

(IN)FORMING CONFLICT PREVENTION,
RESPONSE AND RESOLUTION:



THE ROLE OF MEDIA
IN VIOLENT CONFLICT

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INFOCORE Definitions

Conflict

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INFOCORE DEFINITIONS

CONFLICT

The term conflict is often accompanied by an adjective, such as social, violent, armed, ethnic, etc., to specify what sort of conflict that is pictured. However, on its own, conflict refers to a disagreement, a struggle or an antagonistic state or action. A more specific definition is: “a situation in which actors use conflict behavior against each other to attain incompatible goals and/or to express their hostility” (Bartos and Wehr, 2002, p.22).

If one searches for synonyms for conflict these are: fight, battle, war – terms, yet these terms include a violent element that is not necessarily the case for a conflict as the definition above was proof of. So, whereas violence is not necessarily part of the definition of a conflict, most definitions implicate a confrontation of powers or a distribution of power. Powers can however take many different forms: altruistic and manipulative, coercive and physical and so on. While some powers may be intentional, like assertive or bargaining powers or power directed towards a person’s body, such as force, others may be unintentional or indirect, such as intellectual powers, yet all result in conflict if they clash. Conflict, unlike hostile sentiments which are predispositions to start conflict behaviour, always takes place between at least two persons but can take enormous proportions, when whole states are involved (Rummel, 1976, ch.27). Usually conflicts become more complicated as the number of actors grows, since the risk of misinterpretation, and uncertainty increases.

George Simmel introduced a distinction between two sorts of conflicts: realistic and unrealistic conflicts. The realistic conflict can be resembled to the means needed to achieve an objective. Once the objective is achieved, the conflict ends. An example of this can be secessionist conflicts where a particular part of a state wants independence and autonomy. Once this is achieved, the conflict is usually over. This type of conflict is related to the interests of the actors involved. The second category of conflict, the unrealistic, is contrary to the first, not the means to an end, but the end itself. When young persons from a suburb throw bricks at a bus that passes, changing the object will not avert this conflict, as this is not the main point of the conflict. The young people could for example throw the bricks at a car instead of a bus. For this unrealistic type of conflict, feelings are the central factors animating the conflict. The two sorts of conflicts are often related to each other and may even have a casual relationship. Failure to resolve a realist conflict may for example trigger an unrealistic conflict (Alexandre-Bailly et al. 2006,p.177).

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