

Preparing for peace
Communications in conflict resolution

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Foreword by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office

On 24 October 2012, I had the pleasure of opening a seminar at Trinity College Dublin on the theme of communications and conflict resolution. This event, which was hosted by Trinity College's Philosophical Society, one of the university's oldest debating clubs, was held as part of Ireland's Chairmanship of the OSCE. It brought together students, experts and practitioners for a wide-ranging discussion on this important dimension of our approach to conflict resolution. The presentations from the seminar are set out in the pages that follow.

The topic of the seminar connects two priorities of Ireland's Chairmanship of the OSCE – conflict resolution and Internet freedom – through the theme of communications.

Communications can play a positive or negative role in conflict situations and peace-building processes. Managing this is a key question for policymakers.

The digital age has made this task even more urgent. It has facilitated communication over greater distances and at ever-greater speeds, providing more channels for ever more people to seek, receive and impart information and ideas and, ultimately, to have an impact on developments. This represents a significant shift in terms of who is in control of information.

The articles in this publication consider how communications can help prepare for peace, looking at this question from the point of view of diplomats, journalists and communications experts. They also examine the challenges and opportunities offered by new media.

The authors share their direct experiences of various conflicts, resolved and unresolved, and the lessons that can be learned. Sharing our own experience of the Northern Ireland peace process has also been a key aspect of our Chairmanship, just as we benefited from the experiences and support of others on the road to a peace agreement. While no two conflict situations are the same, by sharing how peace was achieved in Northern Ireland I hope we can offer encouragement and assist those engaged in finding solutions to conflicts elsewhere. I hosted a major conference on this theme in Dublin on 27 April, which brought together political and community leaders with first-hand experience of building and sustaining peace in Ireland. The presentations from the "Shared Future" conference can be found on the website of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (www.dfa.ie).

Ireland today is a hub for developments in new forms of communication, home to many of the world's leading ICT, Internet and digital-media companies. It is vital that we, as policymakers, look not just to the past, but seek to understand how new developments in communications can affect conflict and its resolution.

It is always useful to hear different voices, in particular those with long experience in the field and those of young people who can bring fresh ideas and perspectives. I hope that this publication will serve as a useful contribution to the ongoing dialogue on conflict resolution and offer new insights to those working to bring about peace in the OSCE area and beyond.

***OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister)
and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of Ireland
Eamon Gilmore
December 2012***

Session I.

Reporting on peace processes, shaping public opinion

Introduction

The idea for this session came out of the 2011 OSCE Talks seminar, held at the Institute of International Relations and Political Science of Vilnius University. During the discussions about building a security community in the OSCE space and the need for solutions to the region's protracted conflicts, one panelist said that the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan had come close to agreement on Nagorno-Karabakh in 2001 but failed to seize the moment. One of the reasons for this, the speaker argued, was due to an over-emphasis on the confidentiality of the process; neither side had prepared their own populations and political elites for the implications and inevitable compromises of peace. Accepting that there is a need for confidentiality in negotiations, what nevertheless can be done to bring people in, to make sure that they have a stake in peace? What is the role of communications in preparing for peace and, once it has been achieved, ensuring that it can be sustained?

The three panelists for this session looked at the question from their different personal experiences and professional perspectives. Ambassador Erwan Fouéré, whose diplomatic career has taken him, among other places, to South Africa and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and who currently serves as the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office's Special Representative on the Transdniestrian Settlement Process, presented his views based on his experience as an insider in negotiations. Alexandra Stiglmayer, a former war reporter and former spokesperson for the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, spoke about the importance of communicating effectively to the public when implementing a post-conflict settlement. Finally, former BBC Ireland correspondent Denis Murray talked about his experiences reporting on the Northern Ireland peace process and the duties and responsibilities of journalists. The session was moderated by Iain Atack, Assistant Professor in International Peace Studies and Director of Research at Trinity College Dublin.

Dialogue and wider engagement in post-conflict peace processes

Erwan Fouéré

“We inhibit the peaceful and negotiated resolution of conflicts not only by the extent to which we demonise one another. We do so also by the degree to which we separate, on the one hand, the processes of politics and international affairs, and on the other hand, the moral relations between ourselves as human beings... talking to one another and discussion must be the prelude to the resolution of conflicts.”

Nelson Mandela, Capetown, 1999

I start by quoting Nelson Mandela for the simple reason that his example epitomizes the very essence of a successful peace process. The transition from the apartheid regime to a democratically elected system was rightly praised as a triumph of the human spirit over adversity – a “miracle of the rainbow nation”, in the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

The example of South Africa highlights some of the main principles required for a successful post-conflict peace process, including those that can contribute to shaping public perceptions and ensure greater acceptance of the final outcome.

Some of these points may appear obvious, but they are not necessarily a given and cannot be taken for granted, as the early stages of the Northern Ireland peace process has shown, as we will see below:

- The importance of dialogue between the parties in conflict;
- The desire of both parties to reach a final settlement;
- The role of personalities in driving the process forward (the duo of Nelson Mandela and FW De Klerk, or John Hume in Northern Ireland come to mind);
- The need to build a relationship of trust between the main parties negotiating, a relationship where each may not share the views of the other but will nevertheless respect those views;
- Ensuring transparent and regular communication to the respective constituencies, in particular to grassroots civil society organizations and to the media, thus building confidence in the process by providing for their involvement at an early stage;
- The importance of a road map towards achieving a final settlement (such as the Framework Document in the Northern Ireland process);
- The importance of emphasizing the economic benefits of achieving political stability and a successful post-conflict peace process; this would be particularly relevant in the Transdniestrian settlement process, which we will address later;
- That a post-conflict peace process does not end with the agreement reached, but requires continuing and painstaking work in ensuring implementation at both leadership and local level;
- That a process of reconciliation, often viewed as the “unfinished business” of a peace process, must be seen as an integral part of post-conflict peace building;
- Above all, the need for patience and perseverance.

These principles taken together emphasize the necessity of a comprehensive approach towards conflict resolution to ensure a successful outcome. The degree to which civil society and public opinion in general can influence the process depends very much on how this comprehensive approach is applied.

At the same time, it would be a mistake to try and impose a model of a post-conflict peace process. There is no one model to fit all circumstances. Every conflict is unique and requires a unique approach. However, an analysis of previous post-conflict peace processes can help in understanding the importance of these basic principles.

It is for this reason that Ireland, as the country holding the OSCE Chairmanship in 2012, hosted a conference, “Shared Future: Building a Sustainable Peace – The Northern Ireland Case Study”, in April in Dublin. The OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Irish Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Eamon Gilmore, stated in his opening address: “It is the responsibility of we, who have known peace, to share our experience with you.” He went on to say, “I believe there are some universal experiences which can be of resonance in the OSCE area and elsewhere and that this may contribute to advancing the search for lasting peace”.

The conference brought together all the leading personalities who had played such a critical role in the peace process, as well as those who are currently in the leadership of the Northern Ireland Institutions. The presence of Northern Ireland Executive First Minister Peter Robinson of the Democratic Unionist Party, sitting side by side with his colleague, Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness of Sinn Fein, sent a powerful message in itself of what can be achieved through dialogue and leadership.

Senator George Mitchell, who chaired the negotiations that led to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, recalled his experience of those crucial months. “There is no such thing,” he said, “as a conflict that can’t be ended. They’re created and sustained by human beings. They can be ended by human beings”. He made clear that “peace and stability cannot be achieved in sharply divided societies, unless there is a genuine willingness to understand the other point of view and enter into principled compromise”.

We need to do more, both in the OSCE framework and elsewhere, to learn from other experiences in post-conflict peace processes and gain fresh perspectives on dealing with seemingly insurmountable problems. This would also help in the task of shaping public perceptions and preparing public opinion for the final outcome.

Let us examine some of the principles mentioned above and the influence that one process can have over another.

Dialogue between the parties in conflict

The issue of building a relationship of trust and promoting dialogue between the parties in conflict is a necessary ingredient in any post-conflict peace negotiation. The impact of one experience on another in this respect is well illustrated by interaction between the South African and Northern Ireland cases.

In 1997, all the Northern Ireland parties visited South Africa. This was just one year before the Good Friday Agreement and four years after the election of Nelson Mandela as the first democratically elected president of South Africa. It was a time when the parties from both sides of the conflict in Northern Ireland did not talk to each other. They travelled in different planes to South Africa and rode in different buses to the hotel in the Cape Province. When Mandela came to meet them, he could not understand why the different parties refused to talk to each other, let alone sit in the same room together. He made very clear to them that it was necessary to, as he put it, “work with your enemy to make peace with him. Then he becomes your partner.”

Even if the political parties in Northern Ireland were initially not talking to each other, there was much greater interaction at the local level, through the work of the trade unions, churches and other organizations, as if preparing the ground for the moment when the parties would start

negotiating. Hence the importance of the earliest possible civil society involvement, which we will refer to later.

Transdnestrian settlement process

In the case of the Transdnestrian settlement process, we are fortunate that there has been, since the beginning of this year, a high level of dialogue between both sides of the Dniestr/Nistru river. This was not always the case. The start of the conflict coincided with the break-up of the Soviet Union and led to armed clashes in 1992 – with many casualties – that were brought to an end in July of that year with the ceasefire agreement reached between the Presidents of the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation. This provided for the creation of a demilitarized security zone on both banks of the river separating the two sides. Despite a periodic rise in tensions, the ceasefire has been respected.

While many unsuccessful attempts have been made over the past 20 years to achieve a comprehensive settlement, Transdnestria has developed many of the attributes of an independent state, even though it is not recognized as such by any member of the United Nations. It is heavily dependent on regular financial support from Russia.

Unlike other conflicts that arose following the break-up of the Soviet Union, this one was not based on ethnic or religious grounds. Indeed, it has often been regarded as the easiest to solve of all the so-called protracted conflicts prevalent in the OSCE area.

After almost six years of suspended official talks, agreement was reached only in September 2011 to relaunch the negotiations in the framework of the Permanent Conference for Political Questions in the Framework of the Negotiating Process for the Transdnestrian Settlement. This is the process more commonly referred to as the “5+2” process because of its composition – Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE as mediators, plus the two sides Moldova and Transdnestria, and finally the EU and US as observers.

While all the international actors involved in the process are united at least officially as to the ultimate goal of the comprehensive settlement, they invariably differ on the tactics and the journey required to achieve that goal. It is for the OSCE Chairmanship to try and find the best way forward and to convince all the players to row in the same direction.

The first meeting of the renewed 5+2 process took place in Vilnius in November last year under the Lithuanian Chairmanship of the OSCE.

When Ireland took over the Chairmanship in January, it coincided with a change of leadership in Transdnestria. This led to significant momentum in the process with intensified dialogue between the two sides. During this year we have chaired five formal negotiating sessions of the 5+2 process with the final round under our Chairmanship at the end of November.

Several important steps have been agreed. The most significant were taken at the April round with the agreement on the principles and procedures for the conduct of the negotiations, or basic ground rules such as the recognition of equality of the sides in the negotiating process as well as the principle “that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”; the agenda for the formal negotiating process was also agreed.

Significant developments have also taken place on the ground over the past year. For example, the leaders from both sides agreed on the resumption of rail freight services. This opens the way for many more agreements, such as in the telecommunications and transport areas – all aimed at removing the obstacles which continue to impede free movement between the two sides while building confidence. Such actions will demonstrate to the communities on both sides of the river the advantages of working together, thus creating a sense of ownership in the process and highlighting the economic benefits which could accrue to each side.

While in the Northern Ireland conflict the biggest pressure for an agreement was a desire to end the violence, in the case of Moldova and Transdnestria, it could be argued that the only pressure comes from the economic dimension. Indeed, it could be an important element in the debate if some effort were made to estimate the cost of reintegrating Transdnestria into Moldova

with a special status, and to compare that with the cost of maintaining the status quo. This could be an important contribution to the process from the academic community and civil society, with the basic premise being to determine whether enough people believe that their self-interest would be better served by change rather than by maintaining the status quo.

Last May, we invited the two chief negotiators from the two sides to visit Ireland and to explore together the Northern Ireland peace process. During the four-day trip to Dublin and Belfast, they were able to hear first-hand of the patience and perseverance that the peace process required; and that work must be based on a relationship of trust and partnership, on an ability to step into the shoes of the other and to view things from the other's perspective. The advice that First Minister Peter Robinson gave to the chief negotiators when he received them was a powerful message in itself: that to achieve a peaceful settlement, both sides must want to reach an agreement and that their most difficult challenge will be to convince not their opponents, but their own constituency of the agreed settlement.

A priority in the Irish OSCE Chairmanship's strategy has been to highlight the critical role that can be played by civil society organizations and the media in the ongoing Transdniestrian settlement process. This is, in my view, a necessary ingredient for any post-conflict peace process. The earlier the involvement of the media and of civil society, particularly at grassroots level, the greater the level of trust created and the broader the acceptance by the public of the final settlement.

During my visits this year to both Chisinau and Tiraspol in my capacity as Special Representative, I encouraged the authorities to engage with civil society organizations and the media in discussions. Building a space for open dialogue at local level would help to overcome the prejudices that have developed on both sides of the river over the past 20 years. We also managed to raise it as a point for discussion at the September round of negotiations, with an agreement reached to establish a joint platform for civil society and media with representatives from both sides.

And it was in response to a joint request made to us by both Prime Minister Filat and Transdniestrian leader Shevchuk that we hosted a group of 20 civil society and media representatives in Ireland in October. These were representatives from both sides of the river, many of whom have little opportunity to interact in their own environment. Despite this, they all participated in the visit with great enthusiasm, sharing their different points of view as well as several pints of Guinness.

During their five-day visit to Dublin and Belfast they heard first-hand from political party representatives as well as civil servants who were directly involved in the Northern Ireland peace negotiations and who continue to serve in various capacities in the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. The messages conveyed to the group at every stage of their visit underlined the key role of civil society and media in creating a bridge between political leaders and the people at local level to enable proper and regular communication. As Democratic Unionist Party Member of Parliament Jeffrey Donaldson, who received the group in Belfast, highlighted, if negotiations take place in secret without civil society supporting the process and media not able to report, this reduces the sense of ownership in the process and alienates the public.

The regular consultations with local communities and the grassroots also played a critical part in obtaining acceptance by the public of the Good Friday Agreement in the subsequent referendum, where the Agreement received overwhelming support.

During the visit the role of women in post-conflict peace negotiations, often sadly underestimated, was also underlined. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition was the only political party of its kind to gain representation in the peace negotiations as well as being elected to the First Legislative Assembly. Those courageous women who were part of this struggle for recognition were following in the footsteps of others before them involved in other post-conflict peace processes.

At the funeral service for Helen Joseph, who died in 1993, Nelson Mandela spoke of her courage and tireless campaign for the emancipation of women. He recalled that the Federation of South African Women, of which she was a founding member, was way ahead of the thinking of

even the African National Congress at that time of transition. He reminded his audience of the apt slogan “You strike a woman, you strike a rock”. Helen Joseph was one of the many role models together with Helen Suzman and Albertina Sisulu who fought against the apartheid regime.

However, both South Africa and Northern Ireland tend to be exceptions to the rule in terms of women being included in the actual post-conflict peace negotiations. The challenge facing organizations such as the OSCE involved in conflict resolution is how to bring women to the forefront of the peace process itself.

What was particularly revealing to the group in both Dublin and Belfast was listening to personal testimonials of former prisoners from both the Loyalist and Republican traditions now working together at local level in joint projects to bridge the continuing divide between neighbouring communities. They also play an important role in reducing tensions at critical periods such as during the parade season. The trust they build up at local level can be often greater than the efforts of more distant politicians.

Reporting to media

I would like to highlight one approach we have initiated in the Transdniestrian settlement process in relation to media. Starting last July, we established a practice of briefings following the 5+2 meetings for the media in both Chisinau and Tiraspol by video link. This has taken the form of the Chair flanked by the two chief negotiators plus the Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, presenting together the broad conclusions of the meeting.

This joint presentation encourages both sides to establish a relationship of trust with the media who are following the process. It also helps to minimize any risk of misinterpretation on the outcome as well as the spreading of unhelpful rumours. It is a practice we intend to continue until the end of our OSCE Chairmanship and which we hope to see continue under the next Chairmanship which takes over on 1 January 2013.

The relationship of trust created becomes even more important as negotiations enter a critical stage where the necessary confidentiality needs to be respected and understood by those reporting. Of course it won't prevent either side from trying to use the media for its own agenda; but it will nevertheless help to create a more conducive environment. This of course requires respect for the independence of the media, which is not the case in all conflict-affected countries.

Implementation of agreements reached

Even though we are far from reaching the final stages of a comprehensive settlement in the case of Transdniestria, nevertheless it is important to emphasize that the success of a final settlement often depends on its effective implementation. In the euphoria of reaching an agreement, it is often forgotten that peace is a process which really begins with the signing of an agreement, and the need for effective communications is arguably greater than ever. It would therefore be a mistake not to focus on the work of implementation immediately after an agreement is reached. To quote Tim O'Connor, one of the Irish diplomats involved in the negotiations for the Good Friday Agreement, “it is necessary to keep the scaffolding of negotiations in place after the Agreement is reached”. This is particularly important also in terms of civil society's role at the local level. In Northern Ireland, there is still much work to be done to ensure that the benefits of the Agreement filter down to all communities whatever tradition they hail from. During our visit in October, it was striking to see the number of so-called “peace walls” still dividing communities all across Belfast.

It is clear therefore that the more civil society is involved in the peace process itself, the greater will be the degree of confidence of the broader community in being involved in the work of implementation of the final outcome.

The process of reconciliation

A final point relates to the challenge of reconciliation, where the confidence of the public in the process and the role of civil society is critical. Often referred to as the “unfinished business” of a post-conflict peace process, it involves a long and painful journey for societies emerging from conflict. But it is the only way to move from a divided past to a shared future. It is a challenge still facing Northern Ireland.

The approach chosen by post-conflict societies has varied considerably. Some have tried, usually unsuccessfully, to brush everything under the carpet, or have launched a process that has little to do with justice and reconciliation and more to do with revenge and retribution, as in some of the Balkan countries.

Others have been more courageous, establishing truth commissions supported by leaders who understood the importance of seeking the truth as part of the healing process and justice for the victims. It is the South African model of truth and reconciliation which is probably the most advanced experience so far. The success of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is judged by the manner in which it helped to heal the wounds of the past, and is due in large measure to the personalities who drove the process – the Commission’s Chairman Archbishop Tutu, and of course Mandela himself, who from the moment he walked out of prison, never once uttered words of revenge or retribution; his whole mission was one of reconciliation.

It is often the courage and vision of leadership as well as powerful symbols that can make a difference, such as Robert Schuman with the Schuman Declaration which saw the birth of the European Union as we know it today, or the image of President Mitterand and Chancellor Kohl joining hands at the monument commemorating the millions of Jews who perished in the concentration camps, or the courage of Boris Tadić, former President of Serbia, when he went to Srebrenica in 2004. Similarly, closer to home, images of Queen Elizabeth II, during her official visit to Ireland last year bowing her head at the Garden of Remembrance and this year shaking hands with Martin McGuinness, were powerful symbols which can help in coming to terms with the past.

But any reconciliation process will only be successful if it involves all sectors of society in an inclusive process. This will be the challenge facing the project of transforming the notorious former Maze/Long Kesh prison in Northern Ireland into a centre for conflict resolution and reconciliation, a very courageous and visionary project made possible by EU funding in particular.

This is an area where the OSCE should be in the forefront, advocating and encouraging reconciliation to be part of all post-conflict peace processes, and supporting not just institutional mechanisms but also history teaching and community grassroots projects. Thanks to an initiative of OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier, a discussion on the role of reconciliation took place for the first time as part of the Security Days event between all 56 participating States in June. A follow-up event is planned for December. Let us hope this topic will become a regular feature of debate and action with the OSCE region and beyond.

Concluding note

Even with a comprehensive approach in a post-conflict peace process, what ultimately determines a successful outcome is the political will and leadership of the main protagonists involved.

The transition from apartheid to the democratically elected government of Nelson Mandela and the Northern Ireland peace agreement are eloquent examples of how leaders can exercise their authority for the common benefit of all.

I conclude with a quotation from Vaclav Havel, another great example of moral authority, who reminded us of this challenge in his 2007 memoir *To the Castle and Back*:

“It’s important that politics be more than just a technology of power, but that it provide a genuine service to citizens, a service that is as disinterested as possible, based on certain ideals, a service that follows the moral order that stands above us, that takes into account the long term interests of the human race and not just what appeals to the public at any given moment; it’s a service that resists becoming no more than the interplay of particular interests or pragmatic schemes that ultimately conceal a single aim: to remain in power at all costs.”

Ambassador Erwan Fouéré is the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for the Transdniestrian Settlement Process. Previously he held a number of posts in the European Union including as the first EU Special Representative/Head of Delegation to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (2005), the first Head of Delegation to South Africa (1994) and the first Head of Delegation to Mexico and Cuba (1989). Awarded the Order of Good Hope, Grand Officer, by President Nelson Mandela (1998).

Credibility, coherence and connectedness: communication in post-conflict interventions

Alexandra Stiglmayer

My presentation will nicely follow on from Ambassador Fouéré, who spoke about the role of communications in *reaching* peace settlements. I will speak about the role of communication once there is a peace settlement and a post-conflict international intervention.

I will speak about my personal experience which is related to Bosnia and Herzegovina, where I worked for the Office of the High Representative (OHR). This is a unique international organization created under the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement to implement the civilian aspects of this agreement. Two years into his mandate, the High Representative was given far-reaching powers. He was authorized to dismiss obstructive officials and to impose legislation. In essence, it was an authoritarian post-conflict intervention. I worked for the OHR from 1998 to 2002 as a spokesperson and head of the press office.

Audiences in post-conflict interventions

When it comes to communication, we had two different audiences – in fact, every post-conflict mission has the same two different audiences. One audience is the governments and organizations that contribute troops or give money for the mission, and their publics which need to be convinced that the mission is a good one – that it makes sense and that the goals are reached. The other is, of course, the local population, the actual protagonists, who have to embrace and carry the peace process.

Communicating with the local population and winning their support for peace, for reconciliation, for democratization, for the rule of law, for good governance and for all the other goals the international community wants to achieve is the more complex task. In fact, such strategic communication should be, must be, part of the peace process. If you have a peace settlement, you need to think about how to convince people of its goals, how to make them your allies. This should be factored into every peace-building strategy from the outset. However, in my experience this is not always the case. This is something that should change in the future.

I will talk about what I think important elements of good strategic communication in a post-conflict environment are. As a speechwriter, I learned that there should always be three points to a good presentation because that's what people can usually remember. In my opinion, the three points important for effective communication in post-conflict situations are credibility, coherence and connectedness. You notice that they all start with "c", so I hope you will really be able to remember them afterwards!

Credibility, coherence and connectedness

Credibility is straightforward, though not always easy to achieve. It simply means that the message must be credible. It must be backed up by reality, by actual deeds and actual policy. It is impossible to make black look white. Policymakers sometimes don't know that. They believe that

their press departments can wave a magic wand and convince the public of anything. It happened to me a few times that I was told “just go to the media and make this issue go away,” or, “go to the media and convince them that our move was right”. There is a limit to what you can make others believe. If you want to be taken seriously, you must be credible.

Secondly, there must coherence. Peace settlements are usually implemented by a plethora of international organizations. In Bosnia, we had the NATO-led SFOR troops that had to implement the military aspects of the Dayton Peace Agreement. We had the Office of the High Representatives in charge of the civilian aspects. There was the OSCE, which had the important role of organizing elections, and later also monitoring human rights. There was a UN mission, UNMIB. There were UN agencies and programmes like UNHCR and UNDP. There were the World Bank and IMF. Basically every major international organization was active in Bosnia.

If we could agree on one message, and if we all conveyed the same message, we could reach the Bosnians. But this wasn't easy. Very often we didn't agree. Our messages were fragmented and contradictory, and the result was a mess. So coherence is extremely important.

With the third term, connectedness, I mean that a message must be built on something that the recipients know and can relate to. The message must connect with them, it must resonate with them. They do not have to agree necessarily, but it is important that they understand you, so you must build on things they're familiar with. Very often, I've seen that international officials talk past the domestic populations and are simply not understood.

Now I would like to give you a positive example where I thought all the important elements were present and helped achieve a good outcome. That was property law implementation in Bosnia, the return of apartments and houses to their pre-war tenants and owners.

Return of properties in Bosnia: an example of effective strategic communication

Let me explain this a little bit. During the war, three parties fought against each other – the Bosniaks, who are Muslims, the Serbs and the Croats. After the war, there were many ethnically homogeneous areas in Bosnia because people of the other ethnicities had been expelled or had fled.

When refugees and displaced people came to an area that was controlled by the ethnicity to which they belonged, they moved into abandoned apartments and houses. Apartments were socially owned in Bosnia, which was socialist before the war, so the tenants did not own them formally, but they had a right to use them and this right could be passed on to their children. During the war, the three conflict parties annulled this right in cases where people were no longer present. They allocated the apartments to refugees or to their followers as a thank-you for loyal services.

Houses were generally privately owned even before the war, and they remained privately owned. However, if you had been expelled or left during the war and somebody else moved into your house, there was little you could do about it right after the war, especially if you belonged to the “wrong” ethnic group. You simply had no access to your property.

Now, the return of refugees or displaced persons was a big issue under the Dayton Peace Agreement. It was one of the major goals of the peace process. And we knew that we had to enable people to repossess their homes if we wanted them to return. This was a basic precondition.

At the end of 1999, we drafted a plan called the “property law implementation plan”, abbreviated to PLIP. I believe that it was the biggest, most intense, most co-ordinated and most successful single-issue civilian effort that the international community has undertaken in Bosnia since the end of the war. From the beginning, my department, press and public affairs, was part of it, we were in charge of the communications aspect, and we made a plan for how to communicate it.

As a first step, the High Representative imposed new laws that stipulated that everybody had the right to repossess their pre-war home, whether it was a socially owned flat that needed

to be repossessed or a privately owned home. People were asked to submit claims for the return of their property. The High Representative also passed detailed instructions on how all of this had to be implemented. This was challenging – as it turned out later, we wanted to move 250,000 families. The first who had to move out were people who had somewhere else to go, for example who used to live in one apartment before the war and then acquired another one that actually belonged to somebody else.

The claims had to be processed, decided on and implemented by so-called municipal housing offices. Responsibility to monitor and possibly manage the housing offices was divided between the international organizations that implemented PLIP – that was the OHR, the OSCE, UNMIB, the international police taskforce IPTF, UNHCR and an organization called the Commission for Real Property Claims.

This meant that each housing office was covered by an international official. This official regularly went there, checked if people had submitted claims and checked that the local officials processed the claims, put them in the right order, kept statistics and actually made sure that people were getting back their properties. For that, they had to issue decisions confirming the right of the claimants to repossess their pre-war homes and, if the current inhabitants did not move out voluntarily, organize evictions. Municipalities also had to organize alternative accommodation and there was an effort to rebuild homes with international funds. Logistically PLIP was a tremendous challenge.

As mentioned, communication was a very important element of this effort. We first had to get people to submit claims – that was relatively easy. But we also had to convince Bosnians who lived in other people's homes that they had to move out, that this was the right thing to do, that they had to leave properties that did not belong to them.

Some people of course lived in nicer homes than before, so were reluctant to give them up. Many people did not want to return to their place of residence before the war and argued, "I have given up my apartment in Sarajevo so I have a right to keep this home in Banja Luka." And there was political resistance to property return, because the political leaders wanted to have ethnically homogeneous areas – it was easier to command them and to demand autonomy. Flats were also "war booty", given by the powerful to their loyal followers, so the power elites lost an important asset.

In short, there were significant obstacles – but we managed to overcome them, through focus, persistence and the mobilization of significant resources, but also through a huge communications effort.

There was credibility. The High Representative watched over implementation, and at the beginning he dismissed quite a few officials. In one day, he fired from office 22 people who obstructed property law implementation. These dismissed officials included political leaders, but also individual housing officials and civil servants, who did not play ball. The Bosnians soon realized that PLIP was not one of many noble international community goals for which this community was not doing much, but that we meant business.

The effort was coherent. All the organizations that participated were on board. We printed hundreds of thousands of leaflets that the SFOR troops helped distribute across the country. We did TV ads that explained the process, but also spots that encouraged people to give back properties that did not belong to them. We produced radio spots. We drafted talking points for all the heads of missions who then raised the issue at their meetings with domestic officials. Once a month, we published a scorecard: which municipalities had implemented what percentage of claims, who were the leaders that had to be named and shamed. This was always a big story in the media. We brought journalists on board, we briefed them regularly and explained the importance of PLIP.

PLIP was everywhere, all the time, for months and months and months.

It was a big effort. We, all the organizations and ambassadors and NGOs, managed to sing from the same song sheet – nobody deviated. So, it was politically and from a communications perspective the most coherent effort that the international community has undertaken in Bosnia.

Lastly, there was also connectedness, because people of course knew that it wasn't right to live in somebody else's property. Even during the war when I was a journalist and went to interview people in their homes, they always mentioned whether it was their flat or not. If it wasn't, they would apologize and say, "Ok, this is not my flat. It belongs to a Croat family, but they left, and I can't go back to my home, but I am taking good care of it."

So deep down they all knew that they had to give back the apartments and houses to their pre-war owners. They accepted that it was something that had to be done. It also corresponded to their moral value system.

Implementation took several years because some claims were not easy to resolve. Sometimes people didn't have a place to go to back to, their homes were completely destroyed and their villages abandoned. For them, alternative accommodation had to be found.

When I left Bosnia in May 2002, some 50 per cent of the claims had been resolved. Two years later, in 2004, the property return process had been completed. This did not mean that all the people actually returned. A lot of people sold or exchanged their homes. However, we had managed to establish an important precondition for return, and we succeeded in establishing the rule of law in one specific area. The war parties were not allowed to keep the flats that they had appropriated; they had to give them back to the pre-war tenants and owners.

I believe that PLIP would not have been successful without the accompanying communication effort. PLIP concerned people and their lives. It was big: 250,000 flats and houses were returned, which means that some 750,000 to 1 million people were affected. This is a quarter of the population of Bosnia, which is some 3.5 million. We had to convince them that it was the right thing to do. Today you will find few people in Bosnia who would object to it.

PLIP was politically important for refugee return, for the rule of law and for the return of normalcy. It was also a best-case example of international co-ordination and effective strategic communication.

In conclusion, I believe that it is not possible to achieve lasting stability in a post-conflict environment without communicating with the people concerned, explaining to them what you are doing, why you are doing it and what you would like to achieve. They are the ones who have to develop ownership of the peace process and carry it forward once the internationals leave. This requires a communication effort that is credible, coherent and connected to the people concerned.

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Reporting on negotiation, shaping public opinion: the Northern Ireland experience

Denis Murray

If peace processes round the world have taught us anything, it is that they are all unique – there may be similarities, echoes and resonances between conflicts, but no single one is identical to any other. That is not to say that lessons cannot be learned from one situation to another. For instance, the Northern Ireland peace process has several elements that might be regarded as universal prerequisites: a desire on all sides to reach agreement, or at least to end conflict; international involvement, in the form of arbitrators; a preparedness to keep going; and at least some kind of media scrutiny.

It is my view that news reporting, analysis and debate are essential – of shaping public opinion I'm not so sure.

Shaping public opinion

It is my confirmed view that journalism, except in one vital respect, does not shape public opinion. Facts do that – and the role of the journalist is to report those facts. This may seem ludicrous now, but there was a body of opinion in Northern Ireland in the 1970s that firmly believed that “there'd be no trouble if you boys weren't putting it on TV”. It was as though broadcasters and newspapers were doing the paramilitaries a favour by reporting bombings, shootings and so on. This sort of view reached its height with then-British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's “oxygen of publicity” remark, which showed a fundamental misunderstanding of what motivated and sustained paramilitaries and ultimately led to “broadcasting restrictions”, in other words, effective censorship.

No, an editorial from “the Thunderer”, *The Times of London*, no longer shapes public opinion. There's a whole other ongoing debate about the influence of media empires like that of Rupert Murdoch, for instance, on political leaders. But for the purposes of this debate, it must be said that most people buy their newspapers because they're comfortable with the opinions that they know they're going to find there. In Britain, if you're right of centre, you'll probably get *The Daily Telegraph*; if left of centre, *The Guardian*.

Now it is an act of will, a positive act, to buy a paper or go to its website: turning on the television or radio news is a much more reflexive action. Indeed, you probably didn't turn on the television to watch the news in the first place, but then it happens to come on. One interesting aspect is the viewing figures. May I recommend this year's BBC Huw Wheldon lecture, by long-time foreign correspondent Lyse Doucet. Speaking on the theme of the role of new media she quotes BBC TV news viewing figures, which spike (upwards!) quite markedly for specific events: the London riots or the death of Amy Winehouse to name just two instances.

In none of the reporting of those events will you find the reporters taking sides, leaving condemnation of “looters and hooligans”, and explaining the frustrations of those involved to people with those points of view.

In short, the public is angry, moved, exasperated, amused or uplifted by happenstance, not by the reporter.

Personal experience and neutrality

That is not to say that opinions are not allowed. The Omagh bombing in 1998¹ is an instance where, if the reports by me and, for instance, ITN Correspondent John Irvine were closely analysed, you would not find emotive language or personal opinions. However, I would presume that not even the most casual viewer would have been in any doubt as to what we felt, entirely from our tone of voice.

I am frequently asked how it was possible to remain “neutral” or “unbiased”; to which the answer is always the same: staying politically neutral is not difficult. Ask anyone who’s ever covered the Dail (Irish parliament), or Westminster (UK parliament) or wherever, and you’ll find that we all have people in every party that we like or respect, or both; and people in every party whom we dislike or disrespect.

I found it much more difficult to remain neutral after acts of violence, especially after it should have been obvious to the paramilitaries that armed force was pointless. The IRA in particular became what it did by carrying out “operations” with absolutely no thought whatsoever as to whether those operations would bring its ultimate goal, a united Ireland, any closer to realization. It was a case of all tactics and no strategy, at least until the peace process got into its stride. (Inter alia, the Sinn Fein leadership’s move towards a ceasefire and talks developed as a result of grasping the lack of strategy – but the roots of the process are another day’s work!)

The very idea of neutrality is, I firmly believe, essential to public-service broadcasting in these islands. Reporters telling the truth, analysing the facts as best they can, and the trust that is implicit between a particular news programme and viewer are indispensable.

There is what might be termed “editorialized” or “opinionated” news elsewhere, for example in the United States. Fine. As one of my old BBC bosses who became a senior executive at CNN, Chris Cramer, once said, editorial TV is ok as long as it’s billed as such.

I was taught that you leave your opinions at home, hanging up beside your other suit in the wardrobe. I still think that holds.

Consensus, propaganda and spin

I am taking as a given that mainstream news coverage in these islands is part of a consensus: journalists accept their place in a democracy and, by and large, subscribe to the values of that democracy.

This justifies, for instance the existence of the BBC World Service. Testimonies from people in non-democracies round the world are endless as to the ray of truth, and maybe even hope, provided by the World Service (even if it’s just at the level of Aung San Suu Kyi enjoying a Dave Lee Travis music programme during her house arrest.) It also differs vastly from Voice of America, which, at one time, was used to counter Soviet propaganda.

So let’s assume when we tune in to the BBC, ITN, RTE or Sky News, what we’re going to get is something of the consensus, but hopefully none of the propaganda – unless you count interviews with politicians as them spreading propaganda!

That brings us to “spin”. This, as so-called, is a relatively modern development, though governments and opposition parties were always trying to have themselves and their policies presented in the “best” light. Tony Blair’s government appears to have taken this particularly seriously. Lance Price, formerly a colleague at BBC Northern Ireland who became a No. 10² press officer, has said he kept a sign over his desk saying “spin to win”.

1 The Omagh car bombing, in which 29 people were killed, was carried out by the Real IRA, a splinter group of the IRA opposed to the Good Friday Agreement, in Omagh, County Tyrone, Northern Ireland.

2 No. 10 Downing Street, the address of the UK Prime Minister’s official residence.

But what depresses and annoys me is that people think experienced journalists are taken in by spin. For instance, note the reporting on the 2003 Iraq war – questions were raised right from the start about weapons of mass destruction.

A personal story to draw these stands together: I had a really good working relationship with Tony Blair's Communications Director, the reputed "king of spin", Alastair Campbell. I always found him a straight shooter, but one night he was briefing me – him in Downing Street, me on the mobile phone at Castle Buildings, Stormont, where the talks leading to the Good Friday Agreement took place.³ At one point, he said "it would also be helpful if you said...". "Hold it right there Alastair – if you tell me 'the government policy is', or 'the prime minister thinks', or 'his personal spokesman says', then I'll report that, but I am absolutely not here to help." He laughed and said I was touchy, and I said "damn right, I'm on a mobile phone in Northern Ireland!" "OK," he said, "the government view is...".

Now this is a harmless and mildly amusing anecdote, but it illustrates the point: I could report what Alastair said, but when required, would reach for the pinch of salt and analyse what he said in my own way.

Good Friday and after

This brings me on to how covering a peace process works. At Stormont a media centre was eventually set up in a car park, cabins, portable loos and all. A decision had been taken to exclude the media from the talks, but not from the proximity of where they were taking place. Towards the end, it became rather ludicrous, with politicians emerging to talk to the cameras half an hour before bulletin time. One of the most regular of these serial "spinners" was John Taylor, deputy leader of the Ulster Unionist party, who memorably remarked that he wouldn't touch the deal on offer with a 40 foot bargepole. This led to endless fun for the hacks, with cries of "how long is your bargepole today, John?"

Another important element was the phone (obvious but vital). Very quickly, journalists attending the talks on a more or less permanent basis got the direct-line numbers of the various delegations, and they had our mobile numbers, which meant no party or government could control the flow of information. This *modus operandi* continued throughout the talks that led to agreement, and then afterwards in other talks aimed at implementation.

The only exception to this was at the US Ambassador's residence during the Mitchell Review of autumn 1999. Former US senator George Mitchell, having admirably performed his role as independent chair of the Good Friday process, was invited back to break the deadlock which had followed. The residence is in Regent's Park London, and unsurprisingly, very well protected. Here came the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP, the main players of the time. And they were simply locked away. One reporter who was there said it was the only time it was made clear that the media were not welcome and not tolerated.

Here then, we come to the balance. For this tactic worked.

In an interview at the successful end of the review, I asked Senator Mitchell just how important these talks had been. Absolutely crucial was his view, and not just the content but the circumstances. The two sides didn't engage except to indulge in hostile "whataboutery"⁴, until at one point one Unionist and one SDLP delegate went to the table with the tea and coffee. One offered to pour the milk for the other, the ice was broken and progress made.

So to keep the media away, have them nearby, or involve them? Much as I'm in favour of disclosure, talks in public are unlikely to work – who is going to negotiate in public? For instance, I once asked the post-apartheid ANC Deputy South African High Commissioner to London,

3 Castle Buildings, Stormont, was where the Good Friday peace agreement was reached and is now the seat of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

4 The term "whataboutery" was commonly used during the Northern Ireland "Troubles" to refer to the tendency of each side to respond to criticism by referring faults on the other side.

what they had done when even being seen to talk about something would have been political suicide. “We went out in the bush”, was the reply. Negotiators (one suspects it was the two chief negotiators) would simply vanish off somewhere, thrash out a deal and bring back a solution.

Help or hindrance, and the journalist as citizen

So is having the media to hand during peace processes a help or a hindrance? Firstly, in my view, it is not the job of a reporter to be concerned with being either helpful or unhelpful, just to report and analyse. Reporting to the world that the IRA had called a “complete” ceasefire, did, however, almost certainly give the process an added impetus.

On the other hand, the revealing of the so-called Framework Documents by the *Daily Telegraph* (which was almost certainly done to be unhelpful) didn’t stop the process. Then-Prime Minister John Major and then-Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister) John Bruton would undoubtedly have preferred they hadn’t been leaked, but does anyone remember lasting damage being done?

Lessons learned?

I am convinced that the coverage of the Troubles and of the peace process helped bring the conflict to an end, simply by telling the truth. Senator Mitchell sent a letter, post-Good Friday, to all the correspondents who covered the duration of the talks, thanking them for making a contribution simply by telling the truth.

There are other examples of media influencing by not trying to influence: the Vietnam War for instance. I once heard a former US television network news chief say “the more your audience doesn’t want to hear it, the more you gotta keep telling them”. Does anyone doubt that American public opinion about the war was changed by nightly coverage?

I think the public has every right to be informed about talks as they progress, but in the interests of ending conflicts, those talks should not be held in completely open parliament-style forums.

On a personal note, I regarded it as a privilege to cover the talks which brought peace to my own part of the world, but let me leave you with a little game I invented.

You’re a journalist, and you’ve discovered something which is true, and checked, but which would without doubt collapse the peace talks, and mean a return to conflict. Do you report it, or not?

Let’s have a seminar on that one sometime.

During Denis Murray’s 26-year career with the BBC he extensively covered the Troubles and the Northern Ireland peace process as Ireland correspondent, Northern Ireland political correspondent and Dublin correspondent. He was awarded an OBE in 1997 in recognition of his services to broadcast journalism.

Rapporteurs' report

One audience member said lack of public disclosure on the negotiation process led to more confusion about what is being discussed as well as conspiracy theories, and pointed out that a fine balance is needed. The same audience member also mentioned the move of some international donors to push a concept of “peace journalism”, encouraging journalists to actively promote a pro-peace message. The need for “conflict-sensitive journalism” was perhaps a better term than “peace journalism”, but was there an ethical issue with this?

Denis Murray responded that a journalist's role is not to be involved one way or another – that is the role of peacemakers or politicians. Murray also pointed out that although the negotiations were secret, the journalists following the Northern Ireland process had been able to give the public a reasonably decent take on what had been discussed on the daily news programmes. For example, they were able to report if the topic had been decommissioning of paramilitary weapons, without necessarily being able to report on the detail of the issue. He could also understand why at some points it was necessary for negotiators to get away from the usual locale of the talks, agree on something and then come back, because the agreement has to work despite opposition to certain elements of it. A lot of people in Northern Ireland didn't and still don't like the Good Friday Agreement, he said.

Alexandra Stiglmayer commented that in many conflicts journalists become part of the conflict. For example in the former Yugoslavia it was commonplace for journalists to take sides. She pointed out the difficulties in toning something down and becoming too sensitive in reporting, and that if a massacre happens you have to call it a “massacre” rather than “an incident that caused some casualties”.

Ambassador Fouéré commented that the differing levels of media freedom and respect for the media in different conflict-affected countries can also have an impact on media involvement. He agreed with Murray that there is a need for a level of confidentiality in most post-conflict peace processes but emphasized the need to present things in a way so that people understand why there is a need for a certain level of confidentiality.

In response to a question on the continuity of the personalities involved as mediators, Fouéré agreed that continuity was key to success, and pointed to the critical factor of Senator Mitchell devoting several years to the Northern Ireland peace process and seeing it through to its conclusion. Similarly with the internal post-conflict peace process in South Africa, the key negotiators for the future constitution were there through to the end, so there was confidence and trust between them. In the Transdniestrian case, by contrast, each year there is a different Chairperson in the negotiations, with Ukraine to take the role next year, followed by Switzerland and Serbia. While Fouéré stressed that he did not think this made the task impossible, it did however, in his view, make things more difficult. He pointed out that the Transdniestrian settlement process as a whole is often regarded as the easier of the protracted conflicts within the OSCE region to solve, but people have been saying that for a long time and it is still unresolved.

Responding to a question on the role of the international community as arbitrator and mediator, Fouéré referred to the Ohrid Framework Agreement of 2001, saying that it was basically imposed by the EU and NATO, and was a bitter pill to swallow by the parties at the time but they all signed. But while in some cases the international community can act as an arbitrator or facilitator no conflict resolution is the same.

The issue of the economy was raised as a factor in peace processes. Stiglmayer pointed out the significance of the economic reconstruction programme from the beginning of the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Fouéré pointed out the differences in the Northern Ireland and Transdniestrian cases. In Northern Ireland the process was to end the conflict and the

violence whereas in Transdniestria there is no violence – there has been one fatality in the last 20 years. So the pressure to find a settlement for this conflict is currently an economic one in his view – with average incomes under 100 euros a month, this is one of the poorest areas in Europe. Transdniestria is a society that lives on subsidies from Russia, he said. He suggested a way forward might be to encourage civil society and the academic community to do a study on the economic advantages of integration as opposed to the status quo, to see whether people would be better served by change, rather than by the status quo.

Fouéré was asked whether there was a need for politicians and the media to explain that the implementation of a solution could take more than ten years, looking at the Northern Ireland example, or South Africa – perhaps even 50 years or several generations. Fouéré responded that the biggest mistake people make in post-conflict peace processes is to think that once an agreement is signed then everybody can go home. He said that the cases of Northern Ireland and in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia show that implementation is just as important – if not more important – than the agreements themselves. It would be a mistake, he added, to question the actual agreement by the fact that the implementation is not working, which is often a question of leadership.

Murray added that one of the strengths of the Northern Ireland peace process was the fact that big personalities, who had stood for certain points of view for so long had all signed the same document, which gave it more force. He also pointed out that the difference in the Northern Ireland case is that it happened in a western democracy, and that made a difference in terms of the solution. He also pointed out that by the 1980s there was a whole generation of professionals – lawyers, doctors, accountants – from the Catholic working class graduating from Queens University in Belfast that had been established as a Protestant university. He said that “it is very difficult to throw bricks at someone you have lunch with”, and although this aspect is rarely mentioned, in his view, this societal change made a significant contribution to the peace process.

Session II.

New media in conflict resolution: challenges and opportunities

Introduction

Getting past the considerable hype about the role of new and social media in social change – when talking about the real impact of Twitter in the Arab Spring, for example, or the role of e-diplomacy in “21st century statecraft” – is the first hurdle in trying to discuss the challenges and opportunities presented by social media in conflict resolution and peace-building. This session aimed to arrive at a more nuanced picture of what is known and where further research is needed, how we can improve our understanding with insights gleaned through action on the ground and analysis of the vast data made available through user interaction on social media.

Anand Varghese, Program Specialist from the Center of Innovation for Science, Technology, and Peacebuilding at the United States Institute of Peace, began the discussion by outlining an analytical framework for examining the role of social media. Leonard P. Lidov, the President of Morningside Analytics, speaking on behalf of John Kelly, Founder and Chief Scientist, presented their take on network analysis. Finally, Onnik Krikorian, a journalist and former Global Voices Caucasus Regional Editor, presented his work in the South Caucasus using new and social media to encourage cross-border communication and co-operation between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. The session was moderated by Frane Maroevic, Deputy Spokesperson of the OSCE.

New media and peacebuilding: framing the discussion

Anand Varghese

Over the last ten years or so, the information and communication technology revolution has created fundamental changes in various sectors – in journalism, in international business, etc. The same is true for the field of conflict management. The transformations in the field of peacebuilding are due to one simple but profound reality: with the advent of mobile phones, crowdsourced mapping tools, technology-enabled social networks and “new media”, we have all become media-makers for a global audience. With the push of a button, conflict-affected populations can send information – images, video, text – around the world, leading to a significant increase in the sheer amount of raw information available, often in real-time, about events on the ground during ongoing conflict. This increase in information flows has transformed conflict zones from areas once dominated by the “fog of war” to regions of information surplus. Recent events in the Middle East, from the Arab Spring to the conflict in Gaza, reinforce the notion that today’s conflicts are conducted, documented and understood, at least in part, through a new media lens.

In this context, the challenge before conflict management professionals today is to harness these changes more purposefully. These efforts have taken various forms. Some programmes train local peacebuilders, activists and journalists to use new media in community-level peacebuilding. Large-scale policy priorities such as the “Internet Freedom” agenda are rooted in the idea that a free, open and widely accessible new media environment can catalyze large-scale social change in the direction of peace, democracy and stability. While it can be argued that such policy priorities are worth pursuing for their own sake, the fact remains that we are still in early days in our understanding of the causal role that new media play in these complex social and political phenomena. There are various attempts by governments, academics and others to come to a more rigorous understanding of mechanisms that tie new media to large-scale social change in the world. This article argues for a three-pronged approach to these questions: firstly, questions and hypotheses around new media’s role in large-scale social change need to be posed within a nuanced analytical framework. Second, quantitative tools to analyze the large datasets that emerge from new media need to be incorporated into these efforts. Finally, these initiatives demand that we engage the corporate sector in our work.

Creating a nuanced analytical framework

Conflict is a result of complex human systems – political, social and cultural. When done well, this theme of complexity forms the underpinning for all peacebuilding efforts, and it must also inform how we approach the role of new media in conflict and social change. Until recently, many of the discussions and debates in this area were defined by two camps: the so-called “cyber-skeptics” and “cyber-optimists”.¹ One camp was confident that new media would usher in a wave of global

1 These camps are perhaps best exemplified by two analysts: Clay Shirky and Evgeny Morozov. Shirky, New York University professor and author of *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations* (Penguin, 2008), hailed the power of new media technologies to fuel democratic and peaceful change around the world, while Morozov, a former Belarusian democracy activist, was far more skeptical, as outlined in his book *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (PublicAffairs, 2011). Their public disagreements were often aired in the very same web spaces they were describing: http://neteffect.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/01/15/picking_a_fight_with_clay_shirky (Evgeny Morozov, “Picking a Fight with Clay Shirky”, *Foreign Policy*, 15 January 2011).

dissent and democratic change, while the other argued that these tools would simply create another arena for authoritarian repression. But in order to be skeptical or optimistic about the power of social media to create change, it became clear that this dualistic framework needed to be revised.

There have been various attempts to create a more nuanced analytical framework within which we can posit questions, hypotheses and lines of inquiry in this regard. One that has gained fairly wide cachet recently is the report *Blogs & Bullets: New Media in Contentious Politics*. Authored primarily by scholars from George Washington University in Washington, DC, the report lays out five levels of analysis that should inform the way we analyze the causal links between new media and social change.²

The first level is at the level of the individual. Are new media creating changes at this level? How are new media improving the competencies of individual activists or ordinary citizens in engaging the public sphere or demanding change? Perhaps new media are succeeding in creating new spaces where individuals are able to access news, information or tools that spur changes in knowledge, attitudes or behaviour.

At the second level of analysis, we are urged to scrutinize when new media have succeeded (and failed) in facilitating better inter-group relations. In 1891, the AT&T chief engineer and *Electrical Review* writer John J. Carty wrote: "Someday we will build up a world telephone system, making necessary to all peoples the use of a common language or common understanding of languages, which will join all the people of the earth into one brotherhood. There will be heard throughout the earth a great voice coming out of the ether which will proclaim, 'Peace on earth, good will towards men'".³ Indeed, at various communication epochs – the printing press, radio, television, etc. – people have predicted that they would lead to the breakdown of various social barriers – ethnic, political, national, etc. The same goes for new media. Efforts like Facebook's Peace.Facebook.com page have documented how the website has facilitated connections between communities who have a history of conflict between them – Israelis and Palestinians, Indians and Pakistanis, etc. This is perhaps the first step in showing how new media are creating spaces for intergroup relationships to develop. Similarly, work coming out of MIT's SaxeLab, headed by Dr. Rebecca Saxe, is showing how cross-cultural communication, both online and offline, can create change in people's attitudes towards other groups.⁴

Thirdly, have social media helped civil society groups and others overcome the high collective action costs associated with protests, demonstrations and other forms of mass participation, especially in repressive environments? Much has been made of "Twitter revolutions" and other instances of the use of new media tools to organize activists and co-ordinate protests. While this has certainly been the case in certain instances, there are numerous other attempts that have fallen short of their goals, or worse, led to government crackdowns. Popular skeptics, such as Malcolm Gladwell, have made the argument that social movements need more conventional tools of organizing than those provided by new media.⁵ Others like Phil Howard argue that social media were critical in spreading "both the discontent and inspiring stories of success from Tunisia across North Africa and into the Middle East".⁶ Activists tend to agree with him. Ahed Al Hendi, a representative of the CyberDissidents.org group in Syria has said that "social media

2 Sean Aday et al, *Blogs and Bullets: New Media in Contentious Politics*, United States Institute of Peace, September 2010. <http://www.usip.org/publications/blogs-and-bullets-new-media-in-contentious-politics>

3 "Imagining the Internet", Elon University School of Communications, <http://www.elon.edu/e-web/predictions/150/1870.xhtml>

4 "The Power of Being Heard", McGovern Institute for Brain Research at MIT, 15 March 2012, <http://mcgovern.mit.edu/newsroom/press-release-archive/554-the-power-of-being-heard>

5 Malcolm Gladwell, "Small Change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted," *The New Yorker*, 4 October 2010. http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell?currentPage=all

6 Philip Howard, "Digital Media and the Arab Spring", Reuters, 16 February 2011 <http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2011/02/16/digital-media-and-the-arab-spring/>

and internet in Syria helped us mobilize and build campaigns”.⁷ Regardless, new media as tools for organizing, which have gained considerable cachet in the last few years, is a critical level of analysis in this regard and it must be understood more fully.

Fourthly, how are regimes reacting to these phenomena? Scholars like Evgeny Morozov have dismissed the Internet as yet another sphere where repressive autocrats can track and control their critics and opponents. While this is no doubt a reality in certain places, regimes are not uniformly willing or able to use new media to their advantage. Are they reacting like Egypt did during the Arab Spring – shutting down the networks? Are they trying to co-opt or subvert these new media spaces, like Russia and China? Or are they ham-handed, and unable to cope with the flow of online conversations? Rami Nakhla, a leader of Syria’s Local Coordination Committees commented that activists are “overwhelming the regime” with the size and scope of new media content.⁸

Finally, are new media doing little more than affecting international attention to events on the ground? Are the hashtags that are emerging from these conflict zones simply feeding Western audiences? And conversely, how much are local audiences actually able to access and use the information being shared via new media? For example, new data about Tweets associated with the Arab Spring’s most popular hashtags – such as Egypt’s #jan25 – were mostly consumed by audiences outside the region, rather than by local citizens.⁹ While this does not diminish the role of social media, it does warn us against confusing international attention with local influence.

Each of these five levels, while useful in their own right, also provide ways of thinking about the effects of new media *across* levels. For example, shifts in competencies and attitudes of key individuals may facilitate a greater chance of improved inter-group relations or collective action. International scrutiny might stay the hand of a violent regime. Overall, the five-level framework provides us a rich construct from which we can pose more nuanced questions and hypotheses in our efforts to apply new media in peacebuilding.

Harnessing new media data

Having laid out an analytical framework for this field, the next challenge lies in harnessing the vast amounts of data that are emerging from new media users. The good news is that our tools for extracting insight from these data are steadily improving. “Big data” analytics has become a buzzword, with private sector companies using data from social media for everything from predicting stock market trends to improving Internet marketing. In the field of peacebuilding, these data analysis tools can also help us answer important questions that face our field. There are probably too many tools out there to mention, but some like Morningside Analytics’ link analysis, MIT’s Media Cloud tool and work being done by MemeTracker are all being applied to research in this area. Other tools show similar potential. The Social Media Research Foundation’s NodeXL is an open source network visualization and analysis tool that supports social network analysis by allowing users to import information from social media and analyzing graph data, performing advanced network analysis and visual exploration of networks. Threadmill allows researchers to analyze, graph and download data from message board postings. OpenCalais, a tool created by Thomas Reuters, extracts semantic information from web pages and identifies events, facts, people and entities in the text.

These are just a few examples, but quantitative analysis tools at the nexus of social network analysis, natural language processing, content analysis and related fields are all bound to help researchers and decision-makers in this field. However, with all of these tools, it is vital that we

7 Ahed al Hendi, speaking in public at the US Institute of Peace, 2 October 2012, <http://www.usip.org/events/groundtruth-new-media-technology-and-the-syria-crisis>

8 Rami Nakhla, speaking in public at the US Institute of Peace, 2 October 2012, <http://www.usip.org/events/groundtruth-new-media-technology-and-the-syria-crisis>

9 Sean Aday et al, *Blogs and Bullets II: New Media and Conflict after the Arab Spring*, US Institute of Peace, July 2012, <http://www.usip.org/publications/blogs-and-bullets-ii-new-media-and-conflict-after-the-arab-spring>

remain aware of the limitations of new media data analysis. These tools will have to be supplemented by useful qualitative research to flesh out our picture of realities on the ground. Further, in many places, especially conflict zones, access to social media and other digital communication tools is often the preserve of the urban elite, a fact that could skew data and the insights it provides. Regardless, the potential for quantitative data analysis to aid our cause is clear.

Engaging the private sector

During 2009's post-election protests in Iran, Jared Cohen, an official at the US State Department, famously requested that Twitter postpone its site maintenance to allow Iranian protestors to continue to use the #IranElection hashtag to rally people to their cause. There are serious doubts as to whether this was of any use to the protestors in Tehran, but the incident marked an important engagement of the private sector by outside actors who wanted to influence events on the ground through new media. In answering questions about new media's role in conflict, this engagement will be critical. This is due to two important reasons: firstly, the large datasets that we hope to harness for research are the basis of the business model for many social media companies. We can't hope to get access to this data without engaging the owners of this data as partners. Secondly, new media spaces extend beyond the sovereign limits of state authority, raising ethical questions about how these datasets will be used, who "owns" data, etc. These are important issues, especially at a time when users are growing increasingly wary about their privacy on social media, and when governments are making more and more demands on companies like Google to provide them their users' data.¹⁰ There are signs that private sector actors are willing to "play ball" in this regard, though current efforts to address these tensions, such as the Global Network Initiative, are yet to have a significant impact.¹¹ Absent some large-scale effort to address these issues, they likely will continue to dog any effort to conduct data-driven analysis of new media, however benign its origins may be.

In conclusion

There are a number of questions and issues that lie before us in this area. Much progress has been made through a combination of good scholarship, quantitative analysis, policy-making and private sector engagement. But much more remains to be done before we fully understand new media's role in social change around the world. These efforts will depend on our ability to create more nuanced analytical frameworks, use sophisticated data tools and engage the technology companies as partners in this effort. The need for these approaches go beyond the academic community. They will be useful for the government policy-maker and for other peacebuilding professionals. Ultimately, they will help us fully harness new media's potential for peacebuilding.

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10 "Spike in government surveillance of Google", BBC, 13 November 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-20319505>

11 Larry Downs, "Why no one will join the Global Network Initiative", *Forbes*, 30 March 2011, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/larry-downes/2011/03/30/why-no-one-will-join-the-global-network-initiative/>

“Cyber-social” geography

John Kelly

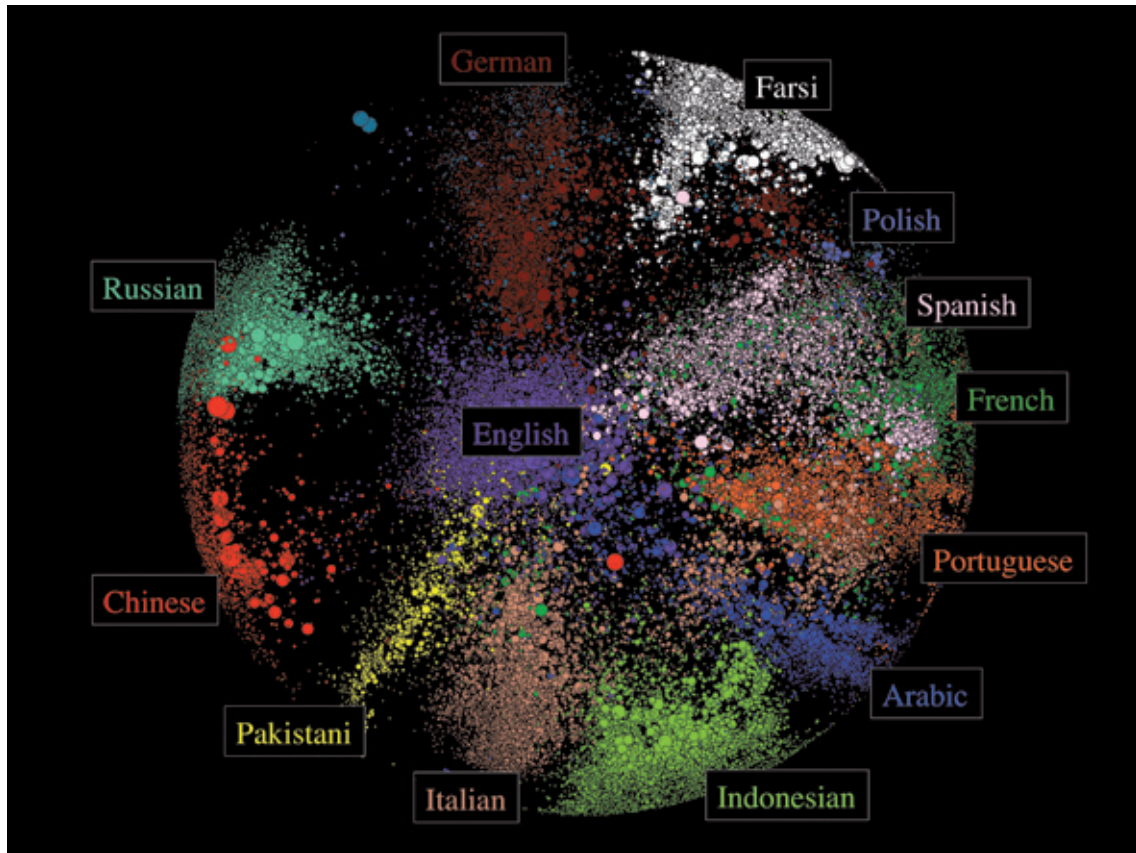
Social media networks have meaningful and somewhat stable macro-structural topologies, which constitute a kind of terrain subject to mapping and dimensional analysis. This mapped topology may be overlaid and correlated with all manner of temporal, semantic, demographic, geo-location and other data.

Key sets of actors can be discovered within societies, their influence measured and communications strategies profiled. Transnational analysis reveals the regional and global flow of ideas within social media. Because participants in social media have physical locations, social media structural topology is inherently related to geographic topography. Some cyber-social network features are tied strongly to geographic locations, others are not. Therefore one might view “sociocultural terrain” as organized into two intersecting planes: geographic and cyber-social.

Following are some examples of social media network maps. In these maps, every dot is an author. The position is the result of a physics model algorithm in which linked authors are drawn closer to each other, revealing the overall structure of influence. The colours represent “attentive clusters” of authors who link to similar people and content. Qualitative analysis is performed to label the clusters and interpret the map.

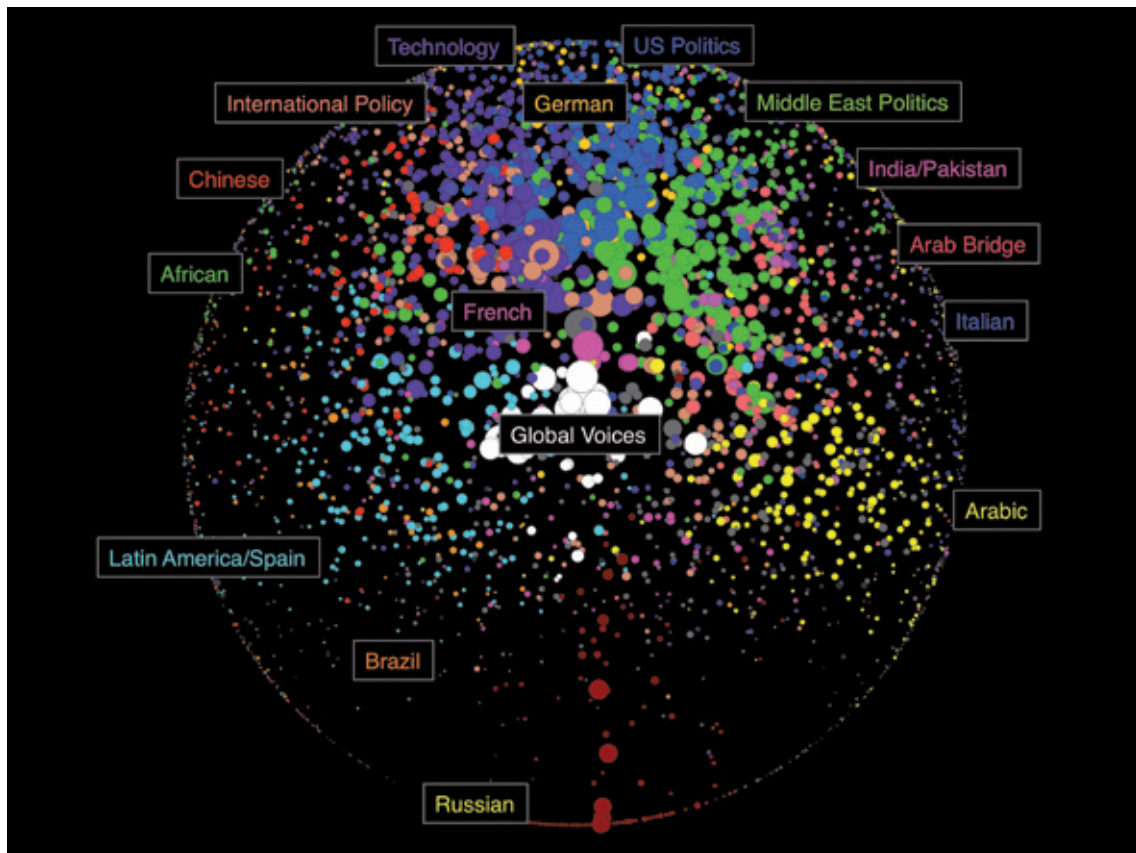
John Kelly is the founder and Chief Scientist of Morningside Analytics. His research blends Social Network Analysis, content analysis, and statistics to solve the problem of making complex online networks visible and understandable.

Global Blogosphere



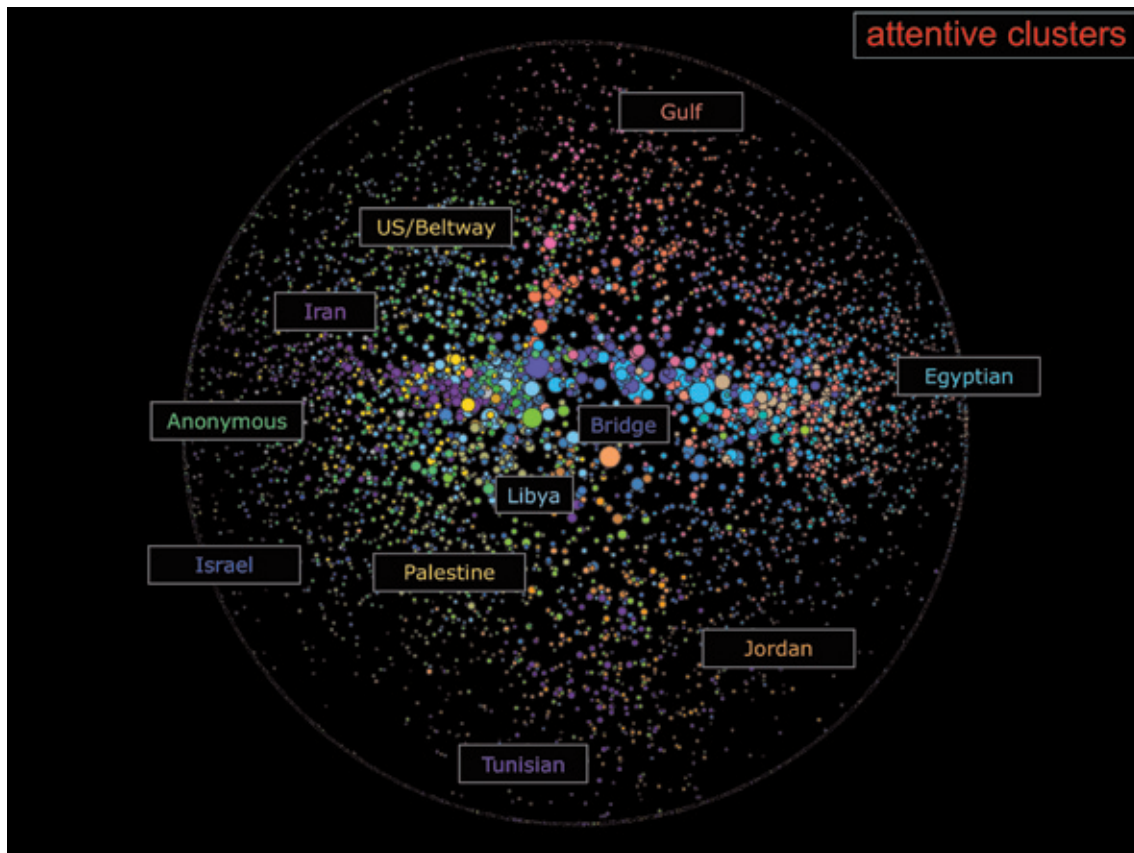
This map shows a network of over 150,000 top blogs in 13 major blogging languages. Each language is shown in a different colour. The key finding is that the English language is distinctly positioned at the core of the network. The vast majority of links from one language to another are to or from English, making it the crossroads of global online influence.

Global Voices Online



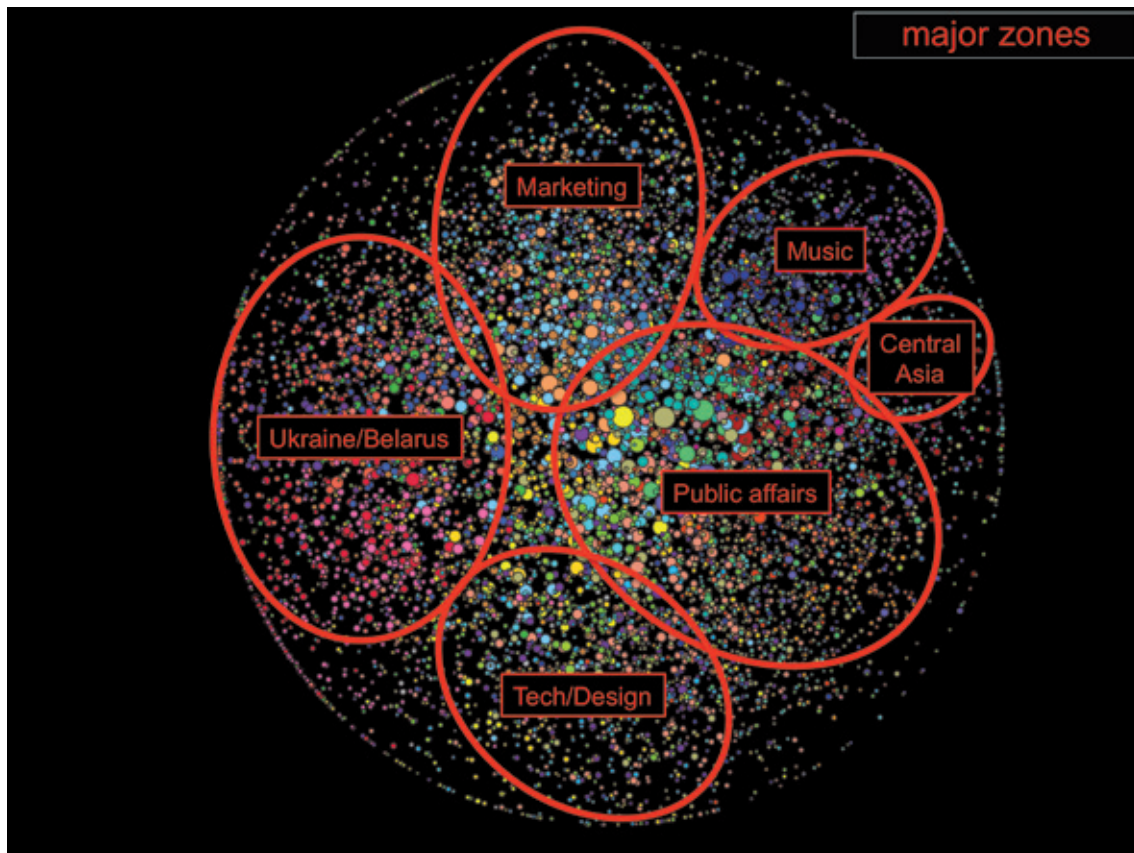
Global Voices Online, an international volunteer blogging organization, acts as a key point of transnational online information flow. Here we see a map of all blogs that cited Global Voices in 2011. At the centre are URLs associated with Global Voices, and around the edges are thousands of blogs in various languages which are connected through the work of this small but influential organization.

Arab Spring Twitter



This map shows the network of Twitter accounts active in the early months of Arab Spring, using several dozen related topical hashtags. Mainly Arabic-speaking Egyptian clusters are seen to the right, Tunisian and Jordanian at bottom, and Gulf/Saudi at top. At left are a number of English accounts, including US “Beltway insiders” focused on American politics and foreign policy, several Mideast-focused clusters and a cluster associated with the online collective “Anonymous.” At the centre of the map, connecting these various constituencies, are a number of mainly Arab trans-national elite authors, including many prominent Arab bloggers writing in English.

Russian Twitter



This map of Russian language Twitter shows the diversity of active communities both in Russia and across the former Soviet world. Key zones include culture, technology and design, and politics. Specific clusters associated with Ukraine, Belarus and Central Asian countries are also highly active. In its composition, the Russian Twitter network closely mirrors the vibrant Russian blogosphere, one of the most active and culturally rich social media networks in the world.

Online communication in conflict zones: a case study from the South Caucasus

Onnik Krikorian

More than 18 years have passed since a 1994 ceasefire agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan put the conflict over the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh on hold, but a lasting peace remains elusive. The war fought in the early 1990s left over 25,000 dead and forced a million to flee their homes, leaving Armenian-backed forces in control of just over 16 per cent of Azerbaijan. But despite often being referred to as a “frozen conflict,” skirmishes on the Line of Contact (LOC) separating the two sides have claimed over 3,000 lives since the armistice. So concerning is the situation that the International Crisis Group (ICG) last year warned of the risk of a new “accidental war” breaking out.¹

“An arms race, escalating front-line clashes, vitriolic war rhetoric and a virtual breakdown in peace talks are increasing the chance Armenia and Azerbaijan will go back to war over Nagorno Karabakh,” the ICG report concluded. “To start reversing this dangerous downward trend, the opposing sides should sign a document on basic principles for resolving the conflict peacefully and undertake confidence-building steps to reduce tensions and avert a resumption of fighting. [...] Monitoring mechanisms should be strengthened and confidence-building steps implemented to decrease the chance of an accidental war.”

The situation is, perhaps, not uncommon for many conflicts, but what makes the Nagorno Karabakh dispute even more volatile is the almost constant rhetoric of militarism and hatred from both sides. Moreover, two decades after the 1991-4 war broke out, a new generation of Armenians and Azerbaijanis have been raised, unable to remember the time when both lived side by side in peace. The situation has been made even more problematic given that neither side can communicate with the other through traditional means. Armenians cannot visit Azerbaijan and vice versa, while telecommunications from Azerbaijan to Armenia are blocked.

The sum result of this lack of people-to-people contact was highlighted by the results of a 2009 Household Survey² by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) which found that 70 per cent of Armenians were against forming friendships with Azerbaijanis. On the other side of the LOC, the situation was even bleaker, with 97 per cent of Azerbaijanis disapproving of friendship with Armenians. In contrast, just 16-17 per cent of Georgians said they were against friendship with Russians, Abkhazians and South Ossetians despite the more recent – albeit short-lived – August 2008 Russia-Georgia war.

The conflict has also become an inseparable part of internal political rhetoric in both countries with Armenia’s last president, Robert Kocharian, for example, publicly declaring in 2003 that Armenians and Azerbaijanis were “ethnically incompatible” and could never live together again. Meanwhile, his Azerbaijani counterpart, incumbent President Ilham Aliyev, regularly threatens a new war to take back Karabakh by force. Regional analysts fear that such threats are not merely empty words. Fueled by massive oil revenue, the Azerbaijani military is rapidly re-arming

1 *Armenia and Azerbaijan: Preventing War* (International Crisis Group 2011).

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/media-releases/2011/europe/armenia-and-azerbaijan-preventing-war.aspx>

2 *Caucasus Barometer* (CRRC 2009).



Two participants of a Free Press Unlimited workshop for which the author was a co-trainer saw cross-border teams of Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Georgians document life in border villages in the conflict zones. Social media and other online platforms will be the main medium for distributing and viewing the resulting multimedia work. Social media is also used for collaborative working and communication. Photo: Onnik Krikorian 2012

itself, with Armenia following suit to a lesser extent, and the August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia over South Ossetia has already served as a wake-up call.

In such a situation, any hope for reconciliation looks bleak, especially when the local media on both sides regularly perpetuates negative stereotypes of the “enemy”, often publishing little more than propaganda and in some cases even misinformation. “Without more accurate and unbiased information [...] free of negative rhetoric and stereotypes, Armenians and Azerbaijanis will continue to see themselves as enemies without any common ground,” a 2008 report³ on the local media by CRRC opined, and the situation has not changed in the three years since.

Many place the blame for the situation in both Armenia and Azerbaijan on the lack of political will in both countries to resolve the conflict and make the compromises necessary for a lasting peace, but in a blog post marking International Peace Day, the Senior Caucasus Program Officer for IKV Pax Christi made another very poignant point⁴: “If the current situation is for about 99 percent to blame on the regimes in Armenia and Azerbaijan [...] what about the remaining 1 or 2 percent? That is the people themselves, and especially ‘civil society,’ the organized part of society that could (or ought to) function as a counterweight to their own authorities. But they don’t.”

“During the height of the war over Nagorno Karabakh in the 90s, civil society activists played a key role in ending the war,” Guido de Graaf Bierbrauwer continued. “They organized cross-border Peace Caravans, arranged the exchange of Prisoners of War, helped the Red Cross identify

3 *Armenian and Azerbaijani International News Coverage – Empirical Findings and Recommendations for Improvement*, (CRRC 2008). http://www.epfound.am/files/mb_fg_report_finalized_edited_12.27.2008.doc

4 “21 September 2012 – a good day for the birth of a new peace movement in the South Caucasus”, Mountains of Peace 2012. <http://mountainsofpeace.wordpress.com/2012/09/13/21-september-2012-a-good-day-for-the-birth-of-a-new-peace-movement-in-the-south-caucasus/>

Missing Persons. Of course times changed, and – thank god – the region is not in a situation of full war yet. Still the deep question I am struggling with right now [...] is [...] WHERE IS THE PEACE MOVEMENT IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS? What’s up with the silence?”

But, although the numbers remain low, there has at least been promising activity in terms of cross-border communication and contact between some Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Interestingly, social networking sites such as Facebook have played an important role. This became particularly noticeable from July 2009, when two video blogging youth activists, Adnan Hajizade and Emin Mili, were detained and imprisoned in Azerbaijan for “hooliganism”, a charge which many international human rights groups and bodies considered politically motivated. As a result, some Armenians and Azerbaijani activists began to make contact via online intermediaries – such as this author.

The birth of online activism in the South Caucasus

Following their arrest, Hajizade and Milli’s supporters naturally used social networking sites such as Facebook to campaign for their release. Spreading networks wide in order to disseminate information and updates, there were obviously risks involved, especially as activists could be monitored if privacy was compromised, but the important thing for them was the potential impact that Facebook could have in the campaign to release the two men. And, as international awareness of their plight increased before their unexpected conditional release in November 2010, they were proved right.

Despite the inherent risks, there is no doubt that connecting people is something that Facebook excels at. True, this isn’t always the case, with nationalists from both sides also online, but as Facebook is primarily “social,” spreading hate speech can result in users having their accounts suspended. Although Facebook groups are different and often tend towards politically or racially motivated abuse, personal Facebook pages at least provided a rare space for some Armenian and Azerbaijani activists to communicate and share information on life and the situation in both their countries.

In such a context, even “liking” a photograph or openly wishing someone from the other side a happy birthday proved revolutionary, breaking stereotypes and re-humanizing the “enemy”. Simply put, after a period of virtual trust building and overcoming stereotypes, a space for dialogue was finally created for some at least. Even on a small scale, such interactions directly challenge the very basis on which isolation from each other is justified by political forces. Given the restrictions on normal telecommunications, Skype can also be considered invaluable here, and sooner or later, networking not only spreads, but also becomes “acceptable” and “routine.”

Nevertheless, some critics argue that since one of the key attributes of Facebook is that it is a social networking site, rather than extending connections, it simply replicates those to be found in the real world. Such concerns are valid, of course, but they overlook the fact that Facebook is a tool with strengths and weaknesses determined by how it is used. Its potential as a medium for cross-border communication should also be evaluated in the context of fairly ethnically homogenous countries with no other possibilities for communication.

Of course, that hasn’t stopped some nationalists from reacting against the establishment of cross-border connections on social network sites.

“The reason why the KGB wants you to join Facebook is because it allows them to, first of all, learn more about you from afar,” Evgeny Morozov, author of *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, says, arguing that the Internet is just as important a tool for governments to engage in mass surveillance and political repression and for nationalists to spread extremist propaganda: “They don’t have to [...] interrogate you, and obviously you disclose quite a bit. It allows them to identify certain social graphs and social connections between activists.”⁵

5 “‘Authoritarian Governments Have Immensely Benefited From The Web,’ Author Says”, RFE/RL 2011. http://www.rferl.org/content/interview_morozov_internet_democracy_promotion/2284105.html



Despite some success in using social media for cross-border communication and co-operation, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) tools have not yet been fully deployed by international organizations and civil society groups. There is still much potential – for example, to map minefields and cross-border violations. Photo: Onnik Krikorian 2006

In Azerbaijan, where activists have been harassed or imprisoned because of their Facebook activity, there have already been some attempts to discredit dissidents because of their communication with Armenians. On 1 March, for example, the online news site Qaynar.Info published the names of prominent opposition and alternative voices in Azerbaijan who had Armenians listed as “friends” on their Facebook pages. Responses to the piece from youth activists in Azerbaijan were furious, viewing the article as a further attempt to discredit social networks and to shame “enemies of the state.”⁶

Remarkably, none of those named deleted their Armenian connections, with the main obstacles to popularizing the use of social media in cross-border connections more practical. Eventually, after a short burst in activity, the number of new connections eventually begins to taper off because those Armenians and Azerbaijanis involved tend to be few in number and also quite similar. They are perhaps already liberal and cosmopolitan, and were anyway inclined towards communication if the possibility existed.

At a 2010 seminar, “Blogs and Bullets: Evaluating the Impact of New Media on Conflict”, at the U.S. Institute of Peace, there was perhaps more criticism of how Facebook sometimes polarizes connections on national, social and political grounds. Ethan Zuckerman, an American technology researcher, terms the phenomena “imaginary cosmopolitanism”,⁷ but even so, in the context of Armenia-Azerbaijan relations it has become an incredibly valuable resource – for now,

6 “Azerbaijan: Blowing Up in Their Facebook”, Transitions Online 2011.
<http://www.tol.org/client/article/22231-blowing-up-in-their-facebook.html?print>

7 Does Facebook unite us or divide us?, CNN 2010.
http://articles.cnn.com/2010-08-03/opinion/zuckerman.facebook.global_1_facebook-users-service-friends?_s=PM:OPINION

at least. While the Internet can be used to perpetuate conflict, it can also be used to promote dialogue, discussion and debate.

But, while some users on both sides now have access to information and opinions they never had before, there is the need to spread the net wider. Illustrative of this is the fact that while existing Armenian-Azerbaijani connections number in their hundreds, at time of writing there are actually 345,300 Facebook users, or 11.64 per cent of the population, in Armenia and 899,560, or 10.83 per cent, in Azerbaijan, according to Facebook metrics site Socialbakers. Moreover, only a small percentage of users online speak English and most live in the capitals rather than the regions.

It now remains to be seen whether these developments continue and grow, or if those opposed to peace instead attempt to drown out the voices of anyone who suggests anything contrary to the official line.

Online communication

Unfortunately, most NGOs have largely failed to use these new tools to their fullest potential or even at all, leaving it up to individuals and grassroots initiatives to do so instead, but their worth is already clear. Not only do they offer a remarkable opportunity to reach out, but they are also the only way for participants of cross-border projects to remain in contact once they return to their respective countries. They also offer the possibility to reach out to potential participants for cross-border projects well beyond the “usual suspects” and “closed circles” that often define civil society initiatives.

Again, however, it is important to note that the use of such tools in the present environment is not without risk or problems, especially when the situation on the ground can change suddenly and unexpectedly, as was the case at the end of August 2012 with the extradition of Ramil Safarov from Hungary to Azerbaijan, which reportedly led to a rise in nationalist sentiment in Armenia.⁸

Can conflict be resolved on Facebook?

As already mentioned, and despite the potential, online tools such as Facebook have failed to reach most citizens. Another survey⁹ conducted by CRRC for USAID, Internews, and the Eurasia Partnership Foundation, found that while 90 per cent of respondents in Armenia relied on television as the main source of news and information, only 7 per cent used the Internet in the same way. Moreover, 79 per cent said they never accessed social networking sites for news and 84 per cent said the same for online media sites. Nevertheless, of those that did use the Internet, 65 per cent used social networking sites.

Even so, 83 per cent of those respondents also said they never used social networking sites to share or discuss political opinions or news items.

Indeed, of those active online, few seek out alternative information or opinions on sensitive matters such as the Karabakh conflict and when they do the tendency is to follow the official line. As an example, one Facebook Question – a feature to create and distribute online polls to Facebook users now being phased out – asking “Who does Nagorno Karabakh belong to?” had only two possible answers to choose from – Armenia or Azerbaijan. Obviously, the question had only one intention – to see which side could attract the most votes even if it changed nothing on the ground. There were no other options, not even “Don’t Know.”

That said, one enterprising Azerbaijani activist currently living in the United States did try another approach by asking what was the most effective solution for resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. There were more varied options to choose from and even some interesting responses from Facebook users, ranging from the need to force the governing regimes to democratize to

8 *Azeri killer Ramil Safarov: Concern over Armenian anger.* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-19463968>

9 *Alternative Resources in the Media*, (CRRC 2011). <http://www.crrc.am/index.php/en/169>



Photographs also have the ability to show similarities between the two ethnic groups. This photograph of an ethnic Azeri Novruz in Marneuli, Georgia, not only depicts an instrument – zurna – played also by Armenians, but was taken in a town co-inhabited by ethnic Armenians and a majority ethnic Azeri population. Photo: Onnik Krikorian 2011

creating a regional federation. However, while 52,118 took part in the first more nationalist poll, only 1,153 took part in the second.

It therefore comes as no surprise that any hopes that the Nagorno Karabakh conflict can be resolved online are clearly misplaced; but on the other hand it does demonstrate that social networking and new tools can at least result in some kind of discussion among much smaller groups otherwise deprived of a voice or medium to do so. Certainly, such tools can contribute to the peace and reconciliation process, and for some in Armenia and Azerbaijan they are doing just that, but they need to be combined with other more traditional initiatives and approaches on all levels.

Caucasus Conflict Voices

For now, the use of social media is in its infancy, but this writer's own experience with using the medium to establish cross-border connections between Armenians and Azerbaijanis has proven extremely positive in the context of the Karabakh conflict. Even so, it first started with physical contacts made in person in Tbilisi in July 2008 and evolved from there to include hundreds of individuals online. Moreover, not only have the main NGOs working on cross-border dialogue projects requested those contacts for their own initiatives, but the main projects involving new and social media have emerged from it.

Online collaborations, such as one involving Azerbaijani journalists to document examples of Armenian-Azerbaijani coexistence in neighbouring Georgia as well as training events for Armenian and Azerbaijani activists and journalists, have followed in third countries, while Georgian NGOs are interested in using Caucasus Conflict Voices, the working name for the initiative, as

a model for similar cross-border communication with Abkhazians and South Ossetians. Combining blog posts with open communication and cross-border networking via social media, Caucasus Conflict Voices has focused in particular on providing a platform for alternative voices to be heard.

“We hear far too little of what I call this ‘third narrative’ of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, a narrative of peace,” wrote Black Garden author and the Carnegie Endowment for Peace’s Thomas de Waal.¹⁰ “It spins the idea that the two peoples are capable of getting along fine, have lived together in the past and, if politicians are able to overcome differences on the Karabakh conflict, can live together in the future. [... Caucasus Conflict Voices] has given a voice to these alternative points of view and given a vivid picture of the different and much more positive Armenian-Azerbaijani reality that still exists in ordinary people [...].”

Indeed, the experience shows that once trust is established through such online activity, it is possible for the citizens of both countries to form relationships, and for journalists and activists to check facts, share information, and work together online.

Nevertheless, aside from emerging privacy and personal security concerns with the use of social media worldwide, as well as the pressing need to reach a much larger audience in the Caucasus, it is important to remember that these new tools are just that. “[...] the internet is not magic; it is a tool,” *The Economist* wrote¹¹ about Caucasus Conflict Voices, referring to its start happening through a personal meeting in a third country between this writer and Azerbaijani bloggers. “Anyone who wants to use it to bring nations closer together has to show initiative, and be ready to travel physically as well as virtually. As with the telegraph before it—also hailed as a tool of peace—the internet does nothing on its own.”

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10 Introduction by Thomas de Waal, *Caucasus Conflict Voices*, 2011. http://peace.oneworld.am/conflict_voices_may_2011.html

11 “A Cyber-House Divided”, *The Economist*, 2010. <http://www.economist.com/node/16943885>

Rapporteurs' report, session II

The moderator began the discussion by asking whether people only use social media to connect with friends, peers, people with the same interests, or are they looking for alternative opinions or voices. There is also the question of whether so-called social media revolutions are largely involving North American and Western European audiences, or are they reaching people in the Arab Spring and other parts of the world. Issues concerning Internet freedom – a priority of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the Irish OSCE Chairmanship – were also raised.

Connecting the discussion to the morning session and Denis Murray's assertion that the role of media is to report the truth, the moderator addressed the role of social media in "getting the truth out" – who is being trusted, who is seen as reliable and what does it mean to have a multiplicity of voices?

Onnik Krikorian said there was a need to identify what is reliable information on the Internet, and that although he discussed the positive sides of new and social media he was also well aware that a number of people in Armenia and Azerbaijan are using these tools to wage an information war.

Leonard Lidov highlighted another tool that is being used to bridge the gap in parts of the world where there aren't as many people connected by the Internet, namely cell phones and text messaging, which is being used by NGOs, the private sector for commercial purposes and by governments in propaganda efforts. Facebook is also trying to figure out how to make its service more accessible via text messaging.

An audience member raised the increasing practice of mainstream media to quote Twitter, for example in reporting on the Arab Spring, and asked whether there is a credibility problem if a lot of the hashtags weren't necessarily from people in the conflict, or only from those who speak English.

Anand Varghese said that the Internet had started with almost no credibility as far as news was concerned, and now the BBC not only drew from social media but had created protocols of how it took information from social media and how it validated and vetted it. Al Jazeera has an entire programme called "The Stream" that looks only at social media. So the connections have increased and the credibility of those sources has also increased. He said he thought the trend was in the right direction but that he still wouldn't necessarily believe something until somebody at the BBC said it.

Krikorian gave the example of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict breaking out on Twitter a few months ago, with people claiming that war had actually started, and that particular towns had been taken, without verifying through the BBC or Russian media. But he was also encouraged to see that there were also people who were saying that it was not true, and that information needed to be verified. He added that it was also encouraging to see mainstream media such as Agence France Presse regularly quoting bloggers as a good source of alternative views on topics that other people in the region are sometimes too scared to speak about. They verify that the people are genuine, and they build up relations with these sources, like with other sources.

The moderator reiterated a point from the morning session about how viewing figures for television or the BBC go up after people learn about news on Twitter; they turn to traditional media for confirmation.

An audience member highlighted the emphasis on "voice" in the presentations, and asked how one could make the peace-building voices louder than other voices, particularly if people were mainly going to sources with similar interests.

Lidov said that the analysis he presented grouped people with demonstrably similar interests, but the idea that people online tend to seek out similar people – an view expressed by

“hardcore Internet pessimists” who posit that everyone listens to the people they already agree with, so you end up with duelling echo chambers – is becoming a more challenged notion. More recent research shows that people online tend to have more exposure to people with differing views than people who are not connected online. So the jury is still out.

Varghese said that in places like Iraq or Pakistan, it might be too simplistic to state it as a problem of there being violent voices and that peace voices needed to be heard. There needs to be basic journalistic training, how not to use inflammatory language – basics that would be taken as a matter of course in other journalistic environments but aren’t a part of the training or media environment in other places. In many cases it is due to there never having been a free press. So in Egypt, the challenge would be to create a press that isn’t always saying what the government said, because that’s what journalists were used to. That’s what viewers were used to. So training them just to be basically journalists before they are peace journalists is the first challenge.

Krikorian highlighted the difference on social networks, which are by and large “social”. He said that on Facebook he had been spared the sort of abusive comments that you get on a blog or YouTube. Facebook itself also seeks to limit abuse and hostile comments. He added that he has seen in Armenian and Azerbaijani circles that if someone posts, for example, something homophobic, activists will report it as offensive and that person will have their Facebook account suspended. While it is not always the case, Krikorian said that social media means that people have to behave in a different way than they would otherwise in order to be taken seriously.

Regarding making peaceful voices heard, Krikorian cited the quote from Nelson Mandela mentioned in the first session about talking with your enemy. He said in his work he aims to talk to those people who are most opposed to peace – “because if I just talk to people who seem to be open to the idea of peace and they’re just a minority in society, it’s never going to get anywhere further than that”. In this respect social media may be a different forum that allows more discussion and debate than could have existed previously.

Lidov emphasized the trust inherent in friend relationships online, and said that people who can figure out how to make connections between the “interest graphs” and the “social graph” will have the most success in getting their messages heard.

Another audience member asked if the panellists thought the shift in traditional media citing reactions online was creating a less accurate portrayal of the reality of conflicts, given that people online in those places may be more middle class, English speakers.

Varghese said it was a Western concern that it is not getting authentic voices and that the information may not be accurate. With respect to peace-building, what is more relevant to local dynamics is the question of whether these social media users, who may skew towards the middle class in urban areas, are able to engage locally.

Krikorian said that it is important to set such “alternative voices” in context, to make it clear that they are not necessarily representing the entire population but still should be heard.

Lidov discussed using data to get a more nuanced understanding of how to communicate. For example, in trying not to use offensive language there is the problem that you may not even know what would be offensive to people with different views. He cited what is popularly known as the home schooling movement in the US, which is seen as involving people on the religious right who educate their children at home because they do not want them exposed to teaching on sex education or evolution. Morningside Analytics’ quantitative analysis, by examining word pairs, found that people educating their children at home actually call it the “home education movement”, and that by calling it “home schooling” people were identifying themselves as outsiders. Anecdotal exposure may not be sufficient to provide the information you would need to communicate with people with different views.

Introductions and rapporteurs’ reports by Sarah Crozier and Sonya Yee, Press and Public Information Section, OSCE Secretariat

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