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Communication between INGOs and the media in respect to the kidnapping of Aid workers

Submitted by
Meriam ABUELGASIM

Examining Board:

Supervisor: Miss Valerie Gorin
President of the Board: Prof. Gilles Carbonnier
Expert: Ms. Silke Roth

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<tr>
<td>ANSO</td>
<td>Afghanistan NGO Security Office</td>
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<td>GPR8</td>
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<td>GTD</td>
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<td>MSF</td>
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<td>NRC</td>
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1. INTRODUCTION

In the post Cold War era, the world experienced a relative calm that was short lived due to the September 11 attacks in New York (Kallberg et al. 2014, 19). On the 20th of September of 2001, President Bush announced the intentions to engage on a ‘Global War on Terror’ (GWOT). The loosely defined term was immediately put to work with the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 (Altheide 2009, xiv). This had an unprecedented affect on the work of humanitarian aid workers and the locations they would be deployed to in order to provide emergency relief and support, globally, in the following years (Roth 2015, 139), especially on security matters. The recent increase of attacks against humanitarian workers, both national and international, has been “largely attributed to Islamic extremists” (Pires et al. 2016, 3), but has also been the result of political and economic factors (Callimachi 2014) that have culminated in variances in how it has been portrayed in the media. News outlets such as The New York Times, The Telegraph, Associated Press Agency, Al-Jazeera English/Arabic, and The Guardian, have all published articles related to the kidnappings of humanitarian aid workers within the last decade, notably on the notorious kidnapping cases and tragic deaths of their compatriots Peter Kassig (USA), Kayla Mueller (USA), Alan Henning (UK) and Margaret Hassan (UK) to name a few.

Security issues have been present prior to the GWOT, especially since the war in Chechnya during the 1990s, with no real trends in where attacks are more prevalent (Fast 2014, 70). Since 2010 a total of 619 kidnapped and released humanitarian workers have been recorded (AWSD) with a large number remaining unreported. Of 619 victims of kidnapping (not killed), 304 aid workers were male, 37 female and 287 with unknown genders. The statistics for aid workers kidnapped and killed total 67 victims; 37 men, one female and 24 with unknown gender. The countries with the most abundant numbers are Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Sudan, Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen (AWSD, Global Terrorism Database 2016).

In response to this, attempts have been made by various humanitarian organizations to create more dialogue with each other, increasing coordination, accountability and security measures for humanitarian aid workers against kidnapping; however, these incentives have fallen short (Harmer 2008, Stoddard et al. 2006). Multiple elements propose difficulty for one unified approach by all organizations: these incentives are affected by the increasing staff turnover, they impact donor relations, they push to external security contracting and they challenge the humanitarian principle of neutrality (Harmer 2008, Stoddard et al. 2009, Wille 2008). One particular aspect has however remained relatively uncovered: the way humanitarian agencies
communicate about the kidnapping of aid workers, which will be the particular focus of this paper.

Communication is more than ever part of the security strategy adopted by humanitarian organizations, as the media landscape has become globalized since the beginning of the 21st century. Terrorists are able to capitalize on the use of the media through the varying degrees in which they attack (Atwan 2015, 20-22). As a result, it is not only globalized attention for terrorists, but also globalized attention for INGOs: any critical article written in Iraq regarding the behavior of a particular INGO can be accessed in Washington DC and communicated to audiences in other countries; this is a simple representation of the dynamics of globalized media today.

However, an exploration of the literature, both from the field and the academy, dedicated to kidnapping cases among humanitarian organizations shows that the ‘voice’ of practitioners is lacking. This is due to a combination of multiple elements: the lack of authority to speak out, the need to remain secretive regarding issues that can be highlighted as weaknesses of the INGOs, the lack of security training for aid workers, sensitivities regarding donor relations and program funds. Nonetheless, a major focus by organizations, and academics, remains on terrorist groups and the methods launched in utilizing maximum media returns. Less focus has been placed on the kidnapping of aid workers, the media and how organizations communicate. As such, this paper aims to address this particular subject through the following research questions:

- Where and when this phenomenon of kidnapping of aid workers occurred since the war in Chechnya in the 1990s?
- Are INGOs aware of the strength of the media in highlighting kidnappings or rather in keeping them hidden?
- How much does it affect their communication strategies?

The purpose of this study is to explore and analyze, if and why, there has been a change in INGO reporting of the kidnapping cases of humanitarian aid workers in the post-Cold War and since The Global War on Terror (GWOT). An effort will be made to interpret the information to determine to what extent INGOs have understood the affects, and power, of media reporting during the kidnapping of aid workers. This paper will endeavor to address issues spreading farther than the concept of ‘humanitarian access’; it will extend to the topics

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1 The ability of humanitarian actors to enter an area plagued by conflict in order to provide humanitarian
of security\textsuperscript{2} and policies, the sensitivity of negotiation processes, the propensity to avoid highlighting organizational weaknesses in public and the delicate relationships that must be maintained with donors in order for programs to continue.

1.1 Methodology
This paper will endeavor to analyze the period from 1997-2015 in the kidnapping of aid worker trends and their reflections within the media as they emerge from practitioners, scholars, negotiators, and journalists. This period was chosen as 1997, the primary year for the registered data, regarding the kidnapping of aid workers, to be made available to the public.

Primarily, quantitative information will be collected by the extensive study of The Aid Worker Security Database (AWSD) and The Global Terrorism Database, that are both made available to the public online, in order to present the context and to establish trends. Then an analysis of the academic and field literature will be probed in order to best understand the influence that the media can have on kidnappers. Because of the lack of information on INGOs’ communication strategies when dealing with kidnapping cases, and because of these particularly delicate issues, six semi-structured exploratory interviews with journalists, practitioners within the humanitarian sphere, and negotiators, have been supplemented in order to achieve a greater understanding of the role the media plays for INGOs in kidnapping cases. Finally, a selection of official news outlets will be made in order to gather information on aid worker kidnapping across this particular period to supplement arguments made.

1.2. Limitations
Approaching the sensitive nature of the kidnapping of aid workers will come with multiple limitations. One primary limitation is the request of those, who have agreed to be interviewed, to refrain from being formally identified within this paper. As such, it will not change the information that was given in the interviews however, it may have an impact on the credibility of the information shared. In order to navigate around this caveat, multiple peer reviewed journals were written by those who have completed extensive research on members of these terrorist organizations. The Aid Worker Security Database was employed to gather data from 1997. It is essential to acknowledge that most kidnapping incidents go unreported and as a result, these numbers are only indicators as opposed to accurate representations.

\textsuperscript{2} Links social, economic and humanitarian issues in order to assure security
Supplementary limitations arose with the lack of scholarly writing regarding the interdependent relationship between INGOs and the media on the matter of security and kidnapping. Particular INGOs have not been the sole focus of this paper; with the general under-reporting of kidnapping cases globally (Forest 2012, 312) it will be of immense difficulty to maintain a focus on one particular organization. This study has consciously excluded other attacks made on aid workers such as roadside attacks and targeted assassinations. A direct distinction has not been made between post/conflict areas or locations that may have suffered from a natural disaster; all circumstances leading to an aid workers’ kidnapping did not affect the collated data.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
The literature research has been conducted on the major academic databases and think tank groups, such as ODI, through the use of key terms such as “communication”, “aid worker security” and “kidnapping”. The principal amount of information comes from social scientists; 25 peer reviewed articles were identified as dealing with Information, Communication and Society, Journals of Political Science, Journals of Risk Research, Global Crime, Journals of Applied Security Research, and Journals of Defence and Peace Economics; one peer reviewed article was written in 2001 with all other articles written between 2007 and 2016. This signifies the shift in increase of the research available post September 11th 2001 that had not been written prior to the inception of the GWOT. Nine peer reviewed articles stemmed solely from Studies in Conflict and Terrorism; an additional six papers stemming from the critical point of reference of the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) – an avant-garde humanitarian policy group that is focused on bringing the most current issues to the foreground; the group is dedicated to improving humanitarian policy by dialogue and debate; and finally, two recent monographies in political sciences and security studies which were of immense value to this paper (Fast 2014; Atwan 2015). It is prudent to note that no scholars directly approached the sole topic of aid worker kidnappings, which made it perplexing to extract information for this research.

The following section is divided in two parts. At a primary level, it will be imperative to understand the basic concept of kidnapping and the dissimilarities to hostage taking. Then, at a second level, the literature review will be thematically organized to address the use of the media by terrorist groups, the media and kidnapping, alongside the correlation between INGOs, media and kidnapping.
2. 1. Kidnapping – concept and media

In several publications kidnapping is the equivalent of hostage taking; for the sake of clarity, kidnapping will be defined and all references to kidnapping, made in this paper, will be under a universal definition. The definition of ‘kidnapping’ in the Oxford Dictionary is related to “A person who abducts someone and holds them captive, typically to obtain a ransom” (2016). Kidnappings are usually classified under three categories - ransom, political, and abductions. Another definition refers “to the unlawful taking and detention of an individual against their will often with the threatened use of violence” (Pires et al. 2016, 2); it further allows us to understand that implications of what humanitarian aid workers go through.

According to Jenkins’ paper “Terrorism and Kidnapping” (1974), the concept of kidnapping evolved from the days of Pirates kidnapping for ransoms. Jenkins explicates that kidnapping is outside the standard realm of “accepted rules and procedures” of political war; it is violence against the system but it is conducted outside of the said system. An intriguing concept is the argument made observing terrorism as ‘theater’; the writer goes on further in a continuum of explanatory observations regarding the need for terrorists to “advertise the existence of a group, to publicize its cause”. The author discusses the unison of maximum publicity garnered through electronic media by holding purposefully choreographed attacks; “the world is now their stage, and the whole world is probably watching”.

This is further compounded by what appears to be the universal views of Phol, Scott and Campana. Pohl (2015, 66) adds an auxiliary statement that asserts kidnapping alone can elevate the media coverage, as it is often associated “with the highest level of risk”, but that “no definitive answer has been found” to the relationship between the two. Scott (2001, 216) exclaims the impotence that terrorism would have without the power of publicity; arguments made by Campana (2007, 387) and Forest (2012, 312) do not coincide with Scotts views and conclude that in the cases of aid worker kidnappings, there exists a current under-representation within the global media platform.

Once an individual is kidnapped, sensationalism occurs on the precedence of the nationality of the individual or in the nature of the work of the kidnapped individual; Campana (2007, 391) refers to humanitarian workers as an example. Humanitarian aid workers have been kidnapped and fallen victim to more than one terrorist organization post GWOT. This is reinforced by the arguments made by Weimann et al. (2008, 883); the authors argue that kidnappings are not randomized but rather sophisticated, choreographed events that are designed to draw the highest amounts of attention from the international media: “Terrorism is aimed at the people watching, not at the actual victims” (Weimann et al. 2008, 883). Scott
(2001, 216) echoes Kim’s beliefs by stating that if a principle goal of a terrorist is to obtain media attention, then reporting on kidnapping activities may possibly increase the frequency of such events. Pohl (2015, 61) vehemently declares that a link between media attention and the encouragement of terrorism cannot be made.

2.2. Context: GWOT, media and kidnappings

2.2.1. Origins of the kidnapping of aid workers phenomenon

Upon interviewing Dr. Kjell Lauvik, Head of Security Operations for The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), it became apparent that 1997 was the primary point of the recordings in the kidnapping cases of aid workers. On investigation of the Aid Worker Security Database, Chechnya stood to be one of the highest incident locations with 19 kidnapping cases in-between 1997-2001 (AWSD, Stoddard et al. 2006).

A Professor of Comparative Politics at London School of Economics, Hughes, debates “The causes of a protracted post-soviet conflict” (2001); his paper depicts the 1994-1996 Russo-Chechen conflict and its resurrection later in 1999, which led to international aid workers becoming targets for rebel groups. The Chechens suffered from a sectarian conflict that created mass divisions within their societies. The immediate result of this was the abrupt growth spurt in the form of militarized Islamic extremists.

2.2.2. Al-Qaeda, Kidnapping and the media

Kidnappers have long acknowledged the power that the media yields in obtaining publicity, recognition, and ransoms. Due to the sophisticated nature of media developments in the last decade alone, terrorist groups have been able to strategically create their own internal media campaigns. Ciovacco (2009) considers the power yielded by one of the most prolific terrorist groups of the 21st Century, Al-Qaeda. The author uses the term “godfather-type” organization to describe the group who he positions as a fundamentally “media-centric militant organization of today” (p. 853). With the creation of their own media wing, Al-Sahab, Al-Qaeda has capitalized on inspiring and recruiting Muslims in their fight against the Western powers. Bin Laden and his counterpart Zawahiri, are bold in their praise of the media, particularly on the annual anniversary of the 9/11 attacks in New York: “… Bin Laden and Zawahiri have adeptly transformed Al Qaeda into an ideological umbrella organization connected to the outside world by the Internet and global media” (Ciovacco 2009, 868).

Professor in the department of Sociology and Anthropology at East Tennessee State University, Kamolnick (2015) brings to light one of the most prolific communications
specialists within a terrorist organization. This communication specialist is known as Gadahn; he is skilled in segmenting key target audiences, the methods of messaging and identifying the most efficient type of media to enhance his organizations credibility. Furthermore, Kamolnick gives us an indication of the level of preparation that goes into planning a ‘media spectacle’. A period of a number of months prior to a said spectacle, Gadahn writes to his superiors discussing the level of preparation that is needed in order to obtain maximum exposure. Gadahn selects media outlets whilst being vocal about networks he finds unappealing; The American ABC Network and Al-Jazeera Network. Gadahn also continues his negative barrage by exclaiming that the reliability of “Jihadi Forums” should not appeal to Al-Qaeda. The repugnant statements made towards undisciplined groups are made, with a particular focus on The Islamic State (IS). Dissimilar to The IS, Al-Qaeda displays a more reserved attitude particularly towards their humanitarian hostages. No prolific videos using humanitarian aid workers with bold statements, attacking specific governments, released can be found online today.

2.2.3. Islamic State, Kidnapping and the Media

“IS’s ‘strategic communications’ campaign… has captured the world’s media attention with its trademark slick productions, gore and use of social media” (Ingram 2016, 2). The IS employs methods that will enhance the ability for them to terrorize their potential targets, from a distance, whilst attempting to exert maximum impact and break their “psychological resolve” (Weimann et al. 2008, 897). This has been exemplified through the victims that had been kidnapped by the group and beheaded with the crime broadcast on international media. An example of this is the highly televised beheading of Mr. Alan Henning, the British humanitarian aid worker kidnapped by The IS in Syria in 2013 and killed in 2014 (Global Terrorism Database, 2016). On October 3rd 2014, the database LeakSource, providing references to thousands of official documents, reported in an article that Mr. Henning became a vessel to deliver a message to the British Parliament: “I’m Alan Henning. Because of our parliament’s decision to attack the Islamic state I, as a member of the British public, will now pay the price for that decision”4. The late Mr. Henning speaks to the camera referencing the UK’s decision in joining a coalition of forty countries in order to defeat The IS. This corroborates ‘The Theory of Terrorism’ addressed by Jenkins (1974), which argues

3 www.leaksouce.info (last checked on August 17th 2016)
4 https://leaksouce.info/2014/10/03/graphic-video-islamic-state-beheads-british-aid-worker-alan-henning/ (last checked on August 17th 2016)
terrorism is “a campaign of violence to advertise the existence of a group to publicize its cause”. This instance has been portrayed by the ‘use’ of Mr. Henning through The IS media campaign in order to deliver a message to his countrymen. There is a similar trend in the video of the beheading of the American humanitarian Peter Kassig, also known as Abdul-Rahman Kassig, kidnapped by The IS in 2013 and killed in 2014. In the video of the late Mr. Kassig, his silence prompted his perpetrator ‘Jihadi John’ to make a statement on his behalf: “To Obama, the dog of Rome, today we are slaughtering the soldiers of Bashar and tomorrow we will be slaughtering your soldiers… and with Allah’s permission … The Islamic State will soon … begin to slaughter your people in your streets.” In an article written for Time Magazine by Mark Thompson in November 2014, Mr. Kassig receives praise for his defiance in refusing to make a statement that was required by ‘Jihadi John’ prior to his beheading; nevertheless, it is understood that ISIS is willing to take the opportunity to deliver a message without the humanitarian aid workers’ participation. Iraq news released an article in November 2014 stating that Mr. Kassig was accused of “fighting against the Muslims” in Iraq. This is juxtaposed by the statement made by a leading senior Al-Qaeda Islamic Jihadist who positions Mr. Kassig as the humanitarian doctor who performed surgery on his leg in order to remove shrapnel. This prompted the jihadist to plea for the release of Mr. Kassig, exclaiming that IS was making a “grave mistake” in the potential beheading of the aid worker. In an effort to have an increase in media reach, The IS adapted their videos to be less disarming in shocking content; with this in mind, the organization was able to secure more circulation on mainstream media (Pohl 2015; Scott 2001, 226; Graham IV 2011, 588). Another strategic maneuver made by the terrorist group has been to keep material in the Arabic language accompanied by English subtitles (Atwan 2015, 20). New material released by the cell is now available in Russian, Chinese and Urdu. No different from Al-Qaeda, the organization employs a Head of IS’s media and communication department, French-born Ahmed Abousamra, together with full time staff in the main media organizations under the governance of The IS: al-Hayat, al-Fruqan, and al-Itisam (Atwan 2015, 21). One of the most

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5 Also known as Mohammed Emwazi, ‘Jihadi John’ is a notorious IS killer of kidnapped aid workers was originally born in the UK. See for example this article: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/03/16/who-is-jihadi-john-and-how-did-mohammed-emwazi-become-the-symbol/ (last checked on August 17th 2016)

6 www.leaksource.info (last checked on August 17th 2016)

6 www.leaksource.info (last checked on August 17th 2016)


8 http://www.iraqinews.com/features/urgent-video-peter-kassig-beheaded-isis-16-syrians/ (last checked on August 17th 2016)

abounding videos released by The IS was the death of the Jordanian pilot, Moaz al-Kasasbeh, who was burned alive in a cage (Atwan 2015, 22). The motives behind such a spectacle are in correlation with Jenkins statements, made earlier however, that the spreading of fear is not the only vessel that The IS is sailing on. There is an immense lust for global recognition.

2.3. Kidnappings of humanitarian aid workers

2.3.1. Impact on Security for INGOs

Scholars have conflicting opinions and statistical observations regarding the number of kidnappings against humanitarian aid workers since the end of the Cold War. Stoddard et al. have provided the most extensive statistics, from 1985 to 1996 (2006, 13). During this time period, the humanitarian sector experienced an average of 12 fatalities a year (see Figure 1). In comparison, during the years 1997-2005, fatalities averaged at 48 per year. Fast corroborates these numbers by exclaiming that violence against aid workers is not a new phenomenon post 9/11, rather that “security has long been an issue for humanitarian actors” (2014, 67) with no apparent formula for where the kidnappings occur. Pires et al. dispute this point by stating that kidnapping “…is highly concentrated in a few countries” (2016, 1) (see Figure 2).

![Figure 1. AWSD](image-url)
Fast and Stoddard et al. continue to mirror each other as they confirm attacks (which include the kidnapping of aid workers) have gone up by 92% during 1997-2005, followed by an additional 89% from 2003-2008, which resulted in a slight decline after 2008. In 2012, the numbers of aid worker kidnappings increased with the emergence of two new conflicts zones – Yemen and The Syrian Arab Republic (see Figure 2) - confirming Fast’s (2014, 75) statement that context are becoming increasingly dangerous. Based on figures from the AWSD, which should be interpreted cautiously due to cases going unreported (Ackerman Group negotiator 2016; Fast 2014; Stoddard et al. 2006; Pires et al. 2016), it is observed that Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia and Syria register the highest records of aid worker kidnapping; it is abundantly clear that there has been a vast increase in the kidnapping of aid workers.

Various motives result in the kidnapping of aid workers; publicity for a cause, funding of terrorism and a combination of economic and social factors (Pires et al. 2016, 2). Political influences can also lead to kidnapping due to the potential “exchange for prisoner” agreements that can be arranged for governments focused on not crafting any ransom payments (Pires et al. 2016, 2). Groups and individuals, who are behind kidnapping, are motivated by needing to “self finance their activities” (Kallberg et al. 2014, 26); valuable targets for them are organizations which are no longer seen as neutral due to the politics of potential donor governments (Roth 2015, 141).
Organizations were known to have increased their security awareness alongside attempting to strengthen pre-existing protocols (Stoddard et al. 2006; Haver 2006; Stoddard et al. 2009; Fast 2014; Karim, 2006). Aid worker security is further weakened when the “responsibility for security is not centralized in a single authority” (Stoddard et al. 2006, 19) particularly as aid workers become political, and economic, targets (Harmer 2008, 529). Wille (2008, 7) discusses ‘The six ‘Ws’: who did what to whom, where, when, why and with what weapons. Enforcing the W’s can provide information that is vigorous in designing security policy; this can help to keep aid workers safe.

Other factors play a role in the outcome of new security protocols: the general increase in security contracting with INGOs refraining from open discussions regarding this topic; problems with high staff turnover; lack of security training; and few incentives combined with weak oversight. Even with an increase in private security providers, the initial cost does not meet the services that they provide; multiple researchers state that donors have an integral part to play in changing the policies to protect aid workers (Harmer 2008; Stoddard et al. 2009; Wille 2008). With the current state of affairs, donor attitudes have been described as: “… fairly hands off” in order to avoid micromanaging partners (Stoddard et al. 2010, 14).

In keeping with an integral focus on policies to protect aid workers from increasing threats, an informal experts forum, The Security Advisory Group (SAG), was created in 1993, shortly followed by The ANSO (Afghanistan) and The SPAS (Somalia) (Karim 2006, 4). These are all examples of inter-agency security coordination groups, in the field, to keep aid workers more secure post 9/11. The GPR8, produced by the HPN which is managed by HPG, has also been immensely valuable in assessing risk to aid workers in recent years; nevertheless, Harmer explains that even with certain advances in security, the lack of information sharing and general anecdotal evidence will continue to pose serious challenges (2008, 530). Accountability for security is currently “diffused across the system” (Harmer 2008, 535; Ackerman Group representative, 2016) and without a reactive response becoming a proactive response, it is unlikely that progress will be made (Stoddard et al. 2006, 20). Not all organizations have a security policy, which can place aid workers at even more risk due to internalizing the content and not sharing information across some of internal networks that are available (Rowley et al. 2008, 12). By releasing this information and providing it to security policy makers, with host governments, local leaders, community members, and donors, organizations can be nudged into focusing on the details of their security context as opposed to the overall security horizon (Rowley et al. 2008, 14; Stoddard et al. 2006, 30). The Aid worker security report of 2014, an independent body that is the sole source of
comprehensive data on aid worker attacks, compounds the statements made above; at utmost, the report counters the operational difficulty of road side attacks excluding the various other common attacks that aid workers are prone to; kidnapping.

2.3.2. Aid worker Kidnapping – National vs. International

By the end of the Cold War and the commencement of the GWOT, the number of attacks on aid workers has gradually been on the incline with sporadic moments of intensity (Roth 2015, 140). These ‘moments’ are represented in the Aid Worker Security Database, as well as the Global Terrorism database, and peak during 2006, 2009, 2010-2013 (AWSD). Roth’s paper, titled ‘Aid work as edgework’, discusses the role and responsibilities of aid organizations to protect their workers. She insists that much attention has been given to the overall improvements for imminent security threats however, far less courtesy has been extended to the hardships and dangers that all aid workers face; aid workers as being persistent targets due to the lack of neutrality, or impartiality, that their organizations appear to uphold; these sentiments are similarly held by Stoddard et al. (2009), Fast (2015) and Harmer (2008). Pires et al. counter these views; countries with kidnapping for ransom epidemics are “… less secure, less peaceful, and unevenly developed in relation to social and economic indicators” (2016, 1). It shows that humanitarian principles are not the only factor steering the kidnapping of aid workers.

Roth elaborates further by creating a direct distinction between the media reporting in kidnapping cases between international aid workers and national aid workers; her argumentation coincides with the clear goals that terrorists who kidnap these individuals will want to achieve publicity, recognition, ransom or all three variables. With a particular focus on ransoms for humanitarian aid workers, Weimann et al. (2008, 886) were the only researchers stressing that the prominent motivation for kidnappers is potential monetary gain and not solely media sensationalism (Forest 2012, 322). Corroborating Pires et al., Forest further outlines that national aid worker kidnapping is becoming just as lucrative as the kidnapping of international aid workers; it is indicated in Forest’s paper that $100 to $150 million can be obtained from what the authors call a “domestic kidnapping business” (2012, 321).

Keeping in line with the assumption that kidnapping is viewed as a ‘business’, terrorist groups continue to see this method as a source of large revenue (whether the victim be national or international) which has led to the concept of success breeding impersonators (Lauvik 2016); countries such as Somalia, Pakistan, Iraq and Afghanistan are “… home to a thriving
‘kidnapping industry’” (Forest 2012, 324; see Figure 2). Staying true to the notion of a business, financial dealings are not publicized in the same manner as the kidnapping itself: “… many of the ransom negotiations and payments remain secret, so complete and precise information on this phenomenon is scarce and impossible to verify” (Forest 2012, 312). In one rare case, two UN envoys that were kidnapped in Niger in 2008 – Robert Fowler and Louis Guay - were returned safely once the Swiss Government paid a ransom to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) (Graham IV 2011, 588).

Groups wanting particular attention from the media will always prefer specific targets; those wanting to remain out of the media will make choices that are completely different (Chermak et al. 2006, 430), although Roth observes that “… attacks on national aid workers tend to receive less media attention” (2015, 141). However, the statistical results taken from AWSD (see Figures 1 and 2) show that the numbers of national aid workers kidnapped exceed international aid workers in 2001. These numbers have increased due to international organizations placing far more concern on the well-fair of international aid workers; this contributes to visible variances in treatment between national and international staff. The overall concept of evacuating international staff is exceptionally costly and can have an impact of the programs that are running on the ground (Roth 2015, 140).

2.4. INGOs and kidnapping cases in communication plan

Jenkins (1974) reiterated the importance of key political motives for a kidnapper; publicity, recognition, and ransom payments. Continuing with this line of investigation related to publicity, Forest shapes the argument that “contemporary media coverage focuses on the kidnapping of foreigners” (2012, 319). This is a clear indication of the sensationalist value that a kidnapper can have for his/her cause. Terrorists will continuously attempt to exploit the power of global media and the most powerful ‘weapon’ to use is to employ extraordinary events that assist in increasing ratings across global media outlets, and online (Chermak et al. 2006, 432), and to get higher compensation for ransom (Yun et al. 2008, 741), especially with the value of foreign hostages (Callimachi 2014). In order to prevent an increase in assumed value of a hostage, a media “blackout” occurs when a decision is made not to reveal the identity of the individual kidnapped or to report on the event in its entirety. Browne et al. (2015, 1345) and a journalist from a leading American news broadcaster parallel Lauvik’s comments; “… we always have the assumption that you can’t talk unless you are otherwise instructed to do so… we always go to standards and practices prior to broadcasting anything” (2016). Abbot explains why the relationship between INGOs and journalists should be
nurtured due to these exact previously listed reasons; needing to maintain vigilance on the information released in the media should be a collaborative role. In her article\(^{10}\), she explains that a crucial relationship already exists between INGOs and journalists even though it may not be publicized (Abbot 2009). The writer explains that there are contentions on both sides, for journalists and INGOs, but that there are varied reasons as to why a relationship between both parties has been cultivated and should continue to be harnessed in the future. One such reason is the rhetoric regarding ransoms.

In an article for *The Atlantic*, David Rohde (2014) specifically highlights the differences between American and European policies on paying ransoms or negotiating. It highlights the importance of the ‘duty of care’ that INGO’s have to members of staff and stresses that humanitarian aid workers are now prepared to hold their organizations accountable towards situations where security is breached. An example would be the indictment of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in November 2015 for “gross negligence and failing on its duty of care” for humanitarian aid workers in dangerous contexts.\(^{11}\) The NRC aid workers, Steve Dennis and three colleagues were kidnapped in Dadaab, Kenya; the ruling found that the NRC had wrongly assessed the situation within which their employees were working.

A representative from The Ackerman Group (2016) stressed that aid workers are deprived of legitimate security training prior to their deployment due to the necessity of immediate positioning with “staff… increasingly at risk without being necessarily prepared for work in insecure environments” (Roth 2015, 141). As a result, INGO security protocols have come under intense scrutiny that led to the inception of the Security Advisory Group (SAG) (Stoddard et al. 2006).

INGOs prefer to avoid the media due to several other supplementary factors. The media require information on how much has been requested/paid in ransom and more often than not, the media publicity works in the favor of the kidnapper but not the hostage. Additional criticism raised by The Ackerman Group is the linear structure of INGOs; it is often of immense difficulty for The Ackerman Group to find a decision maker, in a negotiation situation, which can further contribute to the poor security structure of an organization. The UNHCR, on the contrary, has specific guidelines in place for security protocols in case an incident occurs, with a reserve team that is ready for deployment at any given time.


Roth (2015, 141) argues that for certain terrorist groups, the purpose behind the kidnappings can solely be to represent the level of insecurity and complete disregard for humanitarian principles as an act of defiance; issues such as these, bought to the forefront in the media, does not play to the advantage of the organizations (Fast 2015, 70).

Another reason, highlighted by The Ackerman group representative, is the correlation between publicizing kidnappings of aid workers by organizations and how this element could have an immediate affect on donor funding. Hiring private security contractors, or in this particular situation negotiators, is not without investing large sums of coinage to attempt to secure a release. Donors could see these scenarios, advertised in the media, as a redirection of their funding. This is why the importance of maintaining clarity with donors in order to bring security issues to the fore, and to acknowledge that financing options for securing aid workers, needs to be considered (Stoddard al. 2010, 14). Paying ransoms can be seen as funding terrorism by governments. The Organization and Co-operation for Security in Europe (OSCE) declared its role in light of Resolution 2133 of The Security Council in 2014. They denounced the incidents of kidnapping “… committed by terrorist groups for any purpose, including raising funds … the payment of ransoms to terrorists funds future kidnapping and hostage-taking committed by terrorist groups, creating more victims and perpetuating the problem” (OSCE 2014, 1). The OSCE has outlined their resolve in attempting to prevent kidnappings and to secure the safe release of hostages without ransom payment or political concessions. These factors would have universally led to INGOs shying away from the media spotlight once an aid worker is kidnapped.

3. DISCUSSION

In keeping with the exploratory nature of this research, it was imperative to enforce semi-structured interviews based on the restriction of the information given. Information has been gathered from external and internal negotiators, three practitioners in the field, researchers, and social scientists. Appropriate to the condition of the information that was conveyed, all interviewees, except three, have asked to remain anonymous. The interviewees consist of two journalists; one from a leading international American broadcaster 12 and another from The Daily Telegraph based in the United Kingdom, Mr. Richard Spencer 13. The Head of Security Operations at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Dr. Kjell

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12 Interview by Skype on June 25th 2016
13 Interview by Skype on July 2nd 2016
Lauvik\textsuperscript{14}, is currently based in Geneva, Switzerland. A senior operations representative from The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has requested to remain anonymous. A representative from the Ackerman Group\textsuperscript{15}, created in 1997 to respond to emergencies on behalf of holders of kidnap Ransom and Extortion insurance policy, agreed to be interviewed but also requested anonymity based on the information given. And finally, Dr. Andrea Schneiker\textsuperscript{16}, a Professor of Political Science also agreed to participate in an interview for this research paper.

The interviewees in this paper were partly chosen as individuals who have had first hand experiences in negotiating for the release of aid workers; they were contacted with the purpose of the paper outlined in a preliminary email. Some interviewees connected me to other potential interview candidates who would have had more input on the particular aspect of the media relationship that currently exists with INGOs. However, not all interviewees approached agreed to participate in this research due to the sensitivity of the information that would have been provided. It was imperative to involve journalists in this paper; again few agreed to be interviewed nevertheless after explaining the option of remaining anonymous, one particular journalist from a leading American Broadcaster agreed to explain the INGO communication view from the media perspective. These individuals all hold varied expertise that hold credibility in giving information; they have either been on the “front line”, have been involved in security operations or have observed/reported on issues that are in line with this research.

3.1 To inform or not to inform the media?

Sensationalism is a universal term that most interviewees refer to. It is said to occur when vital information is/is not available which can result in journalists “filling in blanks” (Ackerman representative, 2016). This impacts this topic by demonstrating that INGOs are liable to misrepresentation if they do not communicate with the media. One could argue that it is healthier to inform, as much as an organization is able to do so, without harming hostages in current kidnapping cases. On the other hand, none of the journalists interviewed supplied information that denotes that sensationalism and guesswork are part of the work they produce. In fact, Spencer (2016) argued that indeed the times of media reporting are colossally dissimilar to previous methods of reporting (due to the preparatory research that is connected

\textsuperscript{14} Interviewed in person in Geneva, Switzerland, on February 2\textsuperscript{nd} 2016
\textsuperscript{15} Interviewed by Skype on July 4\textsuperscript{th} 2016
\textsuperscript{16} Interviewed by Skype on August 2\textsuperscript{nd} 2016
to a story) however, those working for credible newsrooms and broadcasters must have information verified prior to any media publications. Spencer further elaborates by explaining that even information, or images, released on social media must be credible prior to their use in media releases. This method of confirmation can contribute to the impact of certain articles released in the media; one such article is that of the NRC kidnapping case.

NRC kidnap ruling is ‘wake-up call’ for aid industry\textsuperscript{17} published by IRIN news in 2015 became one of the leading articles to highlight breaches in security and safety for INGOs (Ackerman representative, 2016). Lauvik (2016) asserts that security has in fact been a continuous issue for aid workers and INGOs however, this has been the result of the continuously changing dynamics within which aid workers provide relief. In the case of Flavia Wagner, an aid worker kidnapped in Darfur in 2010 whilst carrying out duties for Samaritans Purse\textsuperscript{18}, Miss Wagner accuses Samaritans Purse of: “failing to train its security personnel adequately and of willfully ignoring warning signs that abductions were a threat to foreigners” (Reuters 2015). This has echoed through the literature review and also parallels the thoughts of some of the interview participants (Ackerman representative 2016; Lauvik 2016). Alarmingly, the NRC and Samaritans purse articles were published within a four-year span of each other and the security concerns are even graver in 2015. Miss Wagner was held for 105 days and in contrast, Dennis and his colleagues, the NRC hostages, were held for four days. What is of significance to this paper is the lack of mention of the identity of the kidnappers in the case of Miss Flavia Wagner in Darfur and in the case of Dennis in Dadaab; the culprits are described as men from Arab tribes but no other information is made available to readers. In contrast, the cases of both Alan Henning and Peter Kassig maintain emphasis on the sensationalist identity of their captors, The IS. This allows us to reflect on the points made by Ingram (2016), Weimann et al. (2008) and Jenkins (1974), within the Literature Review, which revolve around the importance of “slick productions”, “gore”, and “breaking psychological resolve”. The comparison in the reporting of both the NRC and Samaritans Purse cases allows for the countering of Jenkins “Theory of Terrorism” which revolves around each group wanting to publicize its cause or existence; for The IS, Jenkins theory is relevant. However, it could also be argued that the media refrained from naming the captors in both the NRC and Samaritans Purse case, yet this is highly unlikely.

\textsuperscript{17}http://www.irinnews.org/report/102243/nrc-kidnap-ruling-%E2%80%98wake-%E2%80%99-call-aid-industry (last checked on August 17\textsuperscript{th} 2016)

\textsuperscript{18}http://www.reuters.com/article/us-newyork-kidnap-idUSTRE74I70A20110519 (last checked on August 17\textsuperscript{th} 2016)
It would be naïve to base a timeline conclusion on the two individual cases of the NRC and The Samaritans Purse, nevertheless, it does echo Lauvik’s sentiments that the average time in captivity has now been reduced to 6,000 hours for a hostage due to Kidnap and Ransom insurance (Lauvik 2016); Miss Wagner was held for exactly half this time but it still is a grave increase from being held hostage for four days. The NRC case resulted in a large compensation payment being made to the hostages and more importantly, a “wake up call” for organizations (Lauvik 2016).

The period of detainment therefore has a consequence on the choices made by humanitarian organizations on whether to inform the media or not. The case of the ICRC is therefore interesting as one of the most respected humanitarian agencies, and one that has privileged relations with non-state armed groups. Although the information provided by the ICRC representative cannot be generalized to all humanitarian organizations, it does assist in filling a gap on a very sensitive issue from an insider of the organization. In the case of a kidnapping that extends over a longer period of detainment, the current consensus at the ICRC is not to inform the media; the choice must be made organically and depending on how the situation unfolds in the media itself from the kidnappers vantage point. The ICRC representative stressed that involving the media is counterproductive which echoes the sentiments of The Ackerman Group Representative (2016) in regards to keeping the media at a distance during negotiations. This is juxtaposed as in previous years the behavior of the ICRC in the media has been anything but reticent. The organization vocalized their dismay at the kidnapping of their staff, particularly in the case of Eugenio Vagni in 200919 (ICRC 2009). After expressing concern at several staff members kidnapped in The Philippines, the article highlights the importance of “reviewing its policies and procedures”. Even though there are no apparent reasons, or information, behind a review of policies and procedures prior to 2009, the organization expressed a need for this exercise to occur. More importantly, it displays that the publication of kidnapping cases in the media had a direct affect on the ICRC. It should be noted that this press release was released by the organization itself, with an obvious emotional concern for the wellbeing of its kidnapped staff members. The ICRC emphasized the issues concerning them, informed the public of their decisions, and explained its unrelenting readiness to continue working to strengthen the constitution of the Geneva Conventions. More importantly, the ICRC went on to release another article retorting that their staff members had

19 https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/interview/philippines-interview-120209.htm (last checked on August 17th 2016)
been in captivity for more than seven weeks. Despite the statements made by the staff member regarding external media relations in the interview (2016), in the article the ICRC exclaims that they were reassured of Mr. Vagnis’ safety due to a conversation that occurred via telephone with a TV reporter (ICRC 2009). It is evident the media has played a valuable role in uncovering the health and well being of Mr. Vagnis who was in critical need of medical attention. Unexpectedly, given all the criticism we have against the media such as sensationalism, this TV reporter was in fact critical to the ICRC in uncovering information on their kidnapped staff member. This is noticeably an anecdotal situation but one must marvel at how much a TV reporter can be of use to an INGO in a kidnapping situation. In this particular setting, the TV reporter made direct contact with a hostage; this was crucial nevertheless, it is necessary to recognize that direct contact can also negatively escalate a situation and make it far unhealthier. This begins the debate regarding journalists and INGOs working together collaboratively in order to obtain information on the well being of hostages, but more importantly, it demonstrates that there is a possibility to work together. In yet another article in May 2009, the question “what can the ICRC do in this situation?” garners the response: “It would not be helpful to discuss the ongoing efforts in detail” with respect to Mr. Vagnis case. The 2015 ICRC Operations report reads: “…despite its working methods and its efforts to engage in dialogue with all parties to the conflict, security management remained a major challenge for the ICRC and its field teams, with the tragic loss of three colleagues in Mali and Yemen, and four abducted staff members still being held in Syria and Yemen” (ICRC 2016. 87).

The interviewees remained reserved in discussing the variances in kidnapping trends between national and international staff. Described in the Literature Review by Forest (2012. 321) as a thriving “domestic kidnapping business”, Lauvik agrees with these sentiments as he explains that domestic kidnapping can offer greater monetary rewards as there may be a sense of “familiarity” with the potential victim (Lauvik 2016). Unfortunately, the national kidnapping of aid workers does not make for sensational media news; the tactic of kidnapping locals is predominantly connected with immediate monetary gain and not attention for a cause or sensationalism (Forest 2012, 322). With the minimal media outputs concerning the

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20 https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/interview/philippines-interview-050309.htm (last checked on August 17th 2016)

21 https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/interview/philippines-interview-280509.htm (last checked on August 17th 2016)

kidnapping of local aid workers, Roth’s arguments stand true; a direct distinction does in fact exist between the reporting patterns of international aid workers who are kidnapped and national aid workers who are kidnapped (Roth, 2015. 140). Ultimately, there is a reservation in sharing too much information nevertheless, organizations recognize the importance of keeping the public up-to-date on the general situation.

3.2 Security and communication strategies in INGOs

Organizations have strong communication guidelines with some INGOs being more communicative than others (Spencer 2016) such as Save the Children and MSF. This being said, organizations are rarely uniform in their communication with the media (Ackerman Group representative 2016). This stands true of agencies, such as Save the Children and Medicines Sans Frontiers (MSF), who are heavily backed by public funding. As a result of this, their media strategies are a core part of their existence that makes them stand out from other INGOs; MSF is renowned for public denunciations of Governments that prevent medical attention from being delivered to beneficiaries which is a tactic that other organizations do not enforce often. INGOs, like any other private or corporate organization, will want to highlight positive operational news in the media as opposed to negative news which could reflect badly on their decision making process; this can ultimately have an affect on their funding particularly if sufficient security measures to protect staff are not in place which could result in information about lack of security protocols being made to the media (Spencer 2016).

Throughout the literature there has been ample focus on the insufficient level of adapted security measures that INGOs have previously, and are currently, taking (Stoddard et al. 2006; Haver 2006; Stoddard et al. 2009; Fast 2014; Karim, 2006). The creation of The Security Advisory Group (SAG) in 1993, The ANSO, and The SPAS (Karim 2006, 4) were bodies incepted to bring about changes in the humanitarian sphere; nevertheless, there is no journalistic communication on these bodies. This is notable as journalists are not aware of the level of professionalization within the humanitarian system or the improvements that are made within the system itself. Some could argue that this is typical of journalistic behavior and others could argue is it the lack of knowledge/awareness that prevents journalists from writing about these topics. On the contrary, none of the interviewees made remarks regarding the increase in security measures and the lack of coordination with neighboring agencies that may be located in the same country providing relief. Notably, the lack of coordination and information sharing was highlighted in a substantial amount of the literature by political
scientists (Stoddard 2006; Fast 2014; Harmer 2008; Stoddard et al. 2009). Lack of progress would undoubtedly contribute to INGOs shying away from the media spotlight.

With this said, there has been a sudden surge in guidelines and trainings since 2009 yet, the literature demonstrates that it is still arduous to ensure aid workers are adequately trained. This has been a result of several causes; aid workers posted suddenly, aid workers on secondment from other organizations, a younger generation of aid workers who may not have the same level of maturity as those who are more experienced, high turnover in staff, aid workers posted to unfamiliar locations, and the forever changing context of locations where aid workers work such as South Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq. This has been an issue also underlined by security advisors that were interviewed. Today, staffs in senior management positions go through obligatory security training programs by mandate (Lauvik 2016). This is particularly true to UNHCR where even the Head of Media Communications is expected to go through a Scotland Yard security-training program. Primarily, organizations have a responsibility to protect their staff; this is one of the factors affecting the sudden increase in protocols and guidelines being released internally (Schneiker 2016).

In contrast, The Ackerman Group representative argues that even with new internal security protocols being released, it is still a challenge to work with INGOs (2016). The representative specified that within the organizational structure, it is quite a task to identify a decision maker, in the context of an aid worker kidnapping, which “contributes to the poor security posture” of an organization; this further emphasizes the efforts to avoid the media. It could be argued that due to the nature of The Ackerman Group (external entity) it is understandable that they experience difficulties in trying to locate a decision maker whereas, Lauvik expresses complete confidence in UNHCRs ability in dealing with kidnap situations. This may be a result of employing staff that are experienced to deal with such situations and are present in house; this enables UNHCR to divert away from internal, or for that matter, external politics. These two representatives do echo each other in one crucial aspect; to inform the public of an immediate kidnapping not only hinders negotiations, but also will be of no value to the hostage her/himself.

It is often understood that in the public media only the victim should be considered however, Lauvik asserts that the management of the kidnapper is just as important in negotiations (2016). Kidnapping cases require heightened levels of careful strategic management. The media can have multiple negative affects on a kidnapper and hostage; the kidnapper could panic and the hostage could be killed, the value of the hostage can be increased as the kidnapper could misunderstand the level of publicity given to their hostage, and the hostage’s
family can be put under even more unnecessary duress. In this case, INGOs have a tendency to avoid placing the hostage in a heightened position of risk and this includes media communication (Lauvik 2016). Even with these considerations, families are, more often than not, an integral part of the negotiation process (Ackerman representative 2016). If a kidnapper decides to communicate with the family directly, the Ackerman Group will only play a support role and indicate what information should be given and when. This usually assists the group in meeting terms that result in them obtaining a successful release, particularly if a ransom is requested and paid.

The interviewees universally listed several key reasons behind kidnapping but most significant is the rhetoric regarding ransoms. The literature review provides similar arguments behind ransoms alongside publicity and attention for a cause (Jenkins, 1974; Pohl 2015, 66; Scott 2001, 216; Campana 2007, 391; Weimann et al. 2008, 883). This has always been approached with sensitivity which has resulted in increased distance between INGOs and the media, even more so after it was established that kidnapping initially began in order to raise funds for guerilla groups in the late 90s in Chechnya (Lauvik 2016). Ransoms were previously not paid by INGOs however, in recent years and as a result of immense external pressure, up to 40-50% currently pay ransom fees (Lauvik 2016). Previously, when the focus of a kidnap situation was political, complication followed suit whereas when the focus shifted to monetary gain it became easier as most organizations were insured against values that were paid out to kidnappers (Lauvik 2016). On the other hand, not every organization is able to simply provide a monetary package to a kidnapper. Organizations are closely linked to governments and more often than not, if the government that the hostage belongs to has a zero tolerance policy on payments to kidnappers, the decision to pay can be rerouted to the family. However, with large amounts of ransom money being the preliminary source of income for many terrorist groups, certain governments (United States of America and The United Kingdom) will not allow monetary funds to be paid as said funds will be redirected to fund terrorism; this cannot be publicized in the media (Lauvik 2016, Ackerman Group representative 2016).

3.3. Privacy and public issues in kidnapping cases

Spencer (2016) exclaims that families are always willing to make a public statement to the media expressing readiness to “negotiate” but in recent years this eagerness has waned and shifted, particularly after the family meets with bodies such as the British Foreign Office. The British Foreign Office will always ask for privacy on behalf of the British family however,
one wonders whether this is a request from the family or direct instruction from the Foreign Office (Spencer 2016). This is not seen as problematic and the family typically complies until the hostage is killed; families will then tend to wonder if public denouncement or a public plea could have prevented the death of their loved one (Spencer 2016). Schneiker (2016) states that information that is necessary, such as that which can protect others, should be shared by INGOs with other aid agencies in need of this information excluding information that can put others in danger; this will be of no value in the media. The juxtaposition of avoiding the media in these specific cases, after being instructed to do so, can result in family, and friends, making public denunciations of the government in question which has transpired in the past such as in the case of Margaret Hassan 23. Unfortunately a video example of this cannot be shown here as videos are removed from YouTube, the chosen platform for media release, almost immediately after they are posted. These videos consist of families condemning host governments and highlighting an inability to negotiate the safe release of their loved ones (Ackerman Group representative 2016).

Governments, organizations and the interviewees believe privacy is crucial for the hostage due to the nature of the hostages’ history. Spencer, Lauvik, The Ackerman Group representative and The ICRC representative (2016) believe that elements such as the hostages nationality can lead to heightened provocation. If an American who happens to be a Lebanese national by birth is kidnapped, their death can almost be guaranteed depending on the context of where they were kidnapped. Information such as this may not necessarily be available to the kidnapper first hand, but it could become available due to the globalized nature of how media information is available to the individual or terrorist/group. If a hostage similarly happens to have a military background that is revealed in the media, this can also lead to severe consequences; the hostage could suffer from physical abuse or be viewed as a potential honor killing for previous conflicts (Ackerman Group representative 2016).

In the same way that INGOs will be conscious of the information provided to the media, there is equal concern regarding their own image whether it is during a kidnapping situation or not. INGOs will focus on “putting the best foot forward” (Schneiker 2016) by highlighting their successes and there is a reason to assume that there will be an effort to downplay failures. Spencer (2016) agrees with Schneiker’s views stating that the INGO landscape has become heavily plagued by marketization and competition. INGOs are continuously under pressure to

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23 [https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/jun/06/questionssurroundingmargaret](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/jun/06/questionssurroundingmargaret) (last checked on August 17th 2016)
secure new contracts and to attract donor funding so in this particular case, Schneiker asks what benefit INGOs/hostages stand to gain from publicizing negativity in the media?

3.4 The Media and Media Blackouts

The media have asked themselves a similar question regardless of the sensationalism that some of the interviewees have associated with broadcasts (Ackerman Group representative 2016; ICRC representative 2016; Lauvik 2016; American news broadcaster representative 2016) however, they have continued to keep the hostage, and their families, central to their decisions.

Following the release of the first beheading of an American journalist, James Foley24 by CNN25 in August 2014, images were circulated globally within hours of its release which resulted in social media bosses changing visibility protocol with many urging for The IS not to be given the media attention they used as a vehicle to spread terror26. The incident had an unprecedented affect on TV broadcasters as well; not wanting to fuel propaganda, serious considerations had to be made regarding the circulation of beheading videos. The family of the hostage had pleaded with the broadcaster to remove the original tape from its online archives in order to prevent the lasting image, dressed in an orange suit and decapitated, of the family member. On the premise of this family’s request, the American broadcaster representative asserted that new rules were enforced for the broadcasters in how hostages would be portrayed in the media (2016). Regardless of new policies in internal practice for broadcasters, The Ackerman Group representative still maintains that the most efficient policy is not to communicate any information to anyone outside the family (2016).

Ultimately, it is apparent that the American Broadcaster is in unison with the Ackerman Group; they both assert that the final decision to approach the media or not remains with the family. In the case of the family of humanitarian aid worker Peter Kassig, the decision was made to make a video appeal through CNN a month before his beheading in October 201427. Ed and Paula Kassig appealed to The IS kidnappers: “… we implore those who are holding you to show mercy and use their power to let you go”. The Kassig family use the opportunity in their video message to inform their son, Peter, of the pride they feel in the work that he was continuing to do: “…so very proud of you… to bring humanitarian aid to the Syrian people”.

24 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/16/isis-hostage-killings-timeline (last checked on August 17th 2016)
26 http://thetyee.ca/Opinion/2015/01/27/Television-Terrorism/ (last checked on August 17th 2016)
Concerning INGOs, this attempt at communication by the families of the victims through the media, is clearly a step after it is acknowledged that negotiations are coming to an end (Ackerman Group representative 2016). But, this is also a step in which ‘naming and shaming’\textsuperscript{28} can occur (ICRC representative 2016); returning to the case of Margaret Hassan\textsuperscript{29}, ‘naming and shaming’ of the British Government remained the central theme in this Guardian article; incredibly, the NGO she represented, Care International, was not condemned by the same article. It is not clear as to whether they were ‘spared’ due to mass efforts being made on their part, if they had tactically managed to refrain from being attacked due to a greater enemy taking center stage, or if a mutual understanding pre-existed between the INGO and the media.

### 3.5 Can an INGO-Media relationship work in a kidnapping case?

Spencer has suggested that a mutual relationship can exist between INGOs and the media (2016), echoing Abbot’s claims (2009). This could have beneficial impact to work on a decent and efficient management of media relations in case of a kidnapping. In previous years, INGOs have shown a willingness to cooperate with journalists in order to assist them in gaining access to areas that would otherwise be unreachable. Returning to Abbot’s article Working together, NGOs and journalists can create stronger international reporting (2009), Abbot, a Communications Director for The International Crisis Group\textsuperscript{30}, brings to the fore reasons as to why the relationship between INGOs and journalists should be cultivated. In her article, she elaborates that INGOs have been working closely with journalists nevertheless, she explains the value add for both parties: “… if NGO – media partnerships are not yet happening formally and openly, they certainly are happening” (Abbot 2009). The Director discusses the overlapping nature of INGOs and the media world as journalists persistently use INGOs to obtain: “tips, quotes and access”. INGOs have been willing to cooperate and this has occurred through the development of content, the provision of analysis and guidance, sharing of contacts in the field, providing necessary logistics and in some cases, funding. This reverberates Lauvik’s (2016) view that the media plays an integral part in INGO communication strategies and the power journalist’s yield should be harnessed however, this still remains a relationship that other interviewees would rather circumvent (Ackerman Group

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\textsuperscript{28} A method used to state that an organization, or group, has behaved in an immoral or illegal way

\textsuperscript{29} \url{https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/jun/06/questionssurroundingmargaret} (last checked on August 17\textsuperscript{th} 2016)

\textsuperscript{30} A transnational non-profit NGO founded in 1995 that carries out field work on violent conflict and the advancement of policies
representative, 2016; ICRC representative, 2016). On one hand, the trepidation of INGOs in communicating with the media has been considered in this paper however, the New York Times’s article “3 aid workers kidnapped in Somalia”\(^{31}\) demonstrates a willingness to communicate by the Head of Danish Refugees Council’s International Department (2011). Abbots article (2009) displays a certain level of concern from the perspective of journalists and broadcasters themselves due to editorial integrity. Journalists receiving assistance from INGOs can feel a sense of obligation in mentioning the INGOs work in their articles however, Abbot asserts the more an INGO impetuses to be included in an article, the less likely it is that this will be the outcome (2009). Journalists will want to avoid a portrayal of bias within their articles and they will also want to circumvent manipulation. This becomes increasingly more complex if an INGO has agreed to share the costs of the journalist’s travel and accommodation; Abbot stresses that neither party will benefit from the bartering of ‘grey area’ transactions (2009).

In line with this paper, the article features INGO concerns about open media communication. Abbot highlights several key reasons which range from personnel security (a reoccurring theme), the preservation of humanitarian access but more importantly, Abbot highlights another key factor that was not mentioned by any of the interviewees; a potentially negative impression of the INGOs operational techniques and decision making structure (2009). Releasing negative publicity based on the operational decisions and maneuvers of INGOs can prove disastrous for an INGO after an article is released. This correlates with the argument made by Spencer perpetrating the importance of keeping a positive image, much like that of private corporations, in the media (2016). It can also be emphasized that INGOs may not have autonomy over a story that could inevitably harm their image. The work, which humanitarians provide, is not static but rather evolves over a period of time where trust is gained by enshrining the principle of neutrality. In the case of an INGO being aware of where responsibility for a conflict lies, this information cannot be released in any medium of the media; it will have a direct impact on how the INGO is viewed locally, it can affect the safety of personnel that remain in the field, and ultimately it will have dire consequences for the beneficiaries in need of assistance.

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3.6 Terrorists and the media

The question of public image is not limited to INGO concerns, as terrorist armed groups are specifically using kidnapping cases to openly criticize the West and western values, as seen in the literature review. Terrorism is a form of asymmetrical power assertions with the sole aim of obtaining a change in some policies (Spencer 2016). It is also a method to exercise what power you have in a way that leads to disproportionate affects to the power being asserted (Spencer 2016); the media is the only vehicle that allows this to happen. Reverberating Spencer’s views, Schneiker (2016) elaborates further; from a scientific perspective terrorism itself is a communication strategy and therefore a medium is needed in order to communicate with audiences. This is symbolically true of the beheading of Peter Kassig who refused to address the camera prior to his beheading. It could be argued that Kassig’s lack of action allowed for a varied level of courage to be communicated to the camera that resulted in the captors failing to utilize his beheading in the same way as they had in the previous four beheadings. If the medium of the media is removed, there is no audience and without an audience, the spreading of fear cannot occur (Schneiker 2016).

Although INGOs cannot control or prevent the terrorists from using the media to spread their messages, they can decide to avoid communication in order to prevent an escalating verbal confrontation between INGOs and the terrorists which can negatively affect their image. With global reach in mind, social media is under heavy utilization by terrorist groups – it is an effective and efficient vehicle for recruitment and for the spreading of ideology with success breeding impersonators (Lauvik 2016)). He continues to make an ironic remark observing that the media itself is an integral part of the terrorist group ‘business model’. The Ackerman representative and the ICRC representative (2016) both sing in unison that without the media, terrorist organizations would be, operationally, at a loss. In order to continue, from a position of advantage, terrorist groups will continue to use the media in extraordinary ways. The Ackerman Group representative asserts that the reason behind loss of interest from the media could be the length of time that Al-Qaeda keeps their hostages; they are said to be moved from one oasis to another in the desert for a duration of up to three years; this results in minimum, or no, coverage (Journalist from leading American News Broadcaster, 2016).

These statements are reflected by Dr. Lauvik (2016) who claims that aid worker kidnap

victims are held for an average of 6,000 hours which could further lead to their combined assumption of loss of media interest.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper has confirmed that there has been a change in the way INGOs communicate and has bought to the fore the reasons behind INGOs distancing themselves from the media. The post Cold War era was the inception of kidnapping for funds that led to a model of success that was then copied by rebel groups and terrorist groups. Soon after, it was established that kidnapping internationals was more lucrative than the taking of nationals that resulted in certain nationalities (Spanish, Italian and French) becoming favourable targets. Between 1997 and 2015, INGOs were to experience shifts and increases in the kidnappings of aid workers, both national and international. These increases highlighted specific locations as primary sources for the elevated numbers of kidnappings; Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Researchers have remained the predominant source of information as to why changes have occurred in the manner of which INGOs communicate, with an apparent lack of reflection from the side of practitioners. The internal operational structures of INGOs has come under criticism regardless of efforts made on the part of INGOs to prevent aid workers from falling victim to kidnappings due to politically motivated attacks (Stoddard et al. 2010, 2-3). A general consensus looms regarding an increased need for improvement in the security structures within which aid workers perform their duties. INGOs have responded to this with the increase in external security contractors, and negotiators, and this has not gone unnoticed (Ackerman Group representative 2016). The immediate concern for INGOs seems to be the relationship with Donors and how funds would result in being diverted from programs to ensuring the security of aid workers. Relations with donors are somewhat tumultuous at times however, various pieces of literature identify that there is a need for more transparency between INGOs and donors (Harmer 2008; Stoddard et al. 2009; Wille 2008). There is a need for increased internal dialogue between INGOs in the field; if this information will not be of any value to the public, it can add to the security awareness for neighbouring INGOs (Schneiker 2016). Ultimately, INGOs are put in even more of a compromising position with regards to information sharing; if acceptance has occurred for one organization and not for another in one context/location, distance will be the preferred method of presentation so as not to affect operational effectiveness for other INGOs in the same location/context. INGOs can also be thrust out from locations where they work as a result of making public
denunciations; with a focus on neutrality, INGOs continue to work in environments that can prevent them from continuing to provide relief to beneficiaries if journalists release information that can compromise relief efforts.

The representatives interviewed regard media distance as evolutionary with only one specifying that there is a need for media communications to continue and to be harnessed, Lauvik (2016) however, one must consider if Lauvik’s thoughts are in tribute to the organization he works for, the UNHCR. With articles such as that of Abbot, there is significant proof that this relationship does exist however, the openness with which one may discuss this relationship is another matter entirely (2009). The political side effects that can arise from INGOs, donors, and Governments would not ideally result in neither aid worker kidnappings nor aid worker beheadings. Regardless, there is a delicate balance to strike; INGOs are constantly faced with the continuation of the provision of aid, remaining neutral and protecting staff in contexts that are becoming more complex with the increasing numbers of stakeholders. The focus of information that is released in the international media highlights the realities within which INGOs work however, one can fathom the difficulty in releasing information that can affect an organizations image, represent a disregard for staff security and affect beneficiaries. All interviewees, in unison, agreed that the negotiation process during a kidnapping is sensitive, one that should be managed delicately and should involve the family wherever possible. With the safety and well being of an individual being at the centre a negotiation process, it seems unimaginable that an organization would put the individual in harms way due to information being released/leaked from the organization itself. Hence it becomes even more crucial for INGOs to consider communicating with one another in order to ensure that security concerns are shared and staff members in the same context are informed of impending danger.

There is an abundance of information on how terrorists have utilized the media in their operational strategies, whilst on the other hand, practitioners have remained relatively silent in how they use the media, or if in fact, the decrease in communications is a strategic manoeuvre in itself. Information gained from sources shows that the INGOs have been of immense support to journalists, particularly those who would not gain access without the assistance of organizations. The wishes of some of the interviewees to remain unnamed represents the nature of how sensitive the information released can be. With this said, it is imperative that more practitioners voice their positive views, or concerns, regarding media communication. It is crucial that researchers look at possible methods to increase partnerships with the media through possibilities for more training for humanitarian agencies on how to communicate on
sensitive topics. In line with this, it is also necessary to reflect on the possibility of more deontological training for journalists on how to cover kidnappings.

It is evident that the media can deteriorate a situation but according to Lauvik and the ICRC representative (2016), it can also help to push the humanitarian profile of the individual kidnapped. What is abundantly clear is that one template cannot exist for all kidnapping situations with regards to INGOs communicating with the media; each situation has to be managed organically with organizations reacting to each situation as it arises. An element arises here for possibilities of future research; can INGOs and journalists work together to find a template for the future and most of all, is it possible? A balance should be struck; even with trepidation, INGOs accept the power that the media can yield and they too utilize it how they see fit. Regardless of this, an element of power autonomy still remains for the INGOs; it should not solely remain in the hands of the media.
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