

Resumé du Cours

– L'influence des Média et de la société civile dans le cadre des conflits –

Le concept de « securitization »

Securitization is premised on one main assumption: **the enunciation of security *itself* creates a new social order wherein 'normal politics' is bracketed**. An issue is “securitized” when it gets constructed into a threat. According to Waever, “something is a security problem when the elites declare it to be so”, and **something becomes securitized when it has been declared a security problem and this problem is accepted by the audience**. Securitization is based on a **speech act**.

La sécurisation est conçue comme forme extrême de la politisation, ou de la construction d'un événement en tant que « problème politique », permettant de **faire appel à des moyens extraordinaires au nom de la sécurité**. L'acte de sécurisation suppose de légitimer l'enjeu constitué en tant qu'enjeu fondamental de sécurité auprès de l'opinion publique.

L'analyse de ces actes se focalise sur plusieurs thèmes: **qui sécurise? sur quels thèmes (menaces)? pour qui** (objet référent: quel est l'objet à protéger? cela peut être une population, une culture, etc.) ? **pourquoi? avec quels résultats? Sous quelles conditions?** L'analyse étudie ainsi les relations entre l'acteur de la sécurisation, l'objet référent, et le public de cet acte.

A priori rien n'empêche de constituer n'importe quel entité ou objet en problème de sécurité: les limites à la sécurisation sont fixées par l'opinion publique et ce qu'elle est prête à accepter. On peut ainsi dire que le nazisme avait réussi à convaincre leurs électeurs que « les Juifs, les Slaves et les Tziganes » constituaient un problème de sécurité vital pour leur « identité nationale » et pour la survie de « leur race ». Dans leur ouvrage *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (1998), Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver et Jaap de Wilde évoquent **Cinq champs politiques où peut avoir lieu une opération de sécurisation: le champ militaire, politique, économique, social et environnemental**. Par exemple, la notion de crise économique en Europe a permis de faire accepter la mise en place de mesure d'austérité qui n'aurait autrement jamais été accepté par les populations.

Une fois qu'une entité a été sécurisée, il est possible de légitimer la mise en œuvre de moyens extraordinaires pour faire face à la nouvelle menace: déclaration de l'état d'urgence ou de la loi martiale, etc. Les différents domaines peuvent être combinés. Ainsi, lors de l'invasion d'Irak, on peut affirmer que le conflit a été rendu possible par une sécurisation aux Etats Unis dans le champ militaire (au sujet des prétendues armes de destruction massive détenues par Saddam Hussein) et dans le champ social (la défense des droits de

l'homme en Irak contre un régime dictatorial). **Le contrôle accru de l'immigration et des frontières après les attentats du 11 septembre 2001**, exigence dont le caractère contraignant a été formalisé par la [Résolution 1373 du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies](#), **peut également être considéré comme un exemple de sécurisation**, transformant **l'immigration d'un « problème économique et social » en un « problème de sécurité nationale » liée au terrorisme**. It is the idea of macro-securitization, framing security issues, agendas and relationships on a system-wide basis,” they “are based on universalist constructions of threats and/or referent objects.” Buzan offers two possible reasons for this recent phenomenon, one being globalization, and the other a “belief in a universalist ideology”. In the article, Buzan cites the Cold War as a historical example of macro-securitization and states phenomenon was “capable of structuring the mainstream security dynamics of interstate society for several decades”. Buzan wonders if the War on Terrorism could possibly rise as a macro-securitization to the same level. He even offers the possibility that **states (in particularly the U.S.) need securitization “as a part of their day-to-day functioning”** and that after the Cold War, there was, in fact a threat deficit that was filled by the aftermath of 9/11 and the subsequent “War on Terrorism”.

Securitization theory argues that language is not only concerned with the balance of power, but it is also constitutive of that very social reality. **Critic: the context of the act is defined narrowly, with the focus only on the moment of intervention (e.g: the resistance to the war in Iraq and the change within public opinion).**

For Buzan, two constitutive rules, both pertaining in fact to the linguistic competence of the actors involved, are required for a successful securitization — **‘(1) the internal, linguistic-grammatical — to follow the rule of the act . . .; and (2) the external, contextual and social — to hold a position from which the act can be made** (“The particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked”). **Unless the players follow these rules, the linguistic construction of a security problem — securitization — is not possible.**

For Balzacq, securitization relies on a strategic (pragmatic) practice that occurs within, and as part of, a configuration of circumstances, including the context, the psycho-cultural disposition of the audience, and the power that both speaker and listener bring to the interaction. Securitization is a sustained strategic practice aimed at convincing a target audience to accept, *based on what it knows about the world*, **the claim that a specific development (oral threat or event) is threatening enough to deserve an immediate policy to alleviate it.**

The speech act

In essence, the basic idea of the speech act theory is simply expressed — certain statements, according to Austin, do more than merely describe a given reality and, as such, cannot be judged as false or true. Instead **these utterances realize a specific action; they ‘do’ things — they are ‘performatives’** as opposed to ‘constatives’ that simply report states of affairs and are thus subject to truth and falsity tests. From Austin’s perspective, each sentence can convey three

types of acts, the combination of which constitutes the total speech act situation — (i) locutionary — the utterance of an expression that **contains a given sense and reference**; (ii) illocutionary — the act performed in articulating a locution. In a way, this category captures the **explicit performative class of utterances**, and as a matter of fact, the concept ‘speech act’ is literally predicated on that sort of agency; and (iii) perlocutionary, which is the ‘consequential effects’ or ‘sequels’ that are aimed at evoking the **feelings, beliefs, thoughts or actions** of the target audience. This triadic characterization of kind of acts is summed up by **Jürgen Habermas** in the following — ‘**to say something, to act in saying something, to bring about something through acting in saying something**’ (emphasis in original).

Sincerity while saying the speech act is fundamental.

The use of **the concept ‘security’ modifies the context**. Yet, this use must be aligned with an external context — independent from the use of language — to yield the desired effect. Three, in one view, I retain the broad focus on linguistic competence, according to which the power of **security utterances derives from the social position of the speaker; but I add that language has an intrinsic force that rests with the audience’s scrutiny of truth claims, with regard to a threat, being made by the speaker. The audience, political agency and context are crucial**, if overlooked, aspects of securitization that should guide the analysis of the linguistic manufacture of threats in world politics.

The propaganda model (Chomsky)

The dominant media are embedded in the market system. They are looking for profit. seeking businesses, and **owned by very wealthy people** (or other companies); and they are **funded largely by advertisers** who are also profit-seeking entities, and who want their advertisements to appear in a supportive selling environment. The media also **lean heavily on government and major business firms as information sources** and both efficiency and political considerations and, frequently, **overlapping interests**, cause a certain degree of solidarity to prevail among the government, major media and other corporate businesses. Government and large non-media business. firms are also best positioned (and sufficiently wealthy) to be able to **pressure the media with threats of withdrawal of advertising or TV licenses**, libel suits and other direct and indirect modes of attack. **The media are also constrained by the dominant ideology, which heavily featured anti-communism before and during the Cold War era**, and was often mobilized to induce the media to support (or refrain from criticizing) US attacks on small states that were labeled communist.

These factors are linked together, reflecting the multi-leveled capability of government and powerful business entities and collectives (e.g. the Business Roundtable; the US Chamber of Commerce; the vast number of well heeled industry lobbies and front groups) to exert power over the flow of information. We noted that **the five factors involved—ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak (censure) and anti-communist ideology—work as “filters”** through which information must pass, and that individually and often in cumulative fashion. We stressed that the filters work mainly by the independent action of many individuals and organizations; and these frequently, but not always, have a common view of issues as well as similar interests. In short, the propaganda model describes a decentralized and non-conspiratorial market system of control and processing, although at times the government or one or more private actors may take initiatives and mobilize co-ordinated elite handling of an issue.

Propaganda campaigns can occur only when they are consistent with the interests of those controlling and managing the filters. The power of the US propaganda system lies in its ability to mobilize an elite consensus, to give the appearance of democratic consent, and to create enough confusion, misunderstanding and apathy in the general population to allow elite programs to go forward. We also emphasized the fact that there are often differences within the elite that open up space for some debate and even occasional (but very rare) attacks on the *intent* as well as the tactical means of achieving elite ends.

An objection concerned its applicability to local conflicts where the possibility of effective resistance was often greater than in the case of national issues; but **the propaganda model does not suggest that local and even larger victories are impossible, especially where the elites are divided or have limited interest in an issue.**

The model does suggest that the mainstream media, as elite institutions, commonly frame news and allow debate only within the parameters of elite perspectives; and that when the elite is really concerned and unified and/or when ordinary citizens are not aware of their own stake in an issue or are immobilized by effective propaganda, the media will serve elite interests uncompromisingly.

Are reporters even aware of the deeper sources of bias they may internalize? will they not tend to rationalize their behavior? Vietnam-->) the elite was sufficiently divided over tactics to allow space and considerable debate.

The model does describe a system in which the media serve the elite, but by complex processes incorporated into the model that involve mechanisms and policies whereby **the powerful protect their interests naturally and without overt conspiracy.** the media will be relatively open—mainly, when there are elite disagreements and when other groups in society are interested in, informed about and organized to fight about issues.

The dramatic changes in the economy, the communications industries and politics over the past dozen years have tended on balance to enhance the applicability of the propaganda model. **The first two filters—ownership and advertising— have become ever more important.** The decline of public broadcasting, the increase in corporate. power and global reach and the mergers and centralization of the media have made bottom-line considerations more influential in the US, in Europe and many other countries. In short, the professional autonomy of journalists has been reduced. **The third and fourth filters—sourcing and flak—have also strengthened as mechanisms of elite influence.** A reduction in the resources devoted to journalism means that those who subsidize the media by providing sources for copy gain greater leverage.

A major concern is also the **promulgation of misinformation or disinformation in the media.** Erroneous stories often result from misinformation or disinformation. Erroneous stories are defined as those stories appearing in the media that are not factually correct based upon the most current operational information from units on the ground.

Youtube and social media

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iNsHVAGyTMs>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nINORX006-c>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QeH1TKmYd4c>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBJ98EH-gGg>

While terms such as ‘the *YouTube* effect’ and ‘*YouTube* War’ are both sexy and **sound-bite friendly, they tend to deflect attention** away from the harsh political economic realities of the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the horrific numbers of victims of these conflicts whose deaths and injuries are far from ‘virtual’.

The clips uploaded ‘unofficially’ to the *YouTube* site, on the other hand, are not considered to be part of such large-scale, structured, institutionalized information campaigns. Importantly, these venues differ from their predecessors (radio, television, print and film) in that alternative, **counterhegemonic messages coexist – on the same sites – as the materials produced by the military**. In turn, these clips appear side by side with MNFIRAQ clips when searching the *YouTube* system, thus creating what could be called ‘**propagandistic dissonance**’: moments when overt propaganda is placed side-by-side with material that renders such propaganda impotent.

*For Andersen, propaganda and ‘militainment’ serve a very clear purpose: to **create a socio-political environment in which war becomes an acceptable (and accepted) tool within US driven geo-politics.***

What distinguishes these clips is that they all show (primarily) US forces engaged in gun battles, but **they only show the US troops and not the ‘targets’ of the fire. If the targets are shown, they are usually in the form of buildings or other inanimate subjects.** In this way, the gunfights maintain an air of ‘victimlessness’, with the human casualties of war not shown. **US troops are usually calm and collected, and show few outward signs of panic or fright.**

The majority of clips posted to *YouTube* do not show soldiers engaged in war crimes, violence or anti-social behavior, but rather taking part in the mundane, day-to-day activities one would associate with military personnel during free time: sitting around in tents, talking with colleagues, eating, singing songs and sending messages to loved ones back home.

Which clips, one might ask, best ‘represent’ the ‘reality’ of the conflict in Iraq?

The CNN effect

The **CNN effect** is a theory in political science and media studies that prostates that the development of the popular 24-hour international television news channel known as **Cable News Network**, or CNN, had a major impact on the conduct of states' foreign policy in the late Cold War period and that CNN and its subsequent industry competitors have had a similar impact in the post Cold War era. Professor Steven **Livingston identifies three distinct aspects that fall under the broad term of the CNN effect. The media may function alternately or simultaneously as (1) a policy agenda-setting agent, (2) an impediment to the achievement of desired policy goals, and (3) an accelerant to policy decision-making.**

The term's coinage reflects the pioneering role played by the network CNN in the field, whose "saturation coverage" of events like the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, the fall of Communism in eastern Europe, the first Gulf War, and the Battle of Mogadishu was viewed as being **strongly influential in bringing images and issues to the immediate forefront of American political consciousness and beyond.** Despite these origins, the term as used

generally refers to a broad range of real time modern media, and is not exclusive to CNN or even 24-hour news cycle broadcast cable news.

By focusing **instantaneous and ongoing media coverage** on a particular conflict, international incident, or diplomatic initiative, **the news cycle effectively demands political attention**, as governing politicians attempt to demonstrate that they are "on top of" current issues. The effect has been, according to Margaret Belknap, that "[t]he advent of real time news coverage has led to immediate public awareness and scrutiny of strategic decisions and military operations as they unfold." **Deeper penetration and wider broadcast of statements and actions by public figures may increase transparency, but it can also complicate sensitive diplomatic relationships between states or force an official reaction from governments that would otherwise prefer to minimize political risk by remaining noncommittal.** The information revolution and spread of global mass media through the Internet and international 24-hour news thus accelerates the policy-making process, requiring a faster tempo of decision and action to forestall the appearance of a leadership vacuum.

Former Secretary of State James Baker said of the CNN effect "The one thing it does, is to drive policymakers to have a policy position. I would have to articulate it very quickly. You are in real-time mode. **You don't have time to reflect.**" His former press secretary, Margaret Tutwiler, mirrors his sentiment: "Time for reaction is compressed. Analysis and intelligence gathering is out."

Natural Disasters and the "CNN Effect"

While the "CNN effect" most commonly refers to the effect that news media have on politics and government during political conflict, its effect on decisions made during natural disasters is also noteworthy. As videos and images are broadcast worldwide immediately after or even during natural disasters, these images may convince the public to donate money or pressure governments for immediate action.

The "CNN effect" may have played a role in increasing aid following the Asian tsunami (2004), the Kashmir earthquake (2005), Hurricane Katrina (2005), and the Sichuan earthquake in China (2008). Following the Asian tsunami, for instance, the media "blitz" that followed this natural disaster may have helped prompt an unprecedented outpouring of donations. "By February 2005, the international community had donated \$500 per person affected by the tsunami, compared to just 50 cents for each person affected by Uganda's 18-year war."

Public Diplomacy

Foreign policy has been democratized. In that context, **Nye coined the notion of Soft Power, which refers to "a nation winning influence abroad by persuasion and appeal rather than by threats or military force"**. The main function of PD is the promotion of Soft Power.

“the means to promote the national interest and the national security through understanding, informing and influencing broader publics in foreign countries”. In other words, Governments intend “to shape public opinion in other countries”, in order to sketch a favorable political environment abroad for their national interests.

The idea is that, through a bottom-up political mechanism, the civil society has the capacity to put pressure on the government’s policy making and then will indirectly influence our own national security and prosperity. However, a winning PD strategy must be founded on a two-way communication, a “genuine dialogue”. In other words, to successfully change and inform foreign public points of view, publics must believe their will is taken into consideration by our government. The effect of Public Diplomacy can be measured thanks to world opinion surveys and economic performance.

Public Diplomacy comprehends **two kinds of actions**: firstly, “**information furnishing activities**”, including distribution of information abroad and international broadcasting. It could be considered as propagandistic activities. Secondly, it involves activities of “**international education and cultural exchanges**”. For these actions, PD targets the general public in foreign societies and more specific non-officials groups, organizations and individuals. For the American Department of State, the leading tools of PD are “**publications, motion pictures, cultural exchanges, radio, and television**”. It means that Public Diplomacy, promoting the country’s soft power, does not rely solely on state structures. Public Diplomacy involves a large set of people and interests that go further the actual government’s policy. **The success of PD depends on the synergy between government’s policy and societal actors for broadcasting shared values and an attractive image of the state.** It also means that PD is asymmetrical, relating officials persuading non-state actors abroad, but also non-state actors cooperating with the government influencing foreign non state actors.

Generally, the utilization of PD enables, first of all, to reduce misunderstandings between nations. Secondly, it provides feedback to understand the result and the impact of a policy making. Finally, it facilitates the promotion of personal, professional and institutional bond between civilians and organizations, in foreign countries.

The most important limit for PD is to not correspond to the foreign policy of the country. In fact, as underlines it Amr, policies remain the essential determinant of countries awareness. If PD does not correspond to the reality of facts, it can be assimilated as a pure act of propaganda.

Soft Power

Il existe trois types de ressources dans l'analyse de Nye :

- **les ressources militaires** : les États-Unis sont ceux qui en détiennent le plus, beaucoup plus que les autres acteurs ;
- **les ressources économiques** : tous les grands pays industriels en ont et celles de la Chine progressent vite ;
- **les ressources intangibles** : tout le monde en a, les gouvernements, les ONG, les firmes... Elles sont dispersées et de ce fait non hiérarchisées.

Les ressources du *soft power* correspondent à la capacité d'attraction, de séduction, exercée par un modèle culturel, une idéologie et des institutions internationales **qui font que les autres s'inscrivent dans le cadre déterminé par celui qui dispose de ces ressources.** Elles représentent une capacité à rendre universelle une vision du monde particulière afin que l'action de celui qui la produit soit acceptée car considérée comme légitime. Aidée par le développement

des nouvelles technologies, l'industrie des services audiovisuels se présente comme une source première d'influence et de légitimité. Or la diplomatie de la sphère publique n'est plus celle de l'ère industrielle. « L'attractivité du pouvoir » doit tenir compte de l'évolution spatiotemporelle engendrée par ces nouveaux moyens de communication dans un monde globalisé, et de la capacité à toucher des cibles d'audience (aussi citoyens) selon une géométrie variable. Le cinéma constitue ainsi un exemple majeur d'outil du *soft power*.

Le pouvoir de commandement, capacité de changer ce que les autres font, peut s'appuyer sur la coercition ou l'incitation (par la promesse d'une récompense). **Le pouvoir de cooptation, capacité de changer ce que les autres veulent, peut s'appuyer sur la séduction** ou sur la possibilité de définir la hiérarchie des problèmes politiques du moment de façon à empêcher les autres d'exprimer des points de vue qui paraîtraient irréalistes face aux enjeux du moment.

Track II Diplomacy

Track II is a broad concept, encompassing the many kinds of nonofficial interaction between members of adversary groups or nations which aim to develop strategies, influence public opinion, and organize human and material resources in way that might help resolve conflict.

Today, it is difficult to resolve conflicts without mixing Track I and Track II. American diplomats are less frequently specialists with long term interests and connections to a particular part of the world that they were in the past. **Track II can compensate the decreased focus of diplomats. There is a vast and growing network of business connections and institutions on the ground, in addition to academics and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs),** frequently mentioned as the most effective avenues for out-sourcing.

There is a continuity between diplomatic Tracks I and II, in that the same skills and activities could and should be carried out by an extended range of people. One describe this continuity as almost an extension of official diplomacy; validated private meetings with people charged by governments to explore with similar people on the other side. **Freedom is one of the advantages of Track II, less constraint. There is lots of unofficial diplomacy in economics today, which affect official positions in both sides.**

Track II corresponds to the interactions among individuals or groups that take place outside an official negotiation process. That is a broad definition. Track II may refer to the involvement of citizens into a problem solving dialogue. There is the **hard track II**, aimed at helping the government to negotiate political agreements and **soft track II**, aimed at an exchange of views, information,..., to improve understanding. But it is also policy related. Participants are expected to have some communication with government policymakers. Then, **Track II is related to policy and consciously organized problem solving exercises.**

The particularities of Middle East and South Asia conflict are that it involves sovereignty and territoriality conflicts with religious and nationalistic undertones. There are big mistrusts which produce extremist groups.

To better understand the scope of regional security dialogues, it is useful to conceptualize their roles as a staged, largely sequential process, divided into 3 parts.

_ the socialization of participating Elites: creating a constituency for regional cooperation

Few regional dialogues reach the more ambitious goal of changing security perceptions to the point of changing official policies. But it is for long term policy adjustments.

The idea is to target elites who have access to official policymakers and who would over time convey such ideas to the official level and to the larger public.

The most crucial function during the socialization period is education, such as the creation of an arms control expertise among a select group of policy elites. Through education, the aim is to create an incipient epistemic community, common knowledge, focusing especially on the elites that have access to the official policy makers.

The contrary is also possible, that people feel even more threaten that before due to contact with the adversary (as Isrealians in contact with Iran unofficial, because of their threat perception, during a forum).

_ Filtering: Making Others' Ideas your own.

There is the creation of a discourse that show how cooperation can benefit the interests of participating parties. **The concept is that there are bad relations not because of adversary but because of the perception of insecurity.** The idea at this stage is **to use track II dialogues and their participants to spread ideas and create regional structures that transform the notion of regional cooperation into a regional idea serving regional interests**, not an extra-regional imposition serving the interest of others.

In South Asia, the dialogue process has, over the years, broadened its base in terms of participation. In the Middle East, the evidence of regional filtering is less apparent . Although some joint studies supporting cooperative security concepts emerged from track two dialogues.

_ Transmission: turning ideas into new policies

A critical element in successful transmission of track II ideas is **the ability of socialized elites to disseminate their ideas and the existence of a policy maker that can translate these ideas into actual policies.** 1 example of unofficial dialogue is the US soviet arms control experience: that was a modification of western realpolitik for a mutual security idea.

Obstacles to track II come from

- **The participating elites**
- **The domestic contexts (from which participants come from)**
- **The larger regional environment**

- **The perception of imposition from external actors can make regional elites uncomfortable.**
- **Cooperative ideas can be unpopular in the public opinion**

Participating elites can be ideologically against cooperation, favoring unilateralism and self help nations. It is difficult to breach out conceptual framework.

If participants are too much near to the government, then it is impossible to introduce new ideas. They prefer to maintain the status quo. On the other hand, independent individual who believe in dialogue often have no influence on the government.

The general regional security environment can affect calculations about whether such efforts can be introduced to a larger audience. Generally, there is a greater chance for the development of an elite constituency favoring regional security cooperation and for exposure and acceptance at the broader societal level. Conversely, **high levels of regional conflict and tension makes the transmission of cooperative security ideas to official policymakers and the wider public more difficult.**

The more the building of regional security concepts comes from within the regions themselves and are viewed as valuable tools enhancing regional actors own interests, the more effective such activities will be. Successful filtering into the regional context will also generate greater legitimacy for such dialogues among the regional publics.

Track III processes

Track III correspond to people to people diplomacy, undertaken by individuals and private organizations. A number of NGOs and institutes have been studying and addressing non traditional security issues

Track III enables, through conferences, to include Human Rights considerations and economic development into the security discourse. **The target can be the media, not obligatorily the government representation.** There are meeting between track II and track III to develop new ideas. Its aim is to institute change from the margins of national and regional politics. It can then have anti-government stance. This is a proof of democratization in south east asia. It involves actors that are marginalized by the dominant discourse on security in the region. Nevertheless, Track III criticism limits its influence on government. Moreover, there are few civil society institutions and NGOs outside of the mainstream track two groups involved in security. Furthermore, it is impossible for track III to agree on priorities in fighting.

L'action humanitaire et les médias

The 1970s witnessed the beginning of the transformation of humanitarianism. The humanitarian crisis in Biafra in the early 1970s highlighted the limited effectiveness of classical humanitarianism. Thousands died while the ICRC, loyal to its founding principles, maintained

a neutral and impartial stance. In response, a group of young French doctors founded **Doctors Without Borders**, a volunteer organisation which aimed at offering an alternative to the ICRC by bearing witness. to the horrors it encountered, even if that meant entering the contentious terrain of politics. **From that time on, the humanitarian ideal was increasingly extended beyond the ICRC's prerogatives. States, the United Nations system, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the media have increasingly involved themselves with addressing humanitarian issues.** To fulfil its promise, **humanitarianism often challenges the Westphalian principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states** and the ICRC's principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence.

For Belloni, **humanitarianism originates from and reproduces the unequal power relationship between the West and the less developed world. Humanitarianism hides a Western agenda of containment that has little to do with those humanitarian ideals originally used to justify the infringement of Westphalian sovereignty.** Furthermore, rather than providing an answer to human suffering, humanitarianism is at best ineffective and at worst counterproductive:

- *Humanitarianism simplifies too much*

Humanitarianism sustains a worldview where individuals are either victims or perpetrators, and not, more accurately, human beings in a complex set of relationships. The outbreak of war and the downward spiral of human suffering are attributed to backward and war-like people who have 'always been at each other's throats'. This localization permits the disregarding of any Western contribution to the outbreak of a humanitarian crisis, elevates the West as the realm of reason, modernity and tolerance, and downgrades the rest as the realm of passion, tradition and fanaticism.

Media coverage contributes to the simplification of the reality where humanitarian crises occur. As humanitarian advocate Michael Ignatieff explains, television structures its message by means of *synecdoche*, that is, by taking the part for the whole: 'the starving widow and her suffering children who stand for the whole famished community of Somalia.

The goal of simplified and direct messages is *not* that of raising consciousness and making the Western public think about poverty, war, human rights violations and the like. On the contrary, it is to avoid considering and examining the reasons for such human suffering. Hunger and pain are presented to the public only for the time necessary to convince viewers to contribute a small sum and return to their daily business. Television viewers will then be relieved to know that they contributed to a noble mission whose impact, however, remains questionable. Humanitarianism, then, is the means to temper public conscience in Western developed countries.

The media is only one of the reasons why humanitarian crises are depicted in a deceptively simple manner. Media operate in an effective synergy with humanitarian agencies on the ground, as both need each other. The media needs humanitarians to provide the information on the subject matter they investigate, just as humanitarians need media coverage to make a

humanitarian crisis known to the world and thus raise the funds to address it. Both sometimes exploit victims for shock value, dehumanising those who suffer in what has been aptly termed the ‘pornography of suffering’. Both face a difficult moral dilemma. They can opt to present a nuanced analysis of a crisis, at the cost of leaving the public disinterested and aloof, and thus even limiting humanitarian agencies’ fund-raising ability and the related capacity to achieve their humanitarian goals. Or they can adopt unethical tactics to provoke an impression among the general public and enable humanitarian organisations to raise more funds. More often than not, this dilemma is resolved in favour of the latter.



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**Hunger Crisis
in the Horn of Africa**
You can save lives.

A close-up photograph of a child's face, looking upwards with a distressed expression. A hand is resting on the child's forehead. The child is lying down, and the background is blurred.

DONATE NOW



- *Humanitarianism misinterprets reality and delays effective intervention*

Most human rights crises are not in any sense ‘emergencies’ resulting from the sudden and unforeseen deterioration of the environmental situation of a country or region. Instead, they arise from political, economic and social processes that can be identified, isolated, and potentially prevented. The prevailing humanitarian mindset is inherently *ex post-facto*, and limited in its capacity to proactively address a critical situation before it degenerates. As the old popular adage goes, when the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail. Humanitarianism is not about prevention, but damage control. But humanitarianism is unable to make its voice heard when most needed.

- *Humanitarianism induces minorities to raise the level of violence*

In order to challenge and seek to change the forces that keep them subordinated and oppressed, minority leaders must become skilled in mobilising domestic and international resources and in ‘framing’ and interpreting relevant events in ways to muster potential constituents and gain bystanders’ support.³¹ To these ends, minority leaders can be tempted to confront their oppressors to attract international sympathy and support by instigating further violence. Alan Kuperman confirms this possibility, arguing that in Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq (during the first Gulf war) and, to a lesser extent in Rwanda, the leaders of vulnerable subordinate groups escalated the conflict with the central authorities to provoke a crackdown and attract international support.

- *Humanitarianism prolongs war and misery*

Post-Cold War humanitarianism has changed the dynamics of war-waging. Instead of allowing a war to be fought to the bitter end, humanitarianism defends the dignified idea that letting the stronger faction prevail is to endorse the law of the jungle. By so doing, humanitarianism can perversely make the war longer and prolong human suffering. In Bosnia, humanitarian politics

gave the Bosnian Muslims an incentive to prolong the fighting to either take advantage of the possibility that the international community would intervene in their defence, or even to obtain better peace terms under international sponsorship – a pattern that seems to repeat itself in Darfur. ‘the insistence on respect for international norms, the insistence that the three national communities [in Bosnia] should live together side by side in peace and that ethnic partitioning will violate this principle, served to extend the war, at the terrible cost of human life and suffering’.

The main mechanism worsening and prolonging war is the great powers’ cynical use of humanitarianism to avoid more intrusive engagement.

In Bosnia, the presence of peacekeepers in ‘safe zones’ created an illusion of safety among desperate DPs. In the most infamous case, in July 1995 the Bosnian Serb army overran the town of Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia, one of the UN-declared ‘safe zones’, and killed more than 7,000 men and boys in the worst single massacre on European territory since the end of World War II.

- *Humanitarianism is not altruistic*

Humanitarianism’s main function is preventing civil war’s escalation into wars with cross-national and cross-border consequences, and limiting their impact on Western countries. Humanitarianism is part of a control strategy designed to prevent the transmission of disorder and chaos from war-torn, poor and peripheral countries to the developed world.

The UN Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has acted as a humanitarian bandage to the Palestinian refugee problem created in the aftermath of Israel’s birth in May 1948. Since then, however, the refugee problem has only increased both in size and importance. Palestinian refugees grew from about 700,000 in 1948 to 4,186,711 in mid 2004. Their displacement and political radicalisation remains a main stumbling-block to peace in the Middle East.

- *Humanitarianism is the short-term substitute of development*

For example, the United States has provided only US\$ 4 m to Ethiopia in 2002 to increase its agricultural output. When famine predictably hit the country a year later, US\$ 500 m in emergency food aid had to be disbursed. As a whole, Western attention to less developed areas is increasingly focused on the short-term management of politically, economically and socially explosive situations, instead of long-term development policy.

As a whole, Western attention to less developed areas is increasingly focused on the short-term management of politically, economically and socially explosive situations, instead of long-term development policy. Humanitarianism expresses the renunciation of the effort to address the root causes of poverty, anarchy and recurring war, focusing instead on the immediate needs of individuals and groups. As a practitioner-turned-scholar put it, humanitarians move quickly from one disaster to another, succumbing to the ‘tyranny of the emergency’.

The closer the source of instability to developed Western states, the more resources are needed for containment. In practice, humanitarian spending has little relation to actual needs. Kosovo, for example, received in 1999 five times more aid than Sudan and Angola, despite the lack of a compelling reason for such dramatic difference in aid allocation.

- *Humanitarianism is organisationally dysfunctional*

NGOs are often less independent from government policies than they would like to be. By accepting donors’ money and priorities, they are part of the same humanitarian system that allows Western governments to avoid

addressing the structural political, economic and social realities at the root of humanitarian crises, while at the same time claiming to be actively engaged in protecting human rights. Humanitarian aid agencies not only participate in, but also actively contribute to perpetuating the system and hiding its flaws.⁵⁹ In extreme cases, humanitarian agencies can even become unwilling accomplices to military actions. In a controversial statement, US Secretary of State Colin Powell praised humanitarian NGOs for their role as a ‘force multiplier’ for the US government.

From the point of view of northern humanitarian NGOs, the fact of tolerating the misuse of funds makes a great deal of good sense. Human rights organisations, like other organisations in a competitive environment, suffer from a vicious version of the prisoner’s dilemma, that is, a situation in which whatever the other one does, each is better off by following a sub-optimal course of action.

Humanitarians are increasingly becoming ‘professionals’ with technical skills applicable everywhere and not area specialists with narrow and ultimately less useful contextual knowledge. While until the late 1980s professional training was an afterthought, since the boom of the humanitarian aid industry in the 1990s, humanitarian workers need to be conversant with management skills, fundraising procedures, international human rights norms, capacity-building trainings and anything else which is being added to the humanitarian tool-kit. Some observers take this development towards professionalism to its most extreme conclusion, and argue that the adoption of explicit businesslike professional practices for humanitarian aid workers would further improve their professionalism and thus their efficiency. This is doubtful. The possibility that professionalisation could improve humanitarian performance, foster genuine partnership between international and local actors, and develop local resources is slim. Instead, professionalism reinforces a view that the outside ‘expert’ knows how best to address the causes of domestic distress. Instead of sustaining local development, this approach reinforces a form of control.

- *Humanitarianism reinforces the predominance of local warlike elites*

The criminal use of humanitarian aid is a well-known and relatively straightforward phenomenon. The political impact of humanitarian impulses is subtler. According to Fiona Terry, humanitarianism can prop up the authority and legitimacy of local warmongers in four ways. First, negotiation with local leaders to gain access to a particular area recognises these leaders as legitimate representatives of a particular group or population. Second, local leaders can direct resources towards their supporters and thus consolidate their political power *vis-à-vis* domestic opponents. Third, by their very presence, international aid agencies can legitimate a human rights-violating regime. Fourth, aid agencies can replace the state in the provision of goods and services to its citizens. By so doing, they assuage potential dissent that might challenge local leadership. As Terry concludes, ‘the legitimacy that humanitarian action can inadvertently bestow upon warriors and local officials is in many respects the negative side of the popular development notion of “empowerment”’.

- *Humanitarianism reproduces the very same cleavages it tries to overcome*

The situation in Kosovo is a case in point. NATO’s 1999 war was waged on the grounds that ethnically diverse societies should not only be protected but also actively promoted. This principle aligned NATO with the defence of the rights of the Albanians. The outcome of NATO’s intervention is well known and barely needs to be mentioned: the victims of yesterday became today’s oppressors. Following the departure of the Serb military from Kosovo, ethnic Albanians could take revenge on Serb and Roma civilians for years of repression. Many non-Albanians saw no other option than to leave. The small number of those remaining relocated to those few municipalities in the north where they constituted a majority of the population. Kosovo’s two main ethnic communities are even more divided now than they were prior to the war.