walter, I have lost Middle America.'. In *ibid.*

⁵⁵ In *ibid.*, p.116.

⁵⁶ *Lyndon B. Johnson Speeches: Remarks on Decision not to seek Re-election* [online]. Available at, http://www.millercenter.virginia.edu/scripps/digitalarchive/speeches/spe_1968_0331_johnson [Accessed 28 April 2007].

whether America would ever again be able to fight an enemy abroad with strength and unity of purpose at home.⁵⁷

However it is vital to carefully analyse what is meant by *public opinion*. Furthermore it is important to note that such opinion is arguably only of real importance, even within a democracy, if it translates into tangible action. Whilst such action may indeed take the form of exploiting the democratic suggestibility of elected politicians, it is possible that it needs to take a more radical and explosive form if it were to be a principal factor having a bearing on the course of conflict. As such, as a statement, *having an effect on public opinion* could be largely meaningless. The concept must be explored further and a separation made between simply having an effect on opinion through the relaying of facts, and having an effect on such opinion through the deliberate presentation of facts in a distorted manner.

Crucially, Badsey and Arno go further in their treatment of the importance of public opinion and suggest a model known as the elites hypothesis. Arno considers situation where it may only be, ‘...the leaders and decision-making elite who are the primary actors in international conflict, and public opinion can have only a rather direct and remote influence.’⁵⁸ Badsey states that the elites hypothesis was born from, ‘...the failure of opinion poll data to support any convincing model of a relationship between military operations, the media and public opinion...’⁵⁹. He further states, that:

According to the hypothesis the public opinion which matters is that which can be measured only indifferently by polling, the opinion of the various social and political elites...held to be highly influential in government, in the military and in the media. [Such elites indulge in] combining and re-combining to form constituencies on various issues.⁶⁰

It is then behind such elite opinion that interested elements of the public will align themselves, however, ‘...when elites dispute or oppose government policy, media coverage will reflect this confusion.’⁶¹. This is an empirically based theory and it is worth bearing in mind that there are others in existence which propose a greater degree of complexity, subtlety and nuance but are much more difficult to measure. For example one such alternative offers a, ‘...rather more sophisticated hypothesis...that politicians are genuinely more responsive to electoral public opinion

⁵⁷ Nixon, Richard, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), p.350.

⁵⁸ Arno, Andrew, *The News Media as Third Parties in National and International Conflict: Duobus Litigantibus Tertius Gaudet*, in Dissanayake, Wimal, and Arno, Andrew, *The News Media in National and International Conflict* (London: Westview Press, 1984), p.237. Arno is however not in complete agreement with this sentiment and states later that, ‘In general, however, I think this kind of argument seriously underestimates the power of the mass media audiences, and the reason for it is too simple a model of the dynamics of international conflict.’ *ibid.* It is important to note though that Arno is approaching his analysis from a perspective influenced by International Relations theory and that his conclusion is based on his anti-realist assertion that nation states are not the central actors in conflict when compared to domestic influences. As such he argues, broad public opinion may be more important than the elites hypothesis holds it to be. Note: the Latin in Arno’s title translates as, *when two men argue, the third man rejoices*, thus recognising the media as a content-generating business entity first and foremost.

⁵⁹ Badsey, Stephen, *Media, the Military and Public Opinion*, in Badsey (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.247.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ *ibid.*

than any poll can possibly show.⁶² In terms of its influence therefore, public opinion may simply be what politicians make it to be. Additionally there has been a method proposed which allows politicians to counter the effects of the elites hypothesis; this we shall return to shortly.

Nixon appeared to understand the effects that media reporting has on political elites and thus on wider public opinion. He links them explicitly in his memoirs when he states:

The Vietnam war was complicated by factors that had never occurred before in America's conduct of a war. Many of the most prominent liberals of both parties in Congress, having supported our involvement in Vietnam under Kennedy and Johnson, were now trying to back off...Cabinet members and columnists who supported the war were now swelling the ranks of the antiwar forces...the American news media had come to dominate domestic opinion about its purpose and conduct. In each night's TV news...the war was reported [with] little or no sense of the underlying purpose of the fighting...this contributed to the impression that we were fighting in military and moral quicksand, rather than toward an important and worthwhile objective.⁶³

In the views of those who are partial to blaming the media for turning public opinion against the war in the late 1960s, such a destructive and malign effect is exactly what elements of the American media in Vietnam were indeed wilfully having. But it is possible that it was not as deliberate as may be have been suggested by such individuals. There appear to be other broad and re-occurring explanations for distorted media stories, including the desire for sensationalism in order to increase audience figures and thus generate revenue, the unwitting use of democratically free and friendly media for the purposes of propaganda by a clever enemy, and the ignorance amongst layman journalists (and the public) of what is and what is not significant in a sophisticated and complex military campaign.

The relaying of pictures of North Vietnamese soldiers supported by the NLF, in the grounds of the United States' Embassy in Saigon in 1968 during the Tet Offensive supports all three of these explanations simultaneously. First, the coverage of the incident was no doubt sensationalised by elements of the press.⁶⁴ Second, many journalists' interpretations of the incident were lacking the

⁶² *ibid.*, p.249.

⁶³ Nixon, *op. cit.*, p.350.

⁶⁴ For example, Hudson and Stanier relay the following report from *The Washington Post* on 31 January 1968: 'The Viet Cong brought their largest offensive of the war to the US Embassy in Saigon early today. Guerrillas seized part of the building and held it against attacking American military policemen and paratroops. At least ten of the policemen were killed and several more wounded...The Americans finally regained control of the building by launching an assault from helicopters [which] they landed on the roof of the eight story building. Parts of the building has [*sic*] been held by the enemy for six hours...At the Embassy, opened only a few months ago and said to be proof against attack, American officials said they believed that an enemy suicide squad of about twenty men were holed up in the compound on part of the first floor of the building itself...At 7 a.m. according to the Associated Press, the fighting was still swirling around the building. Reporters were being kept at a distance.' Hudson and Stanier, *op. cit.*, p. 113. This is a report which would no doubt indicate tenuous American progress to a militarily ignorant public, as General Giap would have appreciated. It is also a report, similar to many contemporary reports of the incident, in which '...almost every detail...was false.' *ibid.*

context that would have been apparent in a much wider conflict to a military professional.⁶⁵ And third, it is arguable but nevertheless highly probable that the sole purpose of the Tet Offensive was not to secure military victory in a premature strike within a Maoist revolutionary framework, but was instead to deliver a North Vietnamese propaganda victory through the clever manipulation of television images. Although written records of his thoughts regarding this are unavailable, General Giap, the NVA's senior strategist, is often credited with having the sort of insight, purpose and patience that would indeed pursue such a long-term strategy, even if it meant short-term tactical and operational loss. As part of this, the American media arguably found themselves playing an unwitting role. The broadcasting of the Saigon embassy footage is exactly what Giap would have wanted in order to secure the tactically costly but strategically victorious outcome he desired.

If this is indeed the case and Giap was as calculating as this proposes, then intriguingly we appear to have an authoritarian, communist regime making full propaganda use of a completely free, democratically inclined American media. It is worth reflecting on how this reinforces the proposals made within this study regarding what appears to be the necessity for undemocratic states to become the primary instigating point for malevolent media influence. To certain elements of the American executive of the time (notably Richard Nixon shortly afterwards) the media's actions during the Tet Offensive were partly responsible for instigating the curtailment of the conflict to an end not favourable to the United States and therefore inciting continuing efforts by the North Vietnamese. To General Giap, the media would have simply been on this occasion welcome but unwitting propaganda tools. As such they are not to blame in the sense that Nixon and those like him would have them be.

Neither do the public themselves seem to be to blame in the sense that some may have them. Indeed no matter who it was that Giap himself may have believed he was targeting, it appears to have been the American elites (military, political, media) who were on the receiving end. As Badsey states, '...the explanation for the alleged collapse of public opinion in the aftermath of the Tet offensive, which cannot be demonstrated from opinion polls, is that it was elite public support that collapsed, including a significant part of the elites within the government itself.'⁶⁶ This would support the elites hypothesis previously discussed. The apparent confusion that the broadcasting of images from the Tet Offensive generated was exactly what Nixon would have found so hard to overcome. But it is likely that it is possible to overcome it and the Canadian General Major-Lewis Mackenzie, who commanded UN forces in Sarajevo has argued that such confusion can arguably be countered through firm government action and clear policies. An example of this according to

⁶⁵ The Tet Offensive of 1968 was a resounding tactical and operational defeat for the NVA and the NLF, and their losses crippled their armed forces for a considerable period. Although strategically it was clearly a success as was intended by General Giap.

⁶⁶ Badsey, *op. cit.*, pp.248-249.

Badsey, ‘..may perhaps be seen in the attempts of the Nixon White House to generate a firm policy over Vietnam.’⁶⁷.

Such an approach presents difficulties for a government who may be struggling to identify just whom it is that they should target with their message, and just how it is that they should package it. A policy may be firm and clear to the politician, yet still remain misunderstood to the layman (including the elite layman) who possesses neither the specific education nor perhaps the sophistication required to grasp it. This is almost certainly the origin of the so-called soundbite; a vicious circle supported by public ignorance, media time broadcast constraints and the necessity for a government to distil complexity into a readily understandable and popularly transmittable form in order to account for these constraints.

However, even when we acknowledge such difficulty it reasonable to argue that in the Vietnam war, perhaps a major wilful distorter of truth was in fact the United States government itself. This may have been for a number of reasons many of which are still evident today in the government-media relationship. Such supposed governmental distortion from an elected political body could stem from a genuinely unpleasant, illiberal attempt to disguise mistakes coupled with a paranoid obsession (or misunderstanding of course) regarding the importance of public opinion. It could also arise as a result of the limitations of the broadcast reach of an intelligent executive (when compared to the almost ubiquitous reach of the commercial press) which is attempting to overlay a degree of context onto laymens’ storytelling.

President Nixon in particular often stands accused of wilful distortion of the truth during the Vietnam War. Rubin states:

The major difference between the record of Nixon and his closest White House associates and the records of his predecessors is that he and his cronies manufactured distortions as products of administrative routine. The cancer which began with public illusions after World War II had spread not only to the underlings trying to cover up their failures but to the chief steward of the public trust at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.⁶⁸

Rubin’s opinion of Nixon is no doubt influenced by the President’s behaviour during the Watergate incident. However, whilst one should be take care to avoid suffering from some sort of morally orientated judgement which might prove an obscurant to analysis, Nixon’s attempts at press manipulation, on a personal level at least, are arguably not dissimilar from those that would be made by Milosevic some three decades later.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Rubin, Bernard, *Media, Politics and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.119.

Indeed Nixon's director of telecommunications policy, Clay T. Whitehead appears at one point in 1971 to have been highlighting and emphasising the federal government's licensing powers as a warning to broadcasters.⁶⁹ This view was reflected by Walter Cronkite when in 1971 he appeared before the US Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights stating that,

There are pressures exerted by high government officials who suggest that if we don't put our own house in order, that is, report the news the way they would like it reported, then "perhaps it is time that the networks were made more responsive to the views of the Nation, and more responsive to the people they serve." The speaker might, indeed, disclaim any intention of censoring broadcast journalists, but when the speaker is a high official of the administration that appoints the Commission that holds life or death power over the broadcast industry, a broadcast journalist and his employer might be excused for thinking that it sounds like a threat.⁷⁰

Pressure of this nature would be disconcerting in a democracy and if such a serious charge is to be made then it would be prudent to separate it from what may have simply *seemed* like governmental dishonesty. American strategic deception would have prevented absolute truthfulness and indeed may have promoted dishonesty. In addition the fluidity of the war situation, official optimism and the need for best-case presentation, and the lack of a long-term plan may have made governmental statements issued in honesty appear to be dishonest just a few months later.⁷¹

As this section closes, it is worth recapping on the central points in this analysis of media influence during America's war in Vietnam. First, it appears that the domestic American media probably had little influence on the incitement of conflict; the level of such influence being the primary purpose that this study sets out to demonstrate. It is unlikely that either the American military or the NVA fought as a result of what the media was saying. The United States government was the central factor in that aspect and although not the only belligerent, it could be argued that incitement lay with them. It is also important to note that the war was pursued in what may be considered a constitutional way. For example, drafts were issued, rather than ad-hoc militias raised. Such facts in turn support the contention of this study that an undemocratic government in charge of an enslaved press, and operating in a deliberate and wilfully malevolent propogandist manner is what may be required to actually incite hostilities successfully through the use of the media.

Second, it is debatable whether or not the media also had any effect on catalysing the end of the conflict, or at least on the withdrawal of American troops, despite the commonly held belief in much literature that they should bear such responsibility. There is evidence to support both views, but this study contends that such influence is often mistakenly over-exaggerated. Despite this it is clear

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 126.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ Walton, C. Dale, *The Myth of Inevitable U.S. Defeat in Vietnam* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002), p.36.

that the media were not completely impotent and the degree of importance one attaches to public opinion is the key to unlocking this analysis. Broadly speaking it appears that if the opinions of the political elites were affected by the media, then the government might need to counter it, as this is from where public opinion was formed and where it appears to have mattered.

So were the American media simply benign bystanders and witnesses to the conflict? There is little doubt that various media bodies held their own agenda, but the influence they managed to wield in either inciting the fighting or indeed curtailing it appears to be small. For it to be larger there would need to be a confluence of factors such as those discussed in the case of the former Yugoslavia which were just not apparent in this case. Whilst such a conclusion may contrast sharply with that held by proponents of the third theory of American failure, that of malevolent media influence, discussed in the opening paragraph of this section, it is nevertheless borne out by reasoned analysis. This is an impassioned analysis, unburdened by the possible agenda setting of some of those such as Richard Nixon who were indeed involved at the heart of the enterprise.

Media Influence as a Factor in the Rwandan Genocide 1994

The first section of this study examined how it appears necessary to have an authoritarian aspect to governmental circumstances if a convincing case is to be made that the media can indeed incite conflict to any significant degree. That fact that such an authoritarian aspect was lacking in the case of the war in Vietnam, or at least a mainstream free press existed that was resistant to it, offers supporting evidence for this position. It is not possible of course to examine every conflict and circumstance, but in order to avoid the charge of selective evidence, this study will now examine the circumstances surrounding the conflict in Rwanda, particularly during the genocide of 1994. In doing so the study will contend that some elements of the domestic Rwandan media behaviour in that conflict bears much similarity to that of the Yugoslavian media, and thus a corresponding dissimilarity to the case of the American media during the Vietnam war. Accordingly the symmetry between the Rwandan and Yugoslavian circumstances produced similar effects as a result of domestic media behaviour.

Again the main element of the Rwandan media which was unequivocally complicit in helping to provoke and organise the genocide in 1994 was under official control. They were used as a mechanism for inciting conflict through the use of a very similar model to that used by Milošević, that is by engaging in the deliberate construction and labelling of supposed ethnic differences, broadcast to a susceptible audience and resulting in large scale violence. But the Rwandan media also went further. In particular the radio station *Radio-Television Libre des Mille Collines* (RTLM) was used as an organisational tool for facilitating and coordinating the genocide. RTLM would

broadcast the names of those to be killed, places to locate the victims and times for those indulging in the killing to gather together.

Before the study continues, for the sake of clarity (due to it being a conflict much less commonly understood than either of the other two in this study), it is worth giving a brief historical overview of the circumstances of the conflict in Rwanda. Such an overview will allow the analysis to then resume from an understood foundation. The Rwandan civil war took place between 1990 and 1994⁷² when a Tutsi dominated rebel movement calling itself the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invaded Rwanda from neighbouring Uganda. Their intention was to overthrow the ruling Rwandan government of President Habyarimana, whom they held responsible for allowing a perceived secondary status to exist amongst the Tutsis in comparison to the majority Hutus. A ceasefire was agreed in 1992 between the RPF and the Rwandan Army. This was subsequently broken in 1994 following the shooting down of the president's aeroplane and his consequent death. Upon this event, the Rwandan Army, with the assistance of local *Interahamwe* militias commenced upon a campaign of genocide directed at both the Tutsi minority and Hutu moderate opposition alike, as well as the units of the RPF. The Tutsi dominated RPF responded by reassuming their previous civil war combatant status, which eventually led to their victory over the Rwandan Army and government in July 1994. On 19 July, the RPF established a multiparty 'Government of National Unity'.⁷³

Estimates place the number killed during the massacre at around eight hundred thousand.⁷⁴ The number of displaced people, both those displaced internally and those refugees fleeing into neighbouring Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) is estimated at between one and two million.⁷⁵ The worldwide arrests and subsequent trials for genocide and other crimes against humanity of seventy-two senior government administrators, military leaders, political leaders, and religious leaders still continues in 2007 under the auspices of the UN ICTR.⁷⁶

The contention of this study is that elements of the media were entirely complicit in organising and facilitating the genocide of 1994. This was enabled through both technical means, for example the provision of broadcast stations for radio messages, and also through assistance with the construction of the notion of ethnic tension between Hutus and Tutsis. This domestic media influence was wilful and deliberate. However McNulty argues it goes wider than this and maintains that an incorrect notion of ethnicity as a genuine cause of violence, as reported by the majority of

⁷² Some scholars separate the civil war from the genocide, in which case it ended in 1993. This author sees no requirement for such a distinction.

⁷³ *International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda: Chronology of the Rwandan Genocide* [online]. Available from, <http://69.94.11.53/commemoration/faq/faq-5.asp> [accessed 20 April 2007].

⁷⁴ *Rwanda Remembers Genocide Victims* [online]. Available from, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3606487.stm> [accessed 20 April 2007].

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ *International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda: General Information* [online]. Available from, <http://69.94.11.53/default.html> [accessed 20 April 2007].

the Western media, made such international media bodies a factor in causing a continuation of the conflict. She states,

Misrepresentation of these conflicts as ethnically-driven facilitated Western interventionary responses, the rationale for which may be summarized [*sic*] as “they are mad, we are sane, we must save them from themselves”, and served, whether deliberately or accidentally to make a bad situation worse.⁷⁷

Whilst McNulty’s summary of the rationale behind Western intervention is simplistic, and may in fact present a better case for Western governments *not* to intervene (as opposed to ‘saving’), her position bears many similarities to the case in the Balkans and again it appears that ‘...the media became accomplices in the power politics of external actors with interests in the region.’⁷⁸ Thus it is reasonable from a certain perspective to propose that the international media may indeed have been partly responsible for making a bad situation worse; this study will explore this extra dimension of international media complicity later. However first it is necessary to examine the degree of domestic Rwandan media complicity, and through analysis demonstrate the level of responsibility they should arguably bear for their role in the incitement of genocide.

So how was it done? Commonly referred to in the Rwandan context as *hate media*, the media outlets under contention here and used in Rwanda in the early 1990s took the form of mainly print and radio. The illiteracy rate made the latter the primary tool for the spreading of information (and therefore disinformation) and was used in a number of ways during the conflict. This central and pivotal role that the radio media played in the continuation of this conflict is recognised in the fact that, as a result of its corrosive influence, the Clinton administration would later (in 1999) pass a Presidential Decision Directive which would allow for the electronic jamming of radio stations in such circumstances.⁷⁹ Indeed even though the United States initially declined to electronically jam Rwandan radio in 1994 on both legal advice from the State Department and freedom of speech grounds, Thompson and Price state:

The explosive mobilising role played in Rwanda in 1994 by *Radio-Television Libre des Mille Collines* (RTL), with its explicit incitement for Hutus to slaughter Tutsi, became the common point of reference in arguments that the international community should develop [an electronic] capacity to intervene against incendiary media in conflict zones.⁸⁰

The evidence against elements of the Rwandan media appears absolutely clear cut. Not least because three journalists, referred to by Kofi Annan in the opening quote of this study, were to be

⁷⁷ McNulty, Mel, *Media Ethnicization and the International Response to War and Genocide in Rwanda*, in Allen and Seaton (eds.), op. cit. p.269.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Des Forges, Alison, *Call to Genocide*, in Thompson, Allan (ed.), *The Media and the Rwandan Genocide* [online]. Available from <http://www.idrc.ca/openebooks/338-0/> [accessed 27 April 2007].

⁸⁰ Thompson, Mark and Price, Monroe E., ‘Intervention, Media and Human Rights’, *Survival, The Quarterly Journal of the International Institute for Strategic Studies*, Vol. 45, No 1, Spring 2003, p.186.

convicted in a 2003 ICTR judgement for their incitement of hatred and their role in encouraging genocide. Hassan Ngeze the founder of the propaganda magazine *Kangura*⁸¹ was sentenced to thirty-five years in prison. Ferdinand Nahimana and Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, the owners of RTLM, were sentenced to life imprisonment. In the range of charges for which they were found variously guilty and not guilty, the one most relevant to this study is the count that they were all guilty of Direct and Public Incitement to Commit Genocide.⁸²

These individuals were respectively a professional journalist, a Professor of History and Director of the Rwandan Office of Information, and a lawyer and Director of Political Affairs in the Rwandan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The officially sanctioned links and deliberate forming of RLTM and *Kangura* are thus apparent. The indictment against them confirmed such official sanctioning of their activities, reading:

With the intention of ensuring widespread dissemination of the calls to ethnic violence, prominent figures from the President's circle set up true hate media, which would exercise great influence over the Rwandan people. Thus the creation of...*RTLM* and of the newspaper *Kangura* was a part of the strategy and of the same logic. As early as 1993, the Tutsis and political opponents were targeted, identified by name and threatened by these media. Many of them were among the first victims of the massacres of April 1994.⁸³

Milošević's Socialist Party of Serbia party may have co-opted the existing Politika group and hijacked it for their purposes; the three aforementioned individuals, in concert with others, in fact *created* their own outlets for the spreading and manufacture of hatred amongst ethnic groups.

Of note is the fact that these Rwandan individuals were commonly accepted to be the first people to be sentenced for the incitement of genocide since the hanging of the Nazi journalist Julius Streicher in 1946, for the anti-semitic propaganda he published in his newspaper *Der Stürmer*.⁸⁴ In delivering his verdict the senior judge at their ICTR trial stated,

The newspaper and the radio explicitly and repeatedly, in fact relentlessly, targeted the Tutsi population for destruction. Demonizing the Tutsi as having inherently evil qualities, equating the ethnic group with 'the enemy' and portraying its women as seductive enemy agents, the media called for the extermination of the Tutsi ethnic group as a response to the political threat that they associated with Tutsi ethnicity.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Translates as *Wake-up!*

⁸² *ICTR Case Name: Media Case, Case Number: ICTR-99-52-T, Minutes of Proceedings, Trial Day 241*, dated 3 December 2003 [online]. Available from, <http://69.94.11.53/ENGLISH/cases/Nahimana/minutes/2003/031203.pdf> [accessed 23 April 2007].

⁸³ *United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, The Prosecutor against Hassan Ngeze, Amended Indictment*, dated 10 November 1999, p.5 [online]. Available from, <http://69.94.11.53/ENGLISH/cases/Ngeze/indictment/ngezeamend.pdf> [accessed 2 May 2007].

⁸⁴ For an overview and illustration of the material available in Julius Streicher's publication see, *Der Stürmer Table of Contents* [online]. Available from, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/sturmertoc.html> [Accessed 21 May 2007].

⁸⁵ Thompson, Allan, *Introduction*, in, Thompson (ed.), op. cit.

The message of hatred and dissent directed towards the Tutsi in *Kangura* was spread by word of mouth amongst those who could not read. It was also read aloud at political rallies. The fact that a large part of the population was illiterate and therefore uneducated may lead one to consider that this may be a pre-requisite for such media to have so large an effect. Such consideration however does not stand up to the evidence when one considers the cases of Nazi Germany in the 1930s and 1940s, and Yugoslavia in the 1980s and 1990s. Both of these countries had highly educated populations.

So if it is not a lack of education which leads to such suggestibility then what might it be? Whilst of course remaining cognisant of other causative factors beyond the media, the fact that the positive reception of such propaganda by all types of population worldwide has historically occurred says much about the persuasive influence of the media in an unusual psychological sense. If an item is in the media, then no matter its veracity or the seriousness of its media outlet, it could be argued that it possesses a certain level of sanction when absorbed by the human mind. Often only when individuals read, view or listen to stories of their own intimate concerns, experiences or specialist areas do we realise the levels of inaccuracies recorded in most of them. Despite this we still often tend to remain suggestible enough to take as fact stories that are outside our concerns. From the psychological perspective why this should be is beyond the scope of this study, but in many ways it may simply be a result of the way media is packaged and the message delivered; a slick production may assume a status it might not deserve. Whilst the broadcasts on RTLM and the features within *Kangura* would not be considered slick by modern Western standards, within the context in which they were published they were convincing enough.

The contention that elements of the Rwandan media were central to inciting the events of 1994 and before appears to be beyond doubt an analytical *cul-de-sac* will be encountered if this is further pursued. Therefore this study will now examine in more detail the role played by the international media in this conflict. It is not being suggested here that the actions of the international media were in any degree as witting and manipulative as those of RTLM and *Karunga*, however it is arguable that the way in which the conflict was framed and reported (and also ignored) by the non-Rwandan media may have had other unintended and unhelpful effects.

It is proposed that this came about in a number of ways. First the selectivity of media outlets as to what they wish to broadcast or publish should remove any temptation on the part of policymakers to depend on them as serious monitors of world events, relied upon to provide the cue for possible preventative action. Large television sets bearing the news of several broadcasters are now a regular feature in many operations rooms from which government or military policy is planned and executed. This was also the case in the early 1990s, however the television news in the United States almost totally omitted any reports regarding Rwanda in 1993, thereby making the events of

1994 (which were actually several years in the planning) seem an even bigger shock to the West.⁸⁶ This is not a criticism of the media. They are of course free to choose what they wish to broadcast and frame as news, in line with the drivers that govern their output as revenue-generating or audience-gathering businesses. Rather it is a statement of their limitations as facilitators of early warning that potential interventionists should be aware of.

Second, the news media may have provided an important dimension in the thinking of the American administration's decision not to intervene in Rwanda whilst the killing was occurring during the genocide of 1994. McNulty's earlier categorisation, reflected in the Western media's framing of the situation would have allowed a degree of space to be maintained between the United States and the Rwandan problem. In this the electorate, the elites or whomsoever holds influence on the executive would have been unwittingly complicit. Little pressure would have been made on or within the administration to get involved as it is a problem that only 'they' can understand and resolve. There are echoes here of the situation which arguably occurred in the Balkans. A convenient and easy framing of a conflict as being inextricably tangled up with practically indecipherable ethnic tensions and tribal histories may well have made Western elites turn away and therefore may have provided the reason for their governments to do so as well.

But it is worth bearing in mind two important factors here. The first is that the United States would hardly be likely to intervene anyway in a situation in which it had no clear national interest. For this situation to change it may require significant public (or political elite) pressure being brought to bear at critical moments in an unfolding order of both domestic and international events. The previous occasion when President Bush had intervened in a conflict in an arguably entirely altruistic manner had been in Somalia in 1992 and it is likely that the unfortunate outcome of that intervention, from some American perspectives at least, was still being felt.⁸⁷

The second factor is directly related to this and exists with regard to the effect the media had on public opinion during that short intervention in the Horn of Africa. The famous broadcasting on some television news stations of the abandoned and half-clothed bodies of American servicemen being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu by Somali crowds appears to have made a significant impact on public opinion in the United States. The actual outcome of the American action in Somalia, and the media reporting of that action, had perhaps conflated to ensure that the

⁸⁶ Strobel, *op. cit.*, p.159.

⁸⁷ Robinson provides a summary of various author's explanations as to why President Bush decided to intervene in Somalia, including some empirically based research regarding the number of media items published during the period, corresponding to a supposed increase in State Department interest. Of interest is Robinson's contention that there does appear to be some evidence that media coverage provided at least some of the motivation for the United States to intervene, although other factors such as aid agency and congressional lobbying may have provided a stronger incentive. President Bush himself appears to have been affected on a personal level by images of suffering and is maintained to have acknowledged this in an interview in 1999. However as the media did not devote much attention to the area *until* American troops intervened, there is stronger evidence that the media acted as catalyst for the removal of these troops later, rather than as a catalyst for their insertion. Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp.49-62.

United States would not intervene during the genocide in Rwanda, even when it had the capability to do so.⁸⁸

The Rwandan case stands as an explicit illustration of how the intentions of ruling elements, the position of the media and select other factors can conflate with disastrous results for the country and the population at large. No study has attempted to counter this position of domestic Rwandan media guilt and complicity. The only possible defences have already been witnessed, in a legal sense at least, in the successful trials and occasional appeals that have taken place under the auspices of the ICTR. An academic counter is unlikely to materialise, even from the viewpoint of the staunchest revisionist.

Conclusion

This study set out to demonstrate the level of responsibility borne by the media in the incitement and continuation of conflict. Although apparently often prone to simplistic and poorly informed comment, this is not a simple undertaking. It has been necessary to disentangle the various elements of the media from each other as there can be no all encompassing entity open to a generalised analysis. It has then been necessary to further establish the mechanisms and motives behind these media elements' behaviours, specifically asking the question as to whether or not they were state-controlled or functioning freely. In doing this, the study has demonstrated that at the very least in the select cases under consideration for the media to genuinely have influence of any degree on the incitement of hostilities, it must be in the propagandistic service of an autocratic or corrupted state.

The explanation for this is likely to be a fairly simple one in itself and hinges upon two factors. First, public officials in such circumstances appear likely to be believed. If these individuals fabricate and then declare and promote a state of extreme ethnic tension,⁸⁹ then this is likely to be accepted. Although Mueller has argued that the violence inflicted in both of these conflicts was largely perpetrated by drunken criminal and hooligan opportunists,⁹⁰ this does not in any way alter the study's conclusion regarding the influential position the media can have in such circumstances; rather the opposite.

Second, the state's control of the media and its use of it as a tool of conflict incitement is simply another element of its intended military campaign. The authoritarian, malign state has the physical tools and will deploy them regardless, and within this it may view the captive media as a critical

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p.146.

⁸⁹ Or indeed any other type of emotive tension.

⁹⁰ Mueller, *op. cit.*, p.43.

enabler, a shaper of attitudes and an organisational means for the rallying of arms, rather than a reporter of news.

The study's conclusions regarding the impact on the course of conflict of the behaviour of a freely operating media largely devoid of state control offer less clarity. The constructivist framing of conflict in certain terms, certainly adopted by many international media elements in their reporting of the Rwandan and Balkans conflicts, can be considered to perhaps have been not without consequence. At worst this is usually an unwitting side-effect of the media as a business entity, attempting to capture airtime or publishing space, and over simplifying circumstances in order to achieve and retain the brevity such a trade demands.

The domestic American media's behaviour during the United States' involvement in Vietnam presents a slightly different case and although there was clearly framing occurring, its effects appear to be arguably negligible. There are many studies which do not assume this position but they often appear to lack substantial evidence. Despite this the Vietnam case does raise the interesting question of the media targeting of elites as a necessary factor if public opinion is to be influenced in a functioning and stable democracy. In addition the analysis of this case asks the obverse of the title question and proposes that it is unlikely that the media even genuinely influenced the termination of the conflict. Certainly Nixon was concerned about what he might have viewed as their corrosive influence, but perhaps he need not have been. This arguably remains the case today in the United Kingdom, and attempts at media manipulation by the military or the wider government may be largely futile; little more than a scattered message to an imprecise and un-influential audience, with predictable results.

So is the media therefore liable for the incitement and continuation of conflict? Clearly the answer is both yes and no and depends greatly upon who they are the circumstances under which they are functioning. Media bodies in democracies are possibly largely impotent in the majority of circumstances and without careful study it is sometime too easy to over-inflate their impact. Writing in April 1976, not long after the fall of Saigon and the withdrawal of the last American diplomatic and military presence there, Rubin states, 'Media politics is relevant to every individual and group in this nation, since every special interest is dependent, to a substantial degree, upon the adequacy of the mass media'.⁹¹ Rubin is concerned with the necessity for the media to serve the public in a competent and professional manner and even links this need to the very survival of democracy.⁹² Rubin's perspective is certainly honourable, nevertheless it must be asked whether or not he is exaggerating the routine role of the media and the consequences of their behaviour in a functioning and largely contented democratic situation. The media may arguably have *some*

⁹¹ Rubin, Bernard, op. cit., p. xiv.

⁹² *ibid.*

impact on shaping policy in these circumstances of government, even when military lives may be put at risk through moderately media-provoked deployment (such as the aforementioned deployment by an international force to Northern Iraq in 1991). However such an impact appears to be rarely encountered in any genuine sense and is often limited to little more than a recording and relaying of events with which a government may have a burgeoning interest anyway, but may lack the specific information collection assets in theatre needed to gather its own images or reports.

Conversely, and on occasion as has been discussed, media bodies can be a more powerful tool. This tool is open to abuse in a specific range of circumstances and arguably unequivocally complicit and liable for catalysing the occurrence and prolongation of fighting. This study has argued that such was the case in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. However, to generalise as such, without examining what this study proposes as the necessary conflation of circumstances and factors, would perhaps represent a vital error of analysis.

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